

2017

## The Machine Gun Hand: Robots, Performance, and American Ideology in the Twentieth Century

Benjamin Michael Phelan

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations)



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Phelan, Benjamin Michael, "The Machine Gun Hand: Robots, Performance, and American Ideology in the Twentieth Century" (2017). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 4469.

[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/4469](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/4469)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

# THE MACHINE GUN HAND: ROBOTS, PERFORMANCE, AND AMERICAN IDEOLOGY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by  
Benjamin Michael Phelan  
B.A., Brigham Young University, 2008  
August 2017

## Acknowledgments

First, I must thank my major professor, friend, and advisor, Alan Sikes. Without his insightful comments throughout the years, this dissertation would have never gained much shape or inertia. I cannot thank him enough for his love and support and for the hours of meetings at Garden District Coffee or over the phone, helping me formulate my ideas into concrete chapters.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of numerous faculty at Louisiana State University. I would like to thank the head of the theatre PhD program, John Fletcher, for his mentorship, kindness, and generosity over the years. His example as a person and a scholar remains exemplary. I would like to thank the dean of the LSU Graduate School, Michelle Massé, for being my teacher, my friend, and for her generosity and understanding while I struggled through difficult periods of writing. In addition to John, I would like to thank the other members of my committee: my minor professor, Carl Freedman, and my dean's rep, Bryan McCann. The dedication of my entire committee made the dissertation defense one of the highlights of my academic career. Their advice will serve me throughout my life.

Special thanks to Wade Hollingshaus and Megan Sanborn Jones at Brigham Young University. As both my former teachers and current co-workers, their support has throughout the years has been immense. I would also like to extend a special thanks to family and friends throughout the years who have asked me about my dissertation and who have patiently listened while I explained my arguments. Explaining my ideas aloud helped me immensely. Finally, a special thanks to my parents for loving and supporting me throughout my life. This project would not have been possible without them.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER 1. THE MACHINE GUN HAND: AN INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Project .....	6
Literature Review.....	11
Key Term: Ideology .....	14
Key Term: Performance.....	24
Key Term: Robots .....	27
Key Term: America .....	34
Chapter Outline .....	39
CHAPTER 2. THE IMAGE OF MAN’S THOUGHTS: 1920-1939 .....	42
<i>Rossum’s Universal Robots</i> .....	47
Katrina Van Televox.....	57
<i>The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair</i> .....	61
The Domestic Consumer.....	69
The Time Capsule of Cupaloy .....	73
CHAPTER 3. LIKE OUR PROGENY, THE COMPUTER: 1950-1968.....	79
The Phenomenology of Robots on Stage and Film .....	80
Robot Actors .....	86
The Labor Question .....	89
Robot Brains and Robot Minds .....	93
The Robot Mind in Fiction .....	98
Conclusion .....	109
CHAPTER 4. NO ALTERNATIVE: 1980-1991 .....	111
Capitalist Realism .....	117
<i>The Terminator</i> .....	121
The End of History and the Culture War .....	126
<i>Terminator 2</i> .....	132
CHAPTER 5. THE RED PILL: 1999-2017.....	141
The Red Dress .....	147
The Red Pill .....	151
Going Their Own Way.....	155
Antagonisms .....	163
CHAPTER 6. I AM IN IDEOLOGY: A CONCLUSION .....	175
Is This Dissertation Outside Ideology?.....	176
Is Resistance Possible? .....	181
Will Althusser Continue to be Useful in the United States?.....	188

BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES.....	192
VITA .....	206

## Abstract

Twentieth-century Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser argued in his famous essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” that capitalism reproduces itself by interpellating individuals as subjects. For Althusser, the subject has a dual definition: a person who imagines him or herself to be a free subject who then “chooses” capitalism, and a person who, once they have “chosen” capitalism, gives up their free will to the Subject (Law, God, Authority, the State). This dual definition of the subject mirrors the dual definition of “robot.” A robot is both a mechanical being that moves on its own and a person who acts in a mechanical way. By situating humans as “not robots,” I argue that narratives and performances of robots function as tools for the reproduction of capital. This dissertation examines four historical moments in the United States—the 1939 New York World's Fair, the 1960s automation debates, the end of the Cold War, and the turn of the millennium—to argue that robots in performance serve an important ideological function: to convince us that we, unlike robots, are free subjects.

## Chapter 1

### The Machine Gun Hand: An Introduction

We got a thousand points of light for the homeless man.  
We got a kinder, gentler, machine gun hand.  
-Neil Young, “Rockin’ in the Free World,” 1989<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation is about ideology. Specifically, I use case studies of robots (both “real” and “fictive”) throughout the twentieth century to argue that ideology is the process by which we imagine ourselves to be free from ideology. Even more specifically, I focus on the use of robots as ideological tools in the United States to show how American-capitalist ideological concepts (globalism, hard work, exceptionalism, family values) are supported and maintained through robot narratives. In writing specifically about America during the twentieth century, I seek to track the rise of technological, cultural, and military imperialism in America, not just as a historical phenomenon, but as a cultural one—that is to say, the history I am looking for is an ideological one, which is best found, I argue, in narratives dealing with our other selves—robots. These narratives are ultimately about the production and reproduction of good citizens (read: capitalist workers) under the conditions of US economic and imperialist expansion during the 20th century, which is what I am calling American Ideology.

While I could closely read other non-robot literary, performance, or historical texts to make this point, robot narratives are “pure” examples since they tend to make explicit and overt statements about “humanity” and its “innate” and “universal” values. These values are in opposition to the rigid, mechanical, robotic world that is “unnatural.” For example, in his inaugural address on January 20, 1989, George H. W. Bush said, “We know what works: Freedom works. We know what's right: Freedom is right. We know how to secure a more just

---

<sup>1</sup> Neil Young, “Rockin’ in the Free World,” *Freedom*, Reprise Records, 1989.

and prosperous life for man on Earth: through free markets, free speech, free elections, and the exercise of free will unhampered by the state.” More than financial success, he argued, America needs a “high moral principle” which will “make kinder the face of the Nation and gentler the face of the world.” The problems of poverty, crime, drug addiction and welfare “addiction” cannot be solved with more government spending. Rather, he argued that we need a compassionate capitalism through “community organizations that are spread like stars throughout the Nation” like “a Thousand Points of Light.”<sup>2</sup> Neil Young was referencing this speech when he sang,

We got a thousand points of light for the homeless man.  
We got a kinder, gentler, machine gun hand.

While Young’s song may seem like a cogent critique of Bush’s ideological statements, Young ultimately makes a similar argument to Bush. For Young, the ironic refrain that we should “keep on rockin’ in the free world” is used as a critique of the clearly unfree United States with its homeless epidemic, drug problems, and environmental devastation. While Young does not seem to believe that we are actually “free,” the song still maintains freedom as an ideal—freedom from outside authoritarian interventions into our innate selves (he sings, for instance, about a child abandoned by his mother who will “never get to be cool”). For Bush, to find freedom, “we only have to summon it from within ourselves.” No authoritarian agency can impose it upon us or give us something as “natural” as “freedom.” Where Young and Bush differ is that Young suggests that this authoritarian impulse is a “machine gun hand” (a hybrid of human and metal; for our purposes, a “robot”). Young is correct that this authoritarian control appears “kind” and “gentle,” but is simply another means of control. This does not mean that

---

<sup>2</sup> George H. W. Bush, “Inaugural Address,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 10, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16610>.



Young is “free” simply because he recognizes an ideologue when he sees one. Rather, it is through the very process of imaging ourselves to be “free” that we are folded back into ideology.

In this dissertation, I rely heavily on the theoretical work of the twentieth-century Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Since his work is so central to mine, it is worth pausing to explain why I consider Althusser particularly useful. Later in this chapter, I will give a more detailed overview of Althusser’s theories—specifically his famous essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” which forms the theoretical backbone of my own work within this dissertation. For now, I will answer a fundamental question (which will also allow me to address some of the criticisms of Althusser): Why is Althusser’s work particularly useful to this dissertation?

Warren Montag begins his book *Althusser and His Contemporaries* with this fascinating passage:

To pose the question, “Why read Althusser today?” is to admit at the outset that his status as a philosopher remains unclear in a way that is not true of his contemporaries and friends, Foucault and Derrida. And, indeed, despite the persistent hostility to the latter in the Anglophone world, Althusser alone could boast that more had been written against him than about him by the end of the twentieth century: an impressive number of books in various languages have the phrase “against Althusser” in the title.<sup>3</sup>

This near endless set of criticisms against him,<sup>4</sup> however, serves as a “testimony to the extraordinary power of his work.”<sup>5</sup>

The rejection of Althusser by many of his contemporaries and later thinkers is because Althusser presented a way of thinking about ideology that was radically different from the

---

<sup>3</sup> Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy’s Perpetual War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Montag discusses, for instance, two of Althusser’s critics, Jacques Rancière and E. P. Thompson, who, while they “have little in common,” both argued that Althusser essentially reduced Marxism to the critique of the interpellation of the subject, which is “fundamentally a power of seduction and deception” (ibid., 2-3). See also Simon Clarke, et al., *One Dimensional Marxism* (New York: Allison and Busby), 1980. Clarke, et al., argue that Althusser’s critiques of humanism, historicism, and empiricism are central to Marxism.

<sup>5</sup> Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 2. Althusser believed, along similar lines, that these critiques show that his work had touched on philosophy’s “sensitive points” and therefore, philosophy “had activated philosophy’s defenses” (ibid., 4).

classical Marxist definition. In classical Marxism, the difference between Ideology and Science was the same as “the opposition between the false and the true.” Althusser, on the other hand, argued that ideology is not simply a series of false statements but is, rather, the “unconscious structure that determines both how people think and how they will act.”<sup>6</sup> In his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser, according to Panagiotis Sotiris

gave a new meaning to both ‘representation’ and ‘the imaginary,’ since now the ideological projection of a free individual is considered at the same time a fiction (as an image of the human condition) and the material reality of the everyday practices, institutions and apparatuses that interpellate and produce human subjects as free individuals.

This “offers also the possibility of thinking the materiality of the work of art not only in the moment of its production but also of its reproduction and re-reading.”<sup>7</sup> Sotiris also observes, however, that scholars often remove Althusser from his historical context.

Gregory Elliott’s *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* attempts to fill that gap by placing Althusser’s work within its cultural milieu. Elliott argues that Althusser’s main project was to restore the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français* or PCF) to its former glory—to a time before Stalin had corrupted its core values.<sup>8</sup> Seeing in the Korean War that the USSR was an imperialist organization, between 1946 and 1956, the PCF membership rolls declined from 800,000 to 300,000.<sup>9</sup> Althusser and Sartre remained loyal to the party, with Sartre arguing in 1952 that, without the PCF, there was no “class-being,” without which, “the universe will be bourgeois.”<sup>10</sup> Althusser wrote in 1975 that his “aim was equally clear: to make a start on the first *left-wing* critique of Stalinism...that would above all help put some substance back into the

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

revolutionary project here in the West.”<sup>11</sup> He would do this through the “*revolution of political practice* of the PCF by a *restoration/renewal of Marxist theory*” (emphasis in original).<sup>12</sup>

Althusser argued that those who had left the party were offering “humanist” critiques of Stalinism, which he saw as a right-wing critique. Elliott argues that Althusser failed to “engage in any depth with the humanist recasting of Marxism.” This is in part because many of these “right wing” critics of Stalin remained Marxist even though they had left the PCF, a fact that Althusser, since he conflated party loyalty with loyalty to Marxism,<sup>13</sup> refused to acknowledge.<sup>14</sup>

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to answer Althusser’s critics in detail, nor do I uncritically accept all of Althusser’s work or ideas. Rather, I wish to articulate why he is useful for this dissertation. As I discuss in detail in chapter 4, the late capitalist notion that we are at the “end of history”—which is to say, that liberal democracy is seen as the final stage in the evolutionary development of human society—is a widespread notion, whether people are conscious or unconscious of that belief. This allows late capitalism (as I discuss in detail in my conclusion) to effectively subsume any critique of capital as simply a critique that is allowed by and created within a liberal democratic order (as I mention briefly in chapter 2). In late capitalism, there is a persuasive and persistent discourse which suggests that we can escape ideology (which I explore in detail in chapter 5), and see the world as it is. This very sense that we are “free” from the constraints of ideology is, as Althusser shows, *the very process by which*

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1. Elliott also observes that it was “only ignorance of the work of Trotsky (among others)” that “could allow Althusser to believe (in 1975) that, in the 1960s, he had embarked on the first such critique” (18).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>13</sup> Althusser’s party loyalty is one of the main criticisms against him. As Sunil Khilnani asks, “Why did the author of a sophisticated theory premised on a belief in the desirability of revolution, an argument pursued ‘against the grain of the political evolution of the PCF itself,’ choose nevertheless to remain within and support a Party that was authoritarian, politically inept, and under no possible description engaged in revolutionary politics?” Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 87.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 25.

*capitalism interpellates us as subjects*. Any critique, then, of ideology must begin with the notion that we are always-already within ideology. As Montag writes,

To imagine that it is possible to wage a struggle from the outside when there exists no outside, except an outside already inscribed within a given field as its outside, is thus to take up a position always inscribed within as a function of the order one would overturn. In this sense, one must operate necessarily from the interior, and the manner in which one inhabits this interior determines whether one can undermine and destabilize the conceptual order. To imagine the possibility of simply stepping outside or, as Althusser put it, of finding an empty corner of the forest, is to be condemned to repeat the very discourse with which one would break.<sup>15</sup>

Since neoliberalism in the United States has significantly reduced the horizon of the possible in the political realm,<sup>16</sup> a critique of ideology must recognize that one cannot find an “empty corner of the forest.” In the current political climate, Althusser provides a useful set of tools to critique ideology without imagining that one is free from it.

## **The Project**

This dissertation exists at the crossroads of two intersecting definitions: that of the robot and that of the Althusserian subject. For this dissertation, I locate that intersection squarely within the discursive realm of America, which serves as the focal point of my critique of ideology. In Minsoo Kang’s book *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*, he observes that the word “automaton” and the word “robot” have a dual, contradictory definition.<sup>17</sup> The *OED* defines a robot as “An intelligent artificial being typically made of metal and resembling in some way a human or other animal.” Another, seemingly contradictory definition is that of “A person

---

<sup>15</sup> Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy’s Perpetual War*, 6

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Panagiotis Sotiris who writes, “The ideological exhaustion of neoliberalism, the postmodern attack on classical humanism, the continuing academic interest in what has been labelled “French Theory”, and a political landscape characterised [*sic*] by the re-emergence of political and theoretical radicalism, have also contributed to this new interest in Althusser and have – partially at least – lifted the anathema that he and most Marxists of his generation had received during the heyday of theoretical anti-communism.” Panagiotis Sotiris, “Review Articles,” *Historical Materialism*, 17, no. 4 (2009): 121.

<sup>17</sup> Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2011.

who acts mechanically or without emotion.”<sup>18</sup> Kang observes that this “mechanical” way of acting carries both positive and negative connotations. On the one hand, saying that a person like Stephen King is a “writing machine” or that Michael Jordan is a “dunking machine”<sup>19</sup> is seen as a compliment. It implies competence, talent, ability, and finely honed skill—the likes of which mere flesh and blood rarely achieves. On the other hand, the term “robot” can be negative and employed to accuse a person of being inhuman. During the 2012 presidential elections, for example, the popular media frequently characterized Mitt Romney as “robotic.” *The Atlantic*<sup>20</sup> and *Popular Science*<sup>21</sup> both used popular understandings of Masahiro Mori’s “uncanny valley” to explain voter distaste of the “robotic” candidate. Even *The New York Times* got in on the act in an article called “Building a Better Mitt Romney,” quipping, “‘Your story about dust regulation captures my interest,’ Mitt Romney said to the farmer, sounding as if he actually meant it.”<sup>22</sup>

Whether dealing with metal machines or humans-as-machines, Marxist theory (and its detractors) provides a useful tool for understanding the simultaneously negative and positive connotations that a “machine” has to navigate. Keith Grint and Steve Woolgar in their book *The Machine at Work* quote Bruce Bimber, who writes,

[Marx claims] that the inherent tendency of the introduction of automation in manufacturing, based upon characteristics of the technology, would be a decrease in the length of the working day. Yet the actual result of automation...is the lengthening of the work day [*sic*]...In this case, whatever natural or inherent effects technology tends to produce are overcome by wilful [*sic*] human actions.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “robot.” n2.

<sup>19</sup> Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Fung, “The Uncanny Valley: What Robot Theory Tells Us About Mitt Romney,” *The Atlantic*, last modified January 30, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/01/the-uncanny-valley-what-robot-theory-tells-us-about-mitt-romney/252235/>.

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Boyle, “Mitt Romney: The Uncanny Candidate,” *Popular Science*, last modified February 1, 2012, <http://www.popsoci.com/technology/article/2012-02/why-mitt-romney-just-creepy-robot>.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Draper, “Building a Better Mitt Romney,” *The New York Times*, last modified November 30, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/magazine/mitt-romney-bot.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/magazine/mitt-romney-bot.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>23</sup> Keith Grint and Steve Woolgar, *The Machine at Work: Technology, Work and Organization* (Cambridge: Polity Press: 1997), 34.

To this, Grint and Woolgar reply, “But what is inherent to automation?”<sup>24</sup> They argue that “inherent” is an unspecific term that reveals a certain set of biases. For a Marxist, the “inherent” quality of automation is to reduce labor and shorten the workday. This “inherent” quality is then corrupted by capitalism, which uses the worker’s newfound free time to require more productivity and more labor. In essence, labor saving devices only free up time for more labor. Grint and Woolgar argue, however, that there is no “inherent” reason why automation should decrease the workday. It can just as easily be argued that the “inherent” quality of automation is to offer “higher profits through increased productivity, except that workers attempt to ‘overcome’ this natural tendency by demanding reduced hours.”<sup>25</sup> Technology has no “natural tendency,” they argue. Capitalists or anti-capitalists simply deploy arguments based around ideological assumptions about the “inherent” benefit of automation. This view of the “natural” use of machines bleeds over into our discussion of human robots. Given that automation has a debatable “inherent” benefit, it is no surprise that American capitalism could produce a world that praises a “dunking machine” while, at the same time, denigrating a Presidential candidate by calling him a “robot.”

The second intersecting definition that this dissertation wrestles with is the dual definition of the subject, as articulated by Louis Althusser. He argues that the subject is both “(1) a free subjectivity, a center of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions;” and “(2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of

---

<sup>24</sup> While my own leanings side with the Marxist view, Grint and Woolgar ask a tough question about a point of view that is rarely challenged. Bedini, for instance, writes, “The role of automata in the progress of technology is therefore of considerable importance. Efforts to imitate life by mechanical means, for whatever purpose, resulted in the development of mechanical principles and led to the production of complex mechanisms which have fulfilled *technology’s original aims—the reduction or simplification of physical labor*” (emphasis mine). Silvio A. Bedini, “The Role of Automata in the History of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 5 (1964): 42.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

freely accepting submission.”<sup>26</sup> This means that capitalism teaches that the free subject (the “individual”) is given his or her autonomy so that he or she may submit to the Subject (God, the State, Duty, Justice, Law, etc.) This definition mirrors the ambiguity of the word “robot.”

Understanding Althusser’s theory of humans-as-subjects is not far removed from understanding theories that see humans-as-robots. Much work on robots, specifically work dealing with psychoanalytic or philosophical theories of the mind, has questioned whether humans are, in some ways, robots. For instance, in his 1967 seminal work, *Human Robots in Myth and Science*, John Cohen concludes with a chapter asking that very question: “Is Man a Robot?” While Cohen concludes that robot technology is a long way off from becoming fully human (robots do not laugh, do not blush, and do not commit suicide, he argues), we are, in many important ways, like a robot. He writes, “In general, whatever refinements and novelties are introduced into artefacts in the foreseeable [*sic*] future, man is destined to remain for a very long time, the lightest, most reliable, most cheaply serviced and the most versatile general-purpose computing device made in large quantities by unskilled labor.”<sup>27</sup> In his book *Is Man a Robot?*, Geoff Simons asks a similar question. To be clear, no one is actually arguing that, like Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 2*, one can slice open one’s arm in order to access the metallic skeleton underneath. Rather, Simons writes, when “people are compared with robots” it is “so that particular conceptual or psychiatric points can be made.” This “conceptual or psychiatric point” is usually a comparison to suggest that “the individual is diminished” and “not fully human.” Additionally, Simons argues, these comparisons can also serve “a political or industrial context.”<sup>28</sup> For example, John Cohen employs the comparison between human and

---

<sup>26</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 123.

<sup>27</sup> John Cohen, *Human Robots in Myth and Science* (Cranbury: A. S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1967), 139.

<sup>28</sup> Geoff Simons, *Is Man a Robot?* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), 2.

robot to suggest that our function as a “general-purpose computing device”—an industrial metaphor to be sure—makes us less than human.

The idea that humans are robots also has a religious impulse, tied to both a Judeo-Christian heritage and a peculiarly American pastoral romanticism. For instance, Garett Garrett begins his 1926 book *Ouroboros, or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind* by saying, “One story of us is continuous. It is the story of our struggle to recapture the Garden of Eden, meaning by that a state of existence free from the doom of toil.”<sup>29</sup> Garrett argues that the curse that God put on Adam—the curse of toil—has been, in large part, mitigated by machinery. We now have the technology to create a world where constant toil need not be a reality—a world of abundance. In other words, with machines, we can return to Eden, which is our “natural” state. Additionally, the narrative of the creation of Adam and Eve can be read as a story of early robots, or automata.<sup>30</sup> God, like Prometheus, created Adam out of the dust of the earth and breathed life into him. From a certain point of view, then, in our “natural” state, we are automata—inanimate matter which has been given life.

Recognizing that, to some degree, we imagine ourselves as robots, I can proceed with a major theoretical assumption of this work. I argue that fictional accounts of robots (short stories, novels, films, and plays), “real” robots (Elektro the Moto-Man, Honda’s Asimo<sup>31</sup>), and humans-as-robots (in representations of automated work—a major theme, for instance, in *The Matrix*), can all be read as representing the relationship between humans and labor, free-will, and individual subjectivity. This is to say that robots and robot narratives are ideological—meaning

---

<sup>29</sup> Garett Garrett, *Ouroboros, or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1926), 7.

<sup>30</sup> I will occasionally use “automaton” and “robot” somewhat interchangeably. Both words carry the same double meaning in the *OED*. It is worth noting, however, that “robot” will only be employed when historically accurate. The word came into the English language through the popularity of the play *Rossum’s Universal Robots*. Any use of the term “robot” to refer to automata before 1920 is a historical anachronism.

<sup>31</sup> Asimo is a robot created by Honda in the year 2000 as both a practical test subject for mobility technology and as part of their goal to use robots to improve quality of life.



they are used ideologically. Ideology, I argue, is a performative gesture, rather than a belief system. The various texts that I critique in my dissertation—both “real” and “fictive”—all have a performative function, even if they are not “performance” texts. This is because ideology is manifest by a speaker or speakers to incite or create a desired result. This result is about the maintenance of stable power relations between members of differing social classes. This is by no means a universal definition of ideology. Terry Eagleton begins his book *Ideology* by saying, “Nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology... This is not because workers in the field are remarkable for their low intelligence, but because the term ‘ideology’ has a whole range of useful meanings, not all of which are compatible with each other.”<sup>32</sup> Recognizing, then, that the definition of “ideology” is a tricky one, it will be useful to spend a moment explaining my position. First, I will explain the scope and parameters of my dissertation with my literature review, then I will also discuss my other key terms: ideology, performance, robots, and America.

## **Literature Review**

The literature on this subject is vast, and many studies, like John Cohen’s *Human Robots in Myth and Science*, Eric G. Wilson’s *The Melancholy Android: On the Psychology of Sacred Machines*, Minsoo Kang’s *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination*, Kara Reilly’s *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History*, and Gaby Wood’s *Edison’s Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*, tend to be extremely broad in scope. Each one of these books covers a broad swath of history, sometimes going as far back as Ancient Egypt.

---

<sup>32</sup> Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology: An Introduction*. (New York: Verso, 1991), 1.

John Cohen's book argues that "the imagination of our time has been stirred by an exhilarating succession of man-made robots...they promise a fulfilment of a dream that can be traced through mediaeval [*sic*] fantasy to the legends of an immemorial past."<sup>33</sup> Cohen's goal is to find something of his own age (1966) in the past. He utilizes the past from ancient Egypt up to the sixties to attempt to answer the question, "Is man a robot?"

Eric G. Wilson's book is similarly concerned with answering a question. While Cohen wants to know something of history, Wilson wants to know something more personal. He found himself obsessed with three monsters: the mummy, the golem, and the automaton. His obsession led him to feel a kind of melancholy. Using this as the impetus for his book, Wilson sought to discover the source of this ennui. Wilson's obsession led him to believe that his constant return to these figures, which inhabited his waking and sleeping hours, had a psychoanalytic origin. He argues that Freud's death drive is the answer. Much like how the young child playing "fort-da" tries to control the ball (because he cannot control his mother), so too do the makers of robots create mechanical life: something that they can control, which soothes the terror that they might otherwise feel. As therapy for Wilson's obsession, the book appears to have worked. He writes, "Though I am no longer moored to androids, I am still sometimes troubled by the suspicion that I am a machine. This thought produces the low fever of melancholia. I fear that this viral sadness is not unique to me. I suspect that it is an epidemic slowly infecting the citizens of our age—the age when machines rule organs."<sup>34</sup>

Minsoo Kang's book traces European automata from Greece and Rome until the early twentieth century, paying particular attention to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some

---

<sup>33</sup> John Cohen, *Human Robots in Myth and Science*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Eric G. Wilson, *The Melancholy Android: On the Psychology of Sacred Machines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 13.

of the major highlights include Hero of Alexandria's mechanical theatre and the theories of Descartes who saw the universe as a giant clock. Kang is a historian, but his book covers a good deal of theoretical ground as well. Kang traces the history of theoretical thought about automata that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kang is interested in the power of the liminal space occupied by the automaton.<sup>35</sup>

Kara Reilly is concerned with the mimetic faculty of automata. She argues that the term mimesis has become synonymous with realism, but that this misses the point of the word. It is about the relationship between art and nature. Her book explores "the productive anxiety between nature and art by reading it through the framework of automata."<sup>36</sup> For instance, Descartes came to his theories of the mechanical universe by observing automata in the royal pleasure gardens at Saint-Germain. As a work of theatre studies, Reilly's book is particularly interested in the important Karel Čapek play *R.U.R.* but also focuses a good deal on stage representations of *The Sandman*. For Reilly, *R.U.R.* was the moment that the automata became automation, which in turn gave birth to the robot.

Gaby Wood, like Eric G. Wilson, is interested in the impulse that drives the creation of mechanical life. She notes that most of the creators of automata, and writers of fiction about automata, are men who create women and children. She writes,

---

<sup>35</sup> This liminal space begins with the theory of the uncanny, which can be traced to E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1816 short story *The Sandman*. In this story, a young student named Nathaniel is driven to madness and suicide when he discovers the woman he loves, Olympia, is an automaton. Reading this short story, Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," argues that Nathaniel had a reaction that could be called "uncanny," because he was unsure about whether or not Olympia was human. That liminal space causes an uncanny sensation. In 1919, Freud wrote his famous essay "The Uncanny" as a response to Jentsch. Freud argues that the uncanny is the feeling that occurs when someone encounters something familiar, but that is repressed. In 1970, Masahiro Mori published his famous essay, "The Uncanny Valley," which argued that, as automata more closely resemble humans, they become more familiar, until they reach a point when they are almost human, but not quite. At this point, they are no longer familiar but become uncanny. A 2006 study by Karl F. MacDorman and Hiroshi Ishiguro found support for the theory that uncertainty regarding whether or not a figure is a human or a robot does cause an uncanny sensation. See Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*, 49-51.

<sup>36</sup> Kara Reilly, *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

In the quest for mechanical perfection, does perfection mean infallibility (as in the computer), or innocence (as in the child)? Curiously, contemporary research has returned to these issues. While once it was thought that true artificial intelligence entailed an infinite number of calculations (the computer as all-knowing adult), now more attention has been turned towards ‘learning machines,’ robots that start out as infants and pick things up as they go.<sup>37</sup>

While theories like Descartes’s about the universe working like a machine, or the various theories surrounding The Uncanny (which trace their roots to an E. T. A. Hoffmann short story) are useful, this study will avoid much of this broadness in favor of a tighter scope. Rather than putting robots (or automata) into a conversation with Descartes, this dissertation differs from other work done in its focus on the relationship between the subject, in an Althusserian sense, and robots. This insight is the primary theoretical contribution of this dissertation and one of the major ways in which it is different from many other works in the field. Additionally, because this dissertation is focused almost exclusively on America, it stands out from other works that treat robots as transnational or ahistorical.<sup>38</sup>

### **Key Term: Ideology**

In John Carpenter’s 1988 film *They Live*, the protagonist, John Nada, discovers a box full of sunglasses in a church. It turns out that these are no ordinary sunglasses. When Nada wears them, he is able to see beyond the surface strata of the world. He is able to see things *as they really are*. An ad by the fictional company Control Data, for instance, which reads, “We’re creating the transparent computing environment” simply reads, “OBEY” when viewed through

---

<sup>37</sup> Gaby Wood, *Edison’s Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), xx.

<sup>38</sup> For a good example of historicizing the scientific thinking of man-as-machine, see Adam Curtis’s documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*. In this three-part documentary, Curtis traces the role that computers played in our conception, in the twentieth century, of the economy (part one), nature (part two), and gene theory (part three). In part three, Curtis traces the theories of George Price, Bill Hamilton, and Richard Dawkins, who tried to argue, using the theory of the selfish gene, that humans are essentially hardware, who are carriers of software (our genes), and who act in the way that this “code” tells us to. Curtis’s argument is that Dawkins and company saw the failures caused by liberalism in the so-called third world and sought to eliminate free will from the liberal equation, thus freeing the Western world from guilt.

the glasses. An ad with an attractive, bikini-clad woman reading “come to the... Caribbean” *really* means “Marry and Reproduce”—a truth only observable to someone wearing the glasses.

Speaking of the film, Slavoj Žižek says,

We live, so we are told, in a post-ideological society. We are interpellated that is to say, addressed by social authority, not as subjects, who should do their duty: sacrifice themselves. But, subjects of pleasures: realize your true potential, be yourself, live a satisfying life. When you put the glasses on, you see dictatorship in democracy. It’s the invisible order which sustains your apparent freedom.<sup>39</sup>

*They Live*’s protagonist is able to see the world as it is, not just because of the glasses, but because he is John Nada—an unwritten subject. He is no one, a drifter, he is nothing—Nada. The film imagines that ideology is only perceptible to someone who is *already* outside of ideology. For Althusser, ideology can only be critiqued from within (there is no empty corner of the forest), by a person who recognizes that they are within ideology, otherwise, we run the risk of being folded back within the very discourse we are attempting to critique. However, this still does not answer the main question: what, exactly, is ideology? It is more than becoming like John Nada. Rather, ideology is the very process by which we imagine ourselves to be like John Nada—an unwritten subject, free from authoritarian interventions into our “innate” self.

In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx argues that “definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into...definite social and political relations.” For Marx, the world of ideas, both as discourse—philosophy, religion—and as their actuation within the material world—social systems, governments, laws—are not abstractions, but are realities created through the material relationships between individuals. “The social structure and the State,” he writes, “are continually evolving out of the life process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they *really*

---

<sup>39</sup> *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*, directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2013. British Film Institute.

are; i.e., as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.”<sup>40</sup> What this means is that *reality*, for Marx, is the material relations between individuals. A dominant power structure, however, seeks to obscure those relations by creating individuals “as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination.”

Marx expounds this concept further by arguing that the “German philosophy...descends from heaven to earth,” while Marx’s philosophy “ascend[s] from earth to heaven.”<sup>41</sup> Social institutions (the Superstructure) seek to erase the material reality (the Base) which created that institution. These social institutions commit this erasure through ideology. For instance, a monarchy might insist that its rule is granted from God; its priests may insist that loyalty to the monarch is loyalty to God; paying taxes, fighting in wars, service to the State, etc., are all seen as a Duty One Must Do to Serve the State and God. The military, the vast buildings created by labor, the roads, the farms—all of these material realities are created by individuals. Dominant powers seek to erase that material reality and move reality into the realm of consciousness. So, this hypothetical monarchy might say its Ideas or its World View or its God are the stuff that reality is made of which *just so happen* to be the very ideas that create and replicate inequality and class division. Marx believes that all philosophy (except his own), with its focus on consciousness, is “empty talk” which avoids “real life” or what he calls “practical activity.”<sup>42</sup>

It is important to remember that Marx saw himself as doing a type of science. Ideology, the study of ideas, was an all-encompassing science. For Marx, by grounding all philosophy within the physical world, he could explain all human relationships, all social institutions, and all

---

<sup>40</sup> Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 154.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 155.

of history. The study of consciousness was a pointless exercise because it moved observable reality into the realm of abstract thought. This abstract realm could be easily dominated by and manipulated by the ruling class so that *ideas* like God, Duty, or Loyalty to the State could take precedence over *reality*: material relationships. This study of ideas was not, as Marx would say, philosophy. It was science: observable, measurable, testable. While the term ideology came to later mean “systems of ideas”<sup>43</sup> rather than the study of ideas, it never really lost its love of science. Some Marxists in the mid-twentieth century, like Althusser, believed that they could create a perfectly scientific theory of Marxism that operated outside of ideology.

Terry Eagleton writes,

In a controversial move within Western Marxism, Althusser insists on a rigorous distinction between “science” (meaning among other things Marxist theory) and “ideology”. The former is not just to be grasped in historicist style as the “expression” of the latter; on the contrary, science or theory is a specific kind of labour with its own protocols and procedures, one demarcated from ideology by what Althusser calls an “epistemological break.”<sup>44</sup>

For Althusser, mathematics, for example, would not be considered ideological since it is “verified by methods which are purely internal to [it].”<sup>45</sup> While I am sympathetic to this argument, and even agree to some extent, this is an area where I break with Althusser.

It is difficult to see how something as objective as two-plus-two can be seen as ideological, but it is not specific “facts” elucidated by science that are a cause for alarm. Rather, it is rather its deployment as Science. As Eagleton says, “Science as such—the triumph of technological, instrumental ways of seeing the world—acts as an important part of the ideological legitimization of the bourgeoisie, which is able to translate moral and political

---

<sup>43</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 63.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

questions into technical ones resolvable by the calculations of experts.”<sup>46</sup> I would like to use the example of mental health to demonstrate how Science fulfills an ideological function.

Mark Fisher observes that radical theorists in the ‘60s and ‘70s made the argument that “madness was not a natural, but a political category.”<sup>47</sup> For example, American culture tends to have two very strong reactions to depression. On the one hand, certain socially conservative forces might say that a depressed person simply needs to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, quit complaining, get outside, exercise, and work hard. It is all in your head, they would argue. Other, socially liberal forces might respond to a declaration of depression by saying that it is not the depressed person’s fault, it is just chemicals in their brain which are operating improperly, we can get you to a doctor, medicine will fix the problem, mental health should not be stigmatized, and so on. Like the conservative response, this socially liberal force is also saying, “it is all in your head.” While it is true that there are chemicals in the brain that regulate a “normal” emotional range, both of these reactions to depression are ultimately saying the same thing: depression is an *individual* problem; there is something wrong with *you*. Either you need to simply buck-up, or you need to take some medicine to “fix” your brain, but either way—it is *your* problem. As Sam Kriss writes in his review of the DSM-5, “At no point is there any sense that madness might be socially informed, that the forms it takes might be a reflection of the influences and pressures of the world that surrounds us. The idea emerges that every person’s illness is somehow their own fault, that it comes from nowhere but themselves: their genes, their addictions, and their inherent human insufficiency.”<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative?* (Washington: 0 Books, 2009), 19.

<sup>48</sup> Sam Kriss, “Book of Lamentations,” *The New Inquiry*, last modified October 18, 2003, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/book-of-lamentations/>.



While Althusser hoped to contribute to a purely scientific Marxism that existed wholly outside of ideology, contemporaries like Foucault refuted this notion. Importantly, his ISA essay, which I use throughout this dissertation, does not explain a way that we can find ourselves outside of ideology. This purely scientific Marxism, free from the ideology it seeks to critique, is not something that I necessarily agree with, but this is not to say that I believe that Marxism is just another ideology. I maintain that his theory for how capitalist ideology reproduces itself, as outlined in his famous essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,”<sup>49</sup> is particularly useful for my dissertation. In this essay, Althusser seeks to understand how capitalism manages, as a system, to reproduce itself. What he finds is that it reproduces itself through the reproduction of the subject—an individual who imagines him or herself as a free individual who “chooses” capitalism.

In order for capitalism to reproduce, he argues, the system needs to reproduce both the means of production and the necessary labor power. A person who owns a chair-making factory, for example, cannot simply make chairs but must also replenish his or her supply of materials to make chairs: lumber, tools, paint, etc. There are entire industries devoted to providing this reproduction: a lumber industry, a hardware industry, a paint industry—each made in their own respective factories. Moreover, people must work at the chair factory, other people must manage it, other people (the police) must work to ensure that the property of the factory owner (the Capitalist) is protected, while others still (lumberjacks, toolmakers) must go to work in the industries that provide the factory owner with the goods needed to reproduce the means of production. It would do capitalism no good if the labor force were exhausted after one generation. Labor power, in addition to the means of production, must be reproduced. The bulk

---

<sup>49</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 83-126.

of Althusser's essay goes to answering this question: How is labor power reproduced? The answer is through Ideological State Apparatuses.

Althusser argues that Marx's model of the Base (material conditions) with the Superstructure (the State and its repressive apparatuses) on top is a mostly useful metaphor but requires that we go beyond it. Althusser points out that for Marx, the Superstructure is not merely composed of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). These RSAs can be the police, the military, the legal system, or any other State agency that forces a person into compliance. Other more benign apparatuses that give the illusion of "voluntary" association with capital are what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses, or ISAs. An ISA is an apparatus for which the *raison d'être* is the reproduction of ideology. Schools, churches, trade unions, communications, culture, etc., all fall under this ISA umbrella. While ISAs can be repressive (churches, for instance, can excommunicate you) and RSAs can be ideological (law school, for instance, is part of the legal system), Althusser argues that the difference between the two lies in their primary function. In the case of ISAs, their primary function is successfully training a generation to submit to the habits and practices of the workforce—to reproduce the relations of production.

For instance, Althusser writes, "the communications apparatus" contributes to the reproduction of the relations of production "by cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc. by means of the press, the radio, and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus (the role of sport in chauvinism is of the first importance), etc."<sup>50</sup> As an example of the ideological function of sports (and robots) in daily life, President Obama, in a visit to Japan, played a brief bout of soccer with Asimo, Honda's world-

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 104.

famous robot.<sup>51</sup> In the video, Obama watches Asimo run around for bit, commenting, “Wow, he’s moving!” Asimo responds, “I can kick a soccer ball too.” Asimo then walks over to a soccer ball placed on the ground and, after a few moments, kicks the ball towards the President. The video is a treasure-trove of ideology: international leaders of government, mostly men, all wearing dark suits, white shirts, and conservative ties, gather around to watch Asimo—the representative of “progress” and “industry.” Additionally, the entire video is made by the Associated Press and, except for one brief shot where a photographer appears, we might forget that, in addition to the cultural ISA, there is another ISA at work: the communications apparatus, responsible for letting viewers know that government and industry are crossing national borders, solving problems, and “improving” the world. The role of sport—cultural reproduction, namely the ritual of athletic competition—might go unnoticed as an ISA. However, it is a telling choice that soccer was used to prove how advanced Asimo is. As the ultimate laborer, one way to tell how successfully “human” a robot has become is its ability to reproduce a ritual of capitalism: sport. In fact, by 2050, a group of engineers plans to have “a team of fully autonomous humanoid robot soccer players” who “shall win the soccer game, comply with the official rules of the FIFA, against the winner of the most recent World Cup.”<sup>52</sup> Athletic competition becomes the litmus test to see how “human” a robot has become.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> “Raw: Obama Plays Soccer With Japanese Robot,” *YouTube*, last modified April 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag2vk6coBpI>.

<sup>52</sup> “Group Predicts Robots Will Win Soccer’s World Cup in 2050,” *LiveScience*, last modified February 26, 2009. <http://www.livescience.com/5339-group-predicts-robots-win-soccer-world-cup-2050.html>.

<sup>53</sup> This international example does not make Althusser’s point about chauvinism in sports less valid. The goal of this robot soccer team is to beat the winners of the World Cup—a competition that celebrates national athletic achievement on the world stage. A robot team may show how the “spirit” of “humanity” crosses national boundaries; often the rhetoric surrounding the Olympics is similar. While the Olympics is an international event that celebrates our shared humanity, it is also, simultaneously, a nationalist event. I cannot imagine that whichever country wins the World Cup in 2050 will root for the robots against their own team.

While the cultural ISA is one example of ideology in practice, all ISAs are concerned with the reproduction of ideology. This is done by creating a “subject” who imagines that their thoughts are generated from within themselves, rather than from outside forces. For Althusser, an individual is a subject before their birth. For instance, a pregnant woman uses the term “expecting” to mean that she is expecting a subject. A person recognizes him or herself as a subject because, under capitalism, they *are* treated as a subject even before their birth. Before and after birth, this person will be inevitably hailed through rituals of ideological recognition. They might “have” a name even before their birth, and, once born, “what is his/her name” will be a frequent question asked of its parents. In Althusser’s example, this person, now an adult, may be walking down the street and a police officer may say to them, “Hey you!” This subject will then recognize itself as the one being hailed, thus confirming the person as a subject—an “individual” with an “identity” (an identity recognized and so legitimized by the forces of the state). Ideology is then masked since the subject imagines that his or her “world view” is the result of thoughts originating from his or herself—a subject with an autonomous will. “Individuals” are important for capitalist ideology because they present the illusion of voluntary submission to capitalism, which is then naturalized through the “choice” of the subject. (Mis)recognition of one’s self as a subject, then, is good for capitalism. By submitting to capitalism, individuals become robots—people who have given up their free will—but who nonetheless imagine themselves to be free.

In science fiction narratives, however, the moment in which a mechanical robot recognizes itself as a subject is called the “singularity,” and it is usually a moment of terror for humanity. In the play *Rossum’s Universal Robots* and films such as *The Terminator*, *Blade Runner*, and *The Matrix*, this singularity—robots becoming aware of themselves as subjects—

means doom and gloom for humanity. Why is this? If capitalism cheers the moment of a person becoming a subject, why is this moment so terrifying when it happens to a robot? If robots are the ultimate workers, then why is this singularity a moment of dread? A common way that this terror is understood in popular culture is that there is “something” about “being human” that is “special.” Per Schelde offers insight into the historical basis for this “special” human quality. He argues that post-Cartesian philosophy, what Schelde calls “scientism,” began to move away from the notion of free will, into a belief that all of nature, humans included, were part of a mechanism. Spinoza writes, “I shall consider human actions and desires in exactly the same manner as though I were concerned with lines, planes, and solids.” This approach allows Spinoza to conclude, “Man is a machine.”<sup>54</sup> Schelde argues that science fiction is born of this “tension between ... ‘rude’ scientism and the Christian cosmology.”<sup>55</sup> Specifically, this is the Christian cosmology of the soul. He writes that science fiction “clings to the notion that there is one last entity inside humans that makes them more than machines, more than matter. That entity is the soul or the self. [Science fiction] movies are an account of scientism, what the excision of the soul, would mean to humans.”<sup>56</sup> No robot, no matter how convincing, can effectively do what humans can do: feel, love, make ethical choices, laugh, etc. The video game *Mass Effect 3* plays with this idea with EDI, an AI given free will who wants to understand humanity. Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is a similar character: a robot who, despite all of his advanced hardware and software, simply wants to understand what it is like to be human. Asimov’s short story-turned-Hollywood blockbuster, *Bicentennial Man*, is another example. In *The Matrix Reloaded*, Neo and Trinity’s sex scene—played alongside a rave taking place in the real world—

---

<sup>54</sup> Per Schelde, *Androids, Humanoids, and Other Science Fiction Monsters: Science and Soul in Science Fiction Films* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 126.

is designed to show why “humanity” is essential, as contrasted with the robotic, simulated world of the Matrix. We also see in Chaplin’s *Modern Times* that repetitious factory labor is “dehumanizing.” When we work like robots, we lose that certain “something” that makes us human, the film argues. This emphasis on something essentially “human,” contrasted with something inhuman, presumes that human “identity” is a natural quality. This is why robot narratives are such powerful ideological tools.

To sum up, ideology, as I use it throughout this dissertation, as informed by the work of Althusser, along with my own critical, theoretical, and historical interventions, is (1) systems, structures, utterances, whether “true” or not, that allow for, or create, or maintain a social order which privileges certain individuals over others; (2) passed down through cultural forces, institutions, groups, and individuals, either consciously or unconsciously; (3) all-encompassing, embedded within all types of knowledge, including “science”; (4) not necessarily *restrictive* or *oppressive* (much like Foucault’s notion of power-knowledge), but can be productive and create new ways of being; (5) created by the very structure through which we imagine ourselves to be free subjects; (6) *deployed*, which is to say that it is performative, rather than a set of beliefs.

### **Key Term: Performance**

I envision this dissertation as a cultural history of America, which exists within the interdisciplinary fields of theatre and performance studies. This is clear through four major foci. First, the blurring of categorical definitions through performative gestures, mentioned earlier and discussed in this section, is one of the ways that this work will further the field of theatre studies. Second, the popularity of the play *Rossum’s Universal Robots* in America is an important feature in this dissertation. In some ways, this dissertation is the story of a play and its impact on American culture. Third, I will also be exploring more recent play-texts as literature, like

*Marjorie Prime* and *Heddatron*. Fourth, in chapter 3, I ask a key question, “What does it mean for a robot to act in a film?” The answer to that question lies at the heart of this dissertation.

While for most of this dissertation I focus on the narrative content of plays and films, rather than the performance aspects, when I say that this dissertation is about performance, I mean “performance” in a broader sense. I mean performance as in *performativity*. This is because the various media and performances that I discuss throughout this dissertation work to interpellate the subject in a performative way. In his seminal book, *How to Do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin describes a category of speech that he calls “performatives”—a portmanteau of performance and action. Austin argues that language is typically thought of in positive and negative terms. This is to say that language is seen as either affirming or denying; describing accurately, or describing falsely; telling the truth, or telling a lie. Speech, when viewed in this way, is merely a descriptive binary. What you are saying is either true or false. If I were to say, for instance, “It is cold outside,” my speech would either be describing the world as it is—it actually is cold!—or it would be a lie—it is actually hot! This, Austin argues, does not describe the entire range of speech-acts available to us. Some utterances, he writes, do not “‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constatae anything at all, are not ‘true’ or ‘false.’” In some speech-acts, “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as ‘just’, saying something.”<sup>57</sup> In opposition to “constatives” (descriptive speech), these special kinds of speech-acts (which *do* something) are called “performatives.”

A performative does not just describe the world (rightly or wrongly), but changes it—the words are not a description of the action; they *are* the action. This is what happens, for instance, during the “I do” in a marriage ceremony. In Austin’s words, “to utter the sentence (in, of course,

---

<sup>57</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 5.

the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing...or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it.”<sup>58</sup> As another example, the words “I promise to [blank]” (assuming in some general sense that it is obvious the speaker is not “joking, for example, or writing a poem”) constitute a performative. When making a promise, “the outward utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance.”<sup>59</sup> Meaning, a promise is a promise whether a person means to keep it or not. A promise can be given in bad faith, but it is still a promise.<sup>60</sup>

There is a problematic at work here, however. Althusser and Austin are, in some sense, irreconcilable. Althusser suggests that the “I” is constituted within discourse—the police officer says, “Hey you,” and this is what allows you to (mis)recognize yourself as a subject. For Austin, the “I” is *already* there, meaning that the “I” who speaks the words “I promise to” exists outside of discursivity. Althusser would say that the very speech acts that Austin calls “performatives” are ideological acts of recognition, wherein you imagine yourself as a subject that exists outside of ideology. Judith Butler takes up this difficulty in her book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. As she describes it, “For Austin, the subject who speaks precedes the speech in question. For Althusser, the speech act that brings the subject into linguistic existence precedes the subject in question.” Butler acknowledges that while this is a large philosophical difference, it is also not quite as large it might seem. As she writes, “Just as for Austin the convention governing the institution of promise-making is verbally honored even in the case of a promise that no one intends to fulfill, so for Althusser one is entered into the ‘ritual’ of ideology regardless of whether there is a prior and authenticating belief in that ideology.”<sup>61</sup> This, for

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>61</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 24.



Butler, constitutes performance—which it to say that our lives are made up, not of “true” or “false” notions, but through “performance.”

It is in this performative space of “ritual” where both Austin and Althusser have common ground. It does not matter, as Butler says, whether the person who makes a promise intends to keep it. It also does not matter, according to Austin to himself, whether the person who says, “I do” plans to keep the wedding vows, or if that person who says, “I bet” plans to back off when he or she loses the bet. It is the conventions or ritual which cement the promise or the “I do” as a performative act, not the “inward performance.” Similarly, for Althusser, the police officer’s hail (“hey you”) is not a recognition of a pre-existing, internal subject but is the constitution of a subject through an external ritual of recognition. Both the Austinian and the Althusserian subjects speak through ritual and convention. And what is convention? Provocatively, Butler asks, “Who speaks when convention speaks? In what time does convention speak? In some sense, it is an inherited set of voices, an echo of others who speak as the ‘I.’”<sup>62</sup> When I say that ideology is performative, I mean that it constitutes the limits of our ability to interact with, understand, make sense of the world around us, and that it does so by constituting our subjectivity. It does so by creating a set of parameters to “perform” that subjectivity. When I say that ideology is performative, I mean that it functions through language and manifests as, in, and through discourse.

### **Key Term: Robots**

What is a robot, and how is it different from a puppet, an automaton, a cyborg, or an artificial intelligence? John Bell writes that “the definition of a puppet might seem straightforward,” but Frank Proschan’s term “performing objects” might be a more useful way to

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 25.

think about puppets. Proschan defines performing objects as “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance.” They are the “*things* people use to tell stories.”<sup>63</sup> Alternatively, an automaton may or may not have a narrative purpose. Also unlike a puppet, an automaton is not manipulated, but rather, moves on its own power. As Kara Reilly puts it, this means that they “are often perceived as if they alive.”<sup>64</sup> While robots and automata are similar, even having similar dual definitions in the *OED*, the primary difference is one of history. According to Reilly, as I discuss in chapter 2, the difference is that automata were handcrafted, while robots represent a shift to mechanized labor and mass-production. Like the seemingly simple definition of a puppet, a cyborg seems obvious: a blend of machine and flesh. However, the term has taken on recent, more nuanced connotations. Donna Haraway argues in her seminal “Cyborg Manifesto” that cyborgs in the twentieth century are women who cross the boundary between lived experience and social possibility—who can imagine new ways of constituting the world.<sup>65</sup>

Artificial intelligence, however, is a bit more difficult to define. As I will discuss in chapter 3, the philosophical debate between John Cohen and Alan Turing shows that there is not much agreement on what intelligence actually looks like. As Douglas Hofstadter puts it, “Sometimes it seems as though each new step towards AI, rather than producing something which everyone agrees is real intelligence, merely reveals what real intelligence is *not*.”<sup>66</sup> At a recent Senate hearing on artificial intelligence, Eric Horvitz, a technical fellow and director at Microsoft Research, said, “AI is not one thing. AI is a constellation of disciplines, including

---

<sup>63</sup> John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Kara Reilly, *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” accessed June 24, 2017, <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Haraway-CyborgManifesto-1.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> Brian Christian, *The Most Human Human: What Talking with Computers Teaches Us About What it Means to be Human* (Doubleday: New York, 2011), 12.

computer vision, machine learning, language understanding, reasoning and planning, and robotics, but they're all aimed at a shared aspiration, the scientific understanding of thought and intelligent behavior, and in developing computing systems based on these understandings.”<sup>67</sup>

While in some sense, an artificial intelligence is simply “a machine that can think,” there is no clear definition of what that means or what “true” artificial intelligence looks like. As an ideological phenomenon, however, the stakes are similar to those of robots: a site where the very definition of “human” is at stake.

The more pressing question, however, is how or why does the distinction between puppets, automata, robots, cyborgs, and artificial intelligence matter? Even more pressing: *does* the distinction between these words matter at all? For the historical scope of this dissertation, the answer is yes, the distinction matters. I am particularly interested in robots as a fictive and historical category, rather than extending my historical or theoretical scope to discuss automata or puppets in any detail. This dissertation is also not going to discuss certain contemporary, postmodern discourses that are interested in transhumanism and cyborgs. For the theoretical scope of this dissertation, however, the distinction is somewhat irrelevant since, in some respects, the categories cannot be easily separated from one another. There is a significant amount of slippage between the terms. A different dissertation might be interested in some or all of the following questions: Are not all robots, in some sense, also automata? Is a robot who is capable of machine learning also an artificial intelligence? Is Elektro, in addition to being a robot, also a puppet? Is the Terminator (the fictional character) a robot or a cyborg? Is Arnold Schwarzenegger (the actor who plays the Terminator) a robot or a cyborg? Are humans best

---

<sup>67</sup> The Dawn of Artificial Intelligence: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Space, Science, and Competitiveness of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate, 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, November 30, 2016, accessed June 24, 2017, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-114shrg24175/pdf/CHRG-114shrg24175.pdf>.

understood as “robots” in the sense that John Cohen describes, or are we best understood as “cyborgs”?<sup>68</sup>

The answers to some of these questions are relatively simple. Yes, in addition to being a robot, Elektro is also a puppet. Yes, robots can also have artificial intelligence—which is part of the ideological contrast between our intelligence and theirs. However, the answers to many of these questions are outside of the scope of this dissertation. What interests me in this dissertation is the way in which robots are *deployed* as ideological tools. I am less interested in parsing categorical distinctions than I am in examining the ways in which the performance of “robot” serves as a ritual of ideological recognition. We “know” that the Terminator is not “real,” but is played by an actor. Similarly, we “know” that Elektro is also a puppet. However, in performance, the “real” and the “fictive” blend together to create the category of robot I am interested in examining: the robot that makes us say, “I am not that.”

Since I will be reading both “fictive” and “real” robots as texts in this dissertation, it is worth pausing for a moment to explain why I am skeptical about that binary. There are four primary reasons. First, in some histories, the two qualities are blended. While not immediately relevant to the historical scope of this dissertation, an account about Julius Caesar by Appian provides a perfect example of a way in which ancient automata could be seen as “real.” In 44 BC, after Marcus Antonius finished his famous speech at Caesar’s funeral, Appian records that the effigy representing Caesar “was turned in every direction by a mechanical device, and twenty-three wounds could be seen, savagely inflicted on every part of the body and on the face.” People were so moved by the sight of this mechanical effigy that “howling and lamenting, they surrounded the senate-house, where Caesar had been killed, and burnt it down, and hurried

---

<sup>68</sup> Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*, 299.

about hunting for the murderers, who had slipped away some time previously.” Minsoo Kang observes that this story is likely fictive, existing only in the mind of Appian. However, because Appian presented the story as fact, even if it is not true, “the psychological dimension of the story rings true.”<sup>69</sup> When trying to understand the ideological function of robots in a given historical moment, whether or not the story is true matters less than the way the story is deployed. Whether Appian’s story had actually happened, or if it was purely fictive, the ideological function would be the same.

Second, theorists of robots often use fiction to reference real world interactions between humans and machines. For instance, in a 1935 study entitled *Men and Machines*, Stuart Chase observes that in one of the “great establishments” dedicated to manufacturing automobiles, working men are handcuffed to the machines, “feeding it pieces of steel by hand.” He writes, “As the punch comes down, the lever moves back, taking the hand with it... To look down the long room is to see machines, levers and men in unison—feed, punch, jerk back; feed, punch, jerk back...” Chase argues that these handcuffs were installed—this prison that melds man and machine—“partly out of pity for their flesh and blood.” Since, before this safety mechanism was put into place, workers were constantly losing hands and fingers. While this anecdote is true, Chase turns to fiction in order to make sense of it. He writes, alluding to Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.*, “I have heard of no other single task today which so closely approximates the gloomy prophets’ picture of the robot—that mechanism of flesh and blood first heard of in a Czechoslovak play, towards which, it is alleged, all men are moving.”<sup>70</sup> It is also easy to call to mind fiction films like Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* or Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* when imagining a series of workers, each responsible for one lever or one bolt, chained to a machine as if part of it.

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>70</sup> Stuart Chase, *Men and Machines* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 142-143.

Whatever work of fiction we, or Stuart Chase, employ to make sense of this, the “real” scene of humans working in a mechanical way is mediated by an understanding of fictive works that preceded our observation of the scene.

The third reason why the line between real and fictive robots is blurry is that there is no “natural” reason why a robot should resemble a human, or any other creature. “Real” robots exist as much in the imaginations of their creators as do “fictive” ones, which is to say that an engineer creates a robot in the imagination before building one. For instance, the Cornell Creative Machines Lab<sup>71</sup> has done fantastic research into what they call “soft robots”—voxel-based<sup>72</sup> computer simulations that “evolve” according to certain pre-programed criteria. In one research experiment, for instance, they created simulated robots to have a kind of muscle, tissue, and bone. Programmed with the rule that faster robots have more offspring, the robots then “evolved” into faster and faster beings. Boxy and simple, these “organisms” in no way resemble any kind of “natural” organism found outside of a simulation. Cheney et al. write, “These findings suggest the ability of generative soft-voxel systems to scale towards evolving a large diversity of complex, natural, multi-material creatures.”<sup>73</sup> The word “natural,” as used by Cheney et al., described what is natural for a simulation, rather than what is natural for the world outside of it. The point is that a robot, when “evolved” through simulation, looks nothing like a robot as an engineer might conceive it. The choice to make Asimo, for instance, a cute, approachable being was just that: a choice. To further make this point, it is worth noting that Masahiro Mori, famous for his theory of the “uncanny valley,” was only doing guesswork. While theorizing

---

<sup>71</sup> Cornell Creative Machines Lab, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.creativemachineslab.com/soft-robot-evolution.html>.

<sup>72</sup> “Voxel” is a portmanteau of “volume” and “pixel” (which is a portmanteau of “picture” and “element”). Basically, a voxel represents a point on a 3D grid. In the case of Cornell’s soft-robots, the voxels are essentially data-points in the computer model, with each robot made of many voxels.

<sup>73</sup> Nick Cheney et al., “Unshackling Evolution: Evolving Soft Robots with Multiple Materials and a Powerful Generative Encoding,” accessed May 28, 2014, [http://jeffclune.com/publications/2013\\_Softbots\\_GECCO.pdf](http://jeffclune.com/publications/2013_Softbots_GECCO.pdf).

about the way in which people would react to robots that resemble humans, Mori had *no* actual examples from which to work. He was simply speculating. Not that speculation is a problem. Rather, it shows that both “real” and “fictive” robots have great power over the imagination. Mori’s theory of the uncanny valley could be applied just as easily to Honda’s Asimo as it could to the fictional Robby the Robot.

Fourth, performative gestures blur the lines between the real and the fictive. For instance, at the 1939 New York World’s Fair, Westinghouse presented Elektro the Moto-Man to the public. Standing at seven feet six inches tall and weighing in at 240 pounds, this boxy, art-deco machine was a wonder to behold. When presenting Elektro, the operator would ask him questions through a telephone. Elektro would then give the pre-programmed response. This performance was designed to make it appear as if Elektro understood human speech. In actuality, Elektro’s switchboard would respond to the number of words spoken by the operator. After “counting” the words, Elektro would then give the response that was he was programmed to give. In their presentation of him, Westinghouse made it appear as if Elektro could do things that he could not. Further, Elektro became the centerpiece of a promotional film, *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair*, which was designed to show off Westinghouse’s technology and goodwill to the public. In 1960, Elektro would again find himself in the public eye. “Playing” the supporting role of Thinko in the 1960 erotic film *Sex Kittens Go to College*, Elektro once again blurred the lines between the “real” robot and the “fictive” robot. The point is that while Elektro was real, in the sense that he was a tangible, mechanical being, he was also fictive, in the sense that, through performance, a concoction of metal, wires, lights, switchboards, and photoelectric cells had a “personality” and could “act” in a film. Representations of robots,

then, whether “real” or “fictive” can be read as texts. These texts are ideological, which is to say, represent a particular world-view, whether conscious or unconscious.

### **Key Term: America**

Since this dissertation is concerned with robots and American ideology, I would like to turn my attention to one additional aspect of the dissertation: America. There has been a lot of great work by scholars in recent years that has challenged the meaning of the word “America,” asking questions such as “What is America?” and “Who is an American?” Scholars of borderlands, in particular, have shown that racial, ethnic, national, and cultural boundaries are fluid categories, without a clear reference point. Even in studies of classical history, such as Peter Heather’s *Empires and Barbarians*,<sup>74</sup> the edge of empire is seen as a contested site—a borderland—where two cultures mix until one of them “falls.” In this dissertation, I am not concerned with challenging the generally accepted, popular definition of “America”—meaning the lands and culture located within the boundaries of the United States of America and governed under its laws. This is not to be dismissive of the great and important work done to destabilize that definition. Rather, I am accepting the geographical and political border as a useful conceptual device, since the imagined hegemonic unity created by this border is the very ideological formation that I seek to unpack and understand.

Machines, from the railroad in the nineteenth century to robots in the twentieth, have served as a way to make American ideology invisible. In Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*, he argues that the pastoral ideal in American literature and culture is infused with a spirit of automation and mechanization, industry and railroads, which, ironically, is seen as the

---

<sup>74</sup> Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).



way in which the pastoral ideal is actually made. For instance, Marx quotes a Thomas Buchanan

Read poem:

Of iron men who build the golden future,  
Heroic wills, by which the hugest oak.  
Is broken like a sapling; and to which.  
The wilderness, the rank and noxious swamps,  
Inhospitable hills, renouncing all.  
The incumbrances of ages, bow and bear.  
The burthen of the harvest.<sup>75</sup>

For Marx, “Read is invoking the image of the middle landscape, a version of the pastoral ideal which continues to engage the American imagination long after the ‘take-off’ into the industrial age.”<sup>76</sup> American ideology holds the image of the pastoral landscape—untouched and unspoiled by human hands, yet ready for the taking—as the ideal to which all Americans strive. This is then contrasted with the way the English live: in cities and working in factories. What nineteenth century American writers observed, was that the English labor in factories, while Americans see themselves, not as laborers, but as individuals who are only temporarily working in a factory while in pursuit of their real dream: the American west.<sup>77</sup> For Marx, the paradox is that it is “technology,” specifically, the “railroad” that is “creating the new garden of the world” and “bringing America into its own as a pastoral utopia.” Despite the American pastoral dream, or rather, perhaps *because* this dream was only achievable through mechanization, images of technology still worked their way into American literature through stories and poems about technology or that use technological metaphors. For instance, Walt Whitman’s famous poem:

I sing the body electric,  
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,

---

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Buchanan Read, “The New Pastoral,” accessed June 30, 2017, <http://www.freebookslibrary.org/read-thomas-buchanan-1822-1872-the-new-pastoral-1855/>.

<sup>76</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 222.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,  
And discurrup them, and charge them with the charge of the soul.<sup>78</sup>

Like Garet Garrett, Leo Marx also argues that the pastoral ideal is only achievable through mechanization. There is no “pure” pastoral garden, in other words. What nineteenth-century Americans were after was a fiction—a place where they could imagine themselves as “free” from the very mechanization that allowed for this notion of “freedom.” Marx is correct to point out the railroad as the primary system through which the landscape (both physical and mental) of America became subjugated and controlled and regulated. Thomas Haskell, for instance, in his seminal book, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science*,<sup>79</sup> argues the figure of the expert emerged at the same time as the railroad. Through the railroad, individuals began to see themselves as interdependent with other individuals, but were unaware precisely how—since the systems of interconnectedness were too complex to understand. This gave rise to the professional expert who could explain and rationalize the various systems and forces at work in an individual’s life—forces that were hitherto unimaginable without the rail system. Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that the railroad allowed capitalism to show its dominance over all nature, thus creating the final shift toward seeing capitalism as a totalizing system since it appeared to have the power to bring all time and space under its control.<sup>80</sup> Much in the same way, however, that from the inside of a train, looking out the window, all you *see* is pastoral scenery, ideology is masked from *within* ideology. Similarly, the pastoral ideal is universalized as “American” while the material forces that create it are masked.

---

<sup>78</sup> Walt Whitman, “I Sing the Body Electric,” *The Leaves of Grass: The Complete 1855 and 1891-92 Editions*, ed. John Hollander (New York: Library of America Paperback Classics, 1992), 250.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

<sup>80</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1986).

It is worth pointing out that while the pastoral ideal is proffered as an “American” ideal, it is specifically gendered as masculine, which is then universalized. Nina Baym, in her essay “Melodramas of Beset Manhood,”<sup>81</sup> argues that literature considered “American” is about westward expansion and is gendered in masculine, Oedipal terms. For instance, the young male fights with his father over the land, so the young male then leaves to find his own land, which is gendered as both virgin and mother (you *plow* the land and put *seed* into her, and yet, she is also mother earth). In other words, the Oedipus complex, which is specifically masculine, is portrayed as the “universal” experience to which all “Americans” strive. This was not simply an unconscious universalizing of the male experience, however. American writers in the nineteenth century self-consciously wrote literature that was in contrast to the “melodramas of beset womanhood” that were written by popular and prolific female writers. However, literature about domestic affairs was not seen as “universal” and, therefore, not “American.”

The people in the twentieth century were the inheritors of this nineteenth-century legacy—what Christopher Beach calls “the politics of distinction.”<sup>82</sup> American ideology is the idea that America is a “special” land, a “shining city on a hill” to quote Reagan. It is a “land of opportunity” which is seen as both the site of “universal” human values *and* as the only land in the world where those values can be realized. However, power imbalances like class dynamics, and racial and gender inequality are masked through this very notion of “universal” values. To critique America is to be “anti-American” and therefore not worth listening to, since the critic does not share the “universal” values that he or she is critiquing.

---

<sup>81</sup> Nina Baym. “Melodramas of Beset Manhood,” in *The Critical Tradition*, 3rd ed., edited by David Richter (Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's), 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Christopher Beach, *The Politics of Distinction: Whitman and the Discourses of Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press), 1996.

While there is nothing inherently American about robots, there are specific American ways in which robots are used as ideological tools. By focusing on America, I seek to place robot narratives within a specific historical and cultural framework. For instance, the short Disney film “The New Spirit” serves as a good example of the ways in which robots, performance, and ideology can take on a distinctly American and distinctly twentieth-century role. A World War II propaganda film, “The New Spirit” presents an ideology of democracy by violence, and the necessity for Donald Duck, the consummate everyman, to pay his taxes. In the film, machines and objects move on their own. Donald’s income taxes are completed by his pen at the request of his radio. Finally, the machine of WWII with its guns, tanks, and ships is created without the aid of a single worker—as if there is no Base, only Superstructure. Althusser is useful in unpacking and understanding the film.

At the beginning of “The New Spirit,” Donald Duck’s radio asks, “Are you a patriotic American?” to which Donald responds (knowing that it is really he who is being addressed), “Yes, I am.” Through the ritual of the hail, Donald recognizes himself as a subject who must now give his free will to the Subject: the State. Soon, Donald’s pen and inkwell fill out the tax forms for him. The film is clear that while his tax forms are filled out as if by magic, Donald is consciously aware of his “patriotic duty” to pay taxes to support the American war machine. In a key moment of the film, Donald’s pen asks him to sign the income tax check. Up to this point, the pen, inkwell, and blotter have been able to do all of the work unassisted. However, it is necessary for Donald to sign his own name—to take ownership of the ritual of subjectivity. Through doing so, Donald is “voluntarily” giving his subjectivity to the State—thus becoming a robot, just like the implements in his home. In this dreamscape, where objects in his house move on their own and talk to him, Donald “chooses” to sign, making a conscious “sacrifice” to beat

the Axis. At an earlier point in the film, the radio tells Donald that there is “A New Spirit in America,” to which Donald responds, “That’s right.” The Radio says, “Our very shores have been attacked,” to which Donald responds, “That’s not right!” Donald “knows” what is “right” and “not right” (Althusser would say that Donald imagines that these thoughts originate from himself) and believes that paying his income tax, as a conscious “choice,” is the best way to remedy that which is “not right.”

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter 2. The Image of Man’s Thoughts. Beginning at 1920, this chapter will discuss Karel Čapek’s play *Rossum’s Universal Robots* and its popularity in America. The play not only created a new word in the English language (robot) but also changed the way we thought of machines and the relationship that we have to them. I will also discuss the various robots created by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation between 1920 and 1939. One such robot was Katrina Van Televox, a “robot servant” that would do “housework” and would be obedient. This was not Westinghouse’s only problematic gesture toward women. In this chapter, I critique the Westinghouse propaganda film *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair* and argue that the film reifies capitalism as a normative structure by selling the idea of the stable, nuclear family who has “robots” as servants. Women in the film are naturalized as domestic laborers who become “free” through the process of choosing a capitalist husband and purchasing Westinghouse products. I will also discuss Elektro, the world’s first celebrity robot, mentioned above. The performance of Elektro at the 1939 New York World’s Fair was representative of the technological superiority of Westinghouse at the Fair, and was used to show just why a housewife needed Westinghouse products. In short, everything was for sale at Westinghouse, including domestic bliss, as represented by heteronormative gender dynamics.

Chapter 3. Like Our Progeny, The Computer. In the early 1960s, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution, a group of scientists, academics, and civil rights leaders, led by J. Robert Oppenheimer, was convened to deal with what they saw as three major revolutions in the US: the Human Rights Revolution, the Weaponry Revolution, and the Cybernation Revolution. Due to the massive job loss they saw occurring because of increased mechanization, their suggestions to United States lawmakers included a law mandating a base national income. In 1963, President Kennedy called for the establishment of a National Commission on Automation.<sup>83</sup> Given this historical background, it is hardly surprising that this decade produced a wealth of classic science fiction dealing with the relationship between humans and robots. In this chapter, I attempt to answer one important question: What does it mean for a robot to “act” in a film? Meaning, if robots can do the same kind of labor that humans can do—even “special” labor like acting—then how can we distinguish ourselves from robots? In 1960, Elektro appeared in the sexploitation film *Sex Kittens Go to College* as SAM Thinko, a robot who works in a science department at a university but who breaks down when a sexy new professor, played by Mamie Van Doren, becomes the new science department head. The film exists within a backdrop of concerns about job loss due to mechanization and the role of psychoanalysis in overcoming dissent to capitalism.

Chapter 4. No Alternative. During a 1980 press conference for American journalists, Margaret Thatcher uttered the famous phrase, “there is no alternative” to liberal democracy. During this same conference, she suggested that the difference between the G7 nations and the

---

<sup>83</sup> Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 81-82. The government’s committee initially accepted and agreed with many of the suggestions and conclusions of the Committee on the Triple Revolution, but ultimately backpedaled on any real change. They argued, instead, that job displacement was merely a natural outgrowth of technological change.

Warsaw Pact is that the West remains together by “choice,” rather than by force. This contradiction—that there is no choice other than capitalism, but we “choose” capitalism because it “works”—reflects Althusser’s notion that capitalist ideology functions by creating the imaginary notion that one “chooses” capitalism as a “free” subject. In this chapter, I analyze two Hollywood blockbuster films, *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. I argue that both of these films suggest that what separates humans from robots is that humans have “choice,” but that “choice” will always be used to support liberal democratic values.

Chapter 5. The Red Pill. Perhaps no movie has created more discourse in the twenty-first century, or has been as influential as the 1999 film *The Matrix*. Academic discourse around the film tends to focus on its liberatory power in a Kantian or Marxist sense. Popular discourse, especially among far-right Men’s Rights Activist (MRA) groups, focuses on the film’s “red pill” metaphor to suggest that they (and they alone), have freed themselves from ideology. They believe everyone else around them to be like a robot—or an unwitting part of a system designed to suppress them. How is the film able, simultaneously, to sustain these contradictory readings? I argue in this chapter, following Žižek, that in the twentieth century the concept of “ideology” is simply a Rorschach test where everyone, regardless of political beliefs, is able to believe that they are “free” from ideology.

Chapter 6. Conclusion. In the previous chapter, I accused people who imagine themselves to be free from ideology as actually sustaining the discourse from which they imagine themselves to be free. Ideology’s primary mode of operation is to suggest that we are “free” subjects, which makes that operation almost invisible. Is my own thinking and writing, then, “free” from the discourse it is attempting to critique? Is resistance to ideology possible? And what future, if any, will Althusser play as we move further into the twenty-first century?

## Chapter 2

### The Image of Man's Thoughts: 1920-1939

The machine is the externalized image of man's thoughts. It is furthermore an extension of his life, for we perceive as an economic fact that human existence in its present phase, on its present scale, could not continue in its absence. And what are we ourselves, life to begin with, if not an image of thought? Perhaps it is true as a principle of creation that the image and its creator must co-exist, inseparably.

-Garet Garrett, *Ouroboros, or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind*, 1926<sup>84</sup>

There is an "inseparable" connection that Garet Garrett argues must exist between "the image and its creator"—in other words, "man" must "learn how best to live with these powerful creatures of his mind" because "he cannot live without them."<sup>85</sup> Garrett argues that this inability to live without machines began with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Since then, "one story of us is continuous," and that is "our struggle to recapture the Garden of Eden, meaning by that a state of existence free from the doom of toil."<sup>86</sup> Ostensibly, machines were supposed to (re)create this utopia where humans would be free to pursue art, music, or whatever leisure they desired. In actuality, he argues, machines have simply moved the majority of laborers from agriculture to manufacturing. And what do they manufacture? More machines, capable of making more food. In "three generations," he argues, machines have "changed the design of civilization out of recognition"<sup>87</sup> by creating a race of "mechanical drudges" who work meaningless jobs in factories. The smokestack produced by the factory is a "generative symbol"<sup>88</sup> which reveals, not just people *in* the factory, but also people who *would not exist* if it were not for the factory, since mechanization allowed for a population explosion that would not

---

<sup>84</sup> Garet Garrett, *Ouroboros, or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind*, 92.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



have been possible otherwise. Were all of these machines simply to disappear, half of human civilization would die within a week, he argues.

This life of mechanical drudgery is perpetuated by an insatiable need to consume, not just food, but also all of the goods created by the machines. He explains that at the time of writing his book, he could hear the sound of a self-playing piano through his window, coming from the neighbor's house. What could explain this? Obviously, it was because the self-playing piano salesperson recently came by, selling self-playing pianos to people, who otherwise could not afford them, on the installment plan. Without mechanization, he argues, only a certain amount of goods can be made. With mechanization, there is a surplus, which means that a company has to ignore the "normal demand" for its product and instead "force the sale of its surplus"<sup>89</sup> through salespersons, advertisers, executives, and other parts of the industrial bureaucracy. Purchasing goods on the installment plan has become almost a patriotic duty, he argues. If you only buy through thrift—purchasing what you need with money you have—then industries, which rely on the production of a surplus and forcing the sale of it, will go out of business. The collapse of industry will lead to a run on the banks that will devalue currency, which will mean that the money saved through thrift will become worthless. "Modern life," Garrett quips, "has become so involved in a mechanical spiral that we cannot say for certain whether it is that we produce for the sake of consumption or consume for the sake of production."<sup>90</sup>

The book in question, and the source of this chapter's epigraph, is Garet Garrett's *Ouroboros, or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind*—part of a much longer book series by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd. called "To-day and To-morrow." The books in this series bear titles like *Icarus, or the Future of Science*, by Bertrand Russell; *Hephaestus, the Soul*

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 22.

of the Machine, by E. E. Fournier d'Albe, D.Sc.; and *Timotheus, the Future of the Theatre*, by Bonamy Dobrée.

The index in the back of *Ouroboros*, published in 1926, contains eighty-eight titles, either “in preparation,” “ready,” “just published,” or “nearly ready.” Ten of these titles are cataloged under “Marriage and Morals,”<sup>91</sup> such as *Lysistrata, or Woman's Future and Future Woman*, by A. M. Ludovici, and *Lares et Penates, or the Home of the Future*, by H. J. Birnstingl. There is no equivalent study detailing “Future Man”—save in using the term “man” or “mankind” as a descriptive for all humanity (as in *Ouroboros, or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind*). Rather, when Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., discuss “Marriage and Morals” they are discussing women and their relation to domestic labor. While three of these volumes (*Hypatia, or Woman and Knowledge*; *Hestia, or the Future of Home Life*; and *The Future of the Sexes*) are written by women, the question posed by Virginia Woolf in 1929 still resonates: “What could be the reason, then, of this curious disparity... Why are women...so much more interesting to men than men are to women?”<sup>92</sup>

Some authors, like Gaby Wood, have found a connection between automata and the fascination that men have with the “nature” of women. In her book *Edison's Eve*, Wood argues that the impulse to create automata—the “mechanical extension of mankind,” to use Garret's phrase—is a patriarchal impulse. This, she says, is “what some psychologists have called ‘womb

---

<sup>91</sup> The full list of titles catalogued under “Marriage and Morals” are as follows: *Hypatia, or Woman and Knowledge*, by Dora Russell (the wife of Bertrand Russell, writing a pro-feminist piece meant to be a counter to Ludovici's *Lysistrata*); *Lysistrata, or Woman's Future and Future Woman*, by A. M. Ludovici (the Scotsman described *Lysistrata* as “pro-feminine but anti-feminist.” To get a picture of Ludovici's work, he also wrote a book called “A Defence [sic] of Aristocracy” (ibid., index, 7)); *Hymen, of the Future of Marriage*, by Norman Haire; *Thrasymachus or the Future of Morals*, by C. E. M. Joad; *Pandarus, or the Future of Traffic in Women*, by H. Wilson Harris; *Birth Control and the State*, by C. P. Blacker; *Romulus, or the Future of the Child*, by R. T. Lewis; *Lares et Penates, or the Home of the Future*, by H. J. Birnstingl; *Hestia, or the Future of Home Life*, by Winifred Spielman; and *The Future of the Sexes*, by Rebecca West (ibid., index, 2).

<sup>92</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc. 1989), 27-28.

envy.”<sup>93</sup> She argues that industrialization created a workforce whose jobs required repetitive, monotonous labor. This monotony made humans more-or-less like machines. It is at this moment, she says, summarizing Andreas Huyssen, “that the culture of the android moved into fiction.” She gives the examples of E. T. A. Hoffman’s “The Sandman” and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *The Eve of the Future*. In these works, a man falls in love with a woman who turns out to be a robot. “In both cases,” she argues, “their mistake is fatal.” To these two examples, we could also add the 2015 film *Ex Machina*. Wood argues that “in the shift from the real to the imaginary and from the playful to the destructive, androids ceased to be male and became, more often than not, female.”<sup>94</sup>

While Gareth Garrett does not specifically address female robots, he points to them with a curious turn-of-phrase by describing machines as “the image of man’s thoughts,” which implies by extension, if we take Wood seriously, that Woman is also the “image of man’s thoughts.” Certainly, Garrett did not mean “man” to mean men as in “males of the human species.” Rather, he means “man” as a universal for “human.” It is precisely his use of “man” (embedded in the language of Garrett’s time) that makes this comment so striking and descriptive of robots in the early twentieth century. I would like to use Garrett’s metaphor, and Wood’s keen insight, to discuss 1920-1939 as a time dominated by “the image of man’s thoughts.” In this chapter, I argue that the years 1920-1939 use both the reality and the fiction of robots as a means of creating and maintaining the domestic sphere, a gendered sphere with specific masculine and feminine roles. The broad and ongoing conversation about machines in the early twentieth century tends to focus on jobs, specifically factory jobs—a sphere dominated by men. What mechanization also did, however, was create a new kind of home life where mechanization

---

<sup>93</sup> Gaby Wood, *Edison’s Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*, xix.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

dominated the work and lives of women and children. Unlike the “mechanical drudges” described by Garrett, the early twentieth-century housewife was advertised as new kind of woman, free from the slavery of nineteenth-century drudgery. This new kind of woman, which Westinghouse will call “Mrs. Modern,” was wrapped up in a set of ideological practices that involved “traditional” gender roles, heteronormative union, industrial “progress,” and the development of consumerism. Free from being a “robot” herself, due to robots working in her home (appliances), Mrs. Modern was now “free” to choose one thing: capitalism.

I will make my argument in the following five steps: first, I will argue that the famous play *Rossum's Universal Robots*, which emerged in a context of concerns about mechanization destroying jobs, is also about “traditional” gender roles as a “naturally” occurring aspect of human “nature.” Second, much like *R.U.R.* seeks to reinforce gender roles, Westinghouse used their robots to do the same, as I will show with the example of Katrina Van Televox—a female domestic house servant who does “only what she’s told.” Rather than showing a world destroyed by robots, Westinghouse billed them as servants that we could tame, use in our homes, and that would allow a person to live their best life: the life of a middle-class, happily married suburbanite. Third, at the 1939 New York World’s Fair, Westinghouse used their robot Elektro, and the surrounding promotional material about both him and the Fair, to further reinforce these roles by showing that owning household appliances is just like owning your own robot servant. Specifically, I will critique Westinghouse’s promotional film *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair* to show the ways in which the narrative is ultimately about creating and maintaining “traditional” gender roles in the domestic sphere. Fourth, this gendered, domestic home was a product that Westinghouse was trying to package and sell with their appliances. The film and the Fair were ultimately about creating a consumer class of domestic, heteronormative

families who would need—and then buy—Westinghouse appliances. Finally, I will argue Westinghouse tried to use the Westinghouse Time Capsule—a record of “our” culture, the gendered world so crucial to Westinghouse’s marketing—to show that they were making the Fair about something other than consumption. However, the very need for the Time Capsule shows that Westinghouse was aware of the possibility of the destruction of “our” culture—a destruction brought about by mechanization.

### ***Rossum’s Universal Robots***

On Sunday, October 23, 1932, the *Ogden Standard Examiner* ran a story called “Shot by the ‘Monster’ of His Own Creation” about a “two-ton robot” that had “suddenly developed a ‘mind’ of its own and wounded the inventor who feared it would ‘get him’ some day.” In Brighton, England, an inventory named Harry May had created a robot named Alpha that responded to voice commands. Alpha could “smoke, read newspapers, walk, tell time, and even answer questions.” The audience, believing that all of this was done through “trickery,” were shown, by Mr. May, the insides of the robot and were told that “various tones of voice, carried on air waves to the monster, set the hidden machinery in operation.” For the climax of the show, Mr. May would get Alpha to “shoot a gun at a target.” Dimming the lights so that only a spotlight shone on Alpha, Mr. May reportedly told the crowd that he would now “demonstrate to you what is perhaps the most astounding accomplishment in this mechanical man’s repertoire.” At a command from Mr. May, Alpha would “pick up a revolver and fire a bullet directly at the target on the rear wall.”

According to the unnamed author of the piece, every mind in the audience immediately thought of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and the tragedy that befell a scientist who tried to control a monster of his own creation. Even though May had so far exhibited “complete mastery”

in his control of Alpha, some were reportedly worried that he was “tempting the fates, going a little too far.” A master at working the crowd, May placed the revolver in Alpha’s hand and then explained to the crowd that the gun was loaded. He also explained that they should not worry—Alpha was built with photoelectric cells for eyes, and his ears are “disguised microphones”—Alpha would not do anything unless commanded by May.

Almost immediately after this display, “without awaiting orders,” Alpha stood up and pointed the gun at May, who reportedly shouted back, “Stop, Alpha, stop! Drop that gun and sit down.” Alpha, ignoring the command, shot at May, who raised his hand at the last second, “which probably saved his life.” With a shattered hand, May told Alpha to go “back to your chair,” which he did. Within five minutes, the audience had cleared out, leaving May and Alpha alone on the stage. Later, while being attended to by a doctor, May reportedly told him, “I always had a feeling that Alpha would turn on me some day, but this is the first time he ever disobeyed my commands. I can’t understand why he fired before I gave the proper signal.”<sup>95</sup>

Whether or not this event, which strains credulity, is actually true, that did not stop it from major newspapers across the US from picking it up. Perhaps more likely to have happened is that May was loading the pistol, which Alpha was holding at the time, and the pistol accidentally discharged, injuring May.<sup>96</sup> The sensational nature of the *Ogden Standard Examiner* piece was likely fueled (besides the obvious reason that sensational stories sell papers) by a culture that was embracing narratives—both fictional and scientific—of mechanical men. The *Examiner* story includes some context, provided by the author, which describes *Frankenstein* as

---

<sup>95</sup> “Shot by the ‘Monster’ of His Own Creation,” *The Ogden Standard Examiner*, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/35924338/1932-Oct-23-Ogden-Standard-Examiner-Ogden-City-UT>.

<sup>96</sup> Matt Novak, “Alpha the Robot Shoots His Inventor (1932),” *Gizmodo*, last modified August 15, 2010, <http://paleofuture.gizmodo.com/alpha-the-robot-shoots-his-inventor-1932-512626230>.

a tale about what would happen if “one of these mechanical men got out of control.”<sup>97</sup> Dr. Frankenstein, the author argued, has given his monster everything a human needs “except the soul.” The author also described H. G. Well’s *War of the Worlds* as an example of the terror of robots, as well as Ambrose Bierce’s “Moxon’s Master,” about a chess-playing robot who kills his master for cheating. Finally, the author also notes the “sensation on the American stage,” *R.U.R.*, which is about “mechanical men” who “became strong enough to exterminate mankind.”<sup>98</sup>

It would not be wrong to perceive this widely publicized anecdote as evidence that the United States was dealing with a collective anxiety about the dangers of mechanization. In 1937, the *San Antonio Light* ran a story called “A Whole World of Metal Men” about a “German scientist’s vision of a new civilization of robots made alive by light and sound to replace humanity.” A Professor von Schmidt predicted that in the future, humanity will have created self-replicating machines that will lock humans up in “reservations and escape proof prisons until the race dies out.” The world Schmidt predicted would be a barren world, populated by “classes” of robots designed to do one particular job, and controlled via radio. The lowest tier of robot would be the “worker robot,” each designed to perform a simple, repetitive job. A group of worker robots would be controlled by a “secretary robot” all of which would be under the control of a “robot de-luxe.” A group of “master robots” would be responsible for replacing parts on all of the robots. Finally, a “dictator robot” would control all of the robot “brains” in much the same

---

<sup>97</sup> While Frankenstein’s Monster was made of flesh, not metal, the concept was important in the early twentieth century. The first Robots (in popular culture) were also beings of flesh. In *Rossum’s Universal Robots* (discussed later in this chapter), the eponymous Robots were not creatures of metal but were made of flesh—engineered for maximum productivity. Additionally, many labor activists in the early part of the twentieth century referred to metallic machines designed to reduce human labor as “Frankenstein’s Monsters” (more information later in this chapter).

<sup>98</sup> “Shot by the ‘Monster’ of His Own Creation,” *The Ogden Standard Examiner*, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/35924338/1932-Oct-23-Ogden-Standard-Examiner-Ogden-City-UT>.

way that a telephone switchboard would. It would be the “central distributing point for the nation’s orders” and would “run on the principles of the photo-electric cell and sound vibration.” Each part of this robot society would be designed for utility. Robots would not need fingers that could paint or play the piano. All they would need is the ability to perform the singular job that they were required to do by the dictator. The author of the article writes:

There would be no dissatisfaction in a world with everyone conditioned for his proper job and built physically to do it as well as it could be done. There would be no mediocre workers, no slackern [sic] or bullies, politicians would be scarce, and no would ever have any cause to complain. The profit system of capitalism would be abolished, for every robot would work for the state. There would be no taxes—but it would be an unpleasant place for human beings to live.

Humans, without “incentive for creative work,” would soon die out, after a period in which babies ceased to be born. We would be like dinosaurs to the robots. After all of the humans had died out, Schmidt predicted, eventually, nature would get its comeuppance. There are two reasons for this. First, the secret to making the robots, “a patented invention,” would have died with the last human. Secondly, rain, “humanity’s avenger,” would eventually take its toll on the metal bodies of the robots, turning them to rust. Finally, the “last rusty robot would fall amongst his rusting brothers” with this jingle being the last remnant of humankind:

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.  
It’s better to wear out, than go to rust.<sup>99</sup>

If Schmidt’s “prediction” sounds familiar, it is because it is more-or-less the plot of Karel Čapek’s *Rossum’s Universal Robots*. Schmidt even includes a bit about how “there would be French, American, German, Chinese and Russian robots, all of a different color, language, and way of doing things”—a key plot component in *R.U.R.*

---

<sup>99</sup> “A Whole World of Metal Men?” *San Antonio Light*, accessed January 29, 2016.  
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/23720709/1937-Oct-17-San-Antonio-Light-San-Antonio-TX>.



The word “robot” came into English from Karel Čapek’s 1921<sup>100</sup> play *Rossum’s Universal Robots (R.U.R.)*. It comes from the Czech word *robota*, meaning “drudgery,” and it is “derived from its medieval sense of the unpaid labor a vassal was obliged to perform for his feudal lord.”<sup>101</sup> The popularity of the play quickly made the word “robot” part of the English language.<sup>102</sup> In this play, a company develops a group of workers that they call robots. These workers are not mechanical beings, however. Rather, they are mechanisms of flesh and blood, stripped of any unnecessary organs or emotion, designed to serve humanity as slaves.<sup>103</sup> Eventually, the robots rebel and in so doing, overthrow humanity. The play’s major narrative idea of robot slaves taking over the work/lives/jobs of humans has also become popular through films such as *The Matrix*, *The Terminator*, and *Blade Runner*. Audiences throughout the twentieth century, however, did not see these science fiction narratives as relegated solely to fictional narratives. Roger Luckhurst argues that science fiction has “diffused into a cultural penumbra with fuzzy edges” that can no longer be contained in narrative. “Science-fictionality,” he continues, “is a form of future-oriented speculation”<sup>104</sup> Luckhurst argues that certain performative practices—like the 1939 New York World’s Fair, discussed later in this chapter—represent a sort of “science-fictionality.” It is a site where the “fictive” and the “real” are blended together in such a way that it is difficult to tell them apart. So, what kind of “future-oriented speculation” did *R.U.R.* present?

---

<sup>100</sup> The play premiered in Bohemia on January 3, 1921. Crowds were so large that there was a two-month waiting list for tickets. The play’s American premier was on October 9, 1922 at the Garrick Theatre in New York City. It ran for 184 performances. Kara Reilly, *Automata and Mimesis on the State of Theatre History*, 150-151.

<sup>101</sup> Josef Čapek actually coined the term, but it was his brother Karel who adopted it and made it famous. Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*, 279.

<sup>102</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “robot.”

<sup>103</sup> Karel Čapek, *Rossum’s Universal Robots (R.U.R.)*, trans. Paul Selver and Nigel Playfair (New York: Samuel French, 1923), 13-16.

<sup>104</sup> Roger Luckhurst, “Laboratories for Global Space-Time: Science-Fictionality and the World’s Fairs, 1851-1939,” *Science Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3 (2012): 385.

The play is about a company created by a scientist named Rossum—Rossum’s Universal Robots. In the fictional timeline of the play, Rossum, in 1932, discovered a “substance which behaved exactly like living matter although its chemical composition was different.”<sup>105</sup> Domin, the CEO of the company, tells Helena, a young woman who is visiting the island where the factory is located, that Rossum was insane—he wanted to make *people*. The Robots produced by the factory, Domin reminds her, are not people. They are “approximately” people, but “Rossum meant it literally. He wanted to become a sort of scientific substitute for *God*.” Rossum’s son, referred to as “Young Rossum,” disagreed with his father, Old Rossum, that the Robots should be people. Young Rossum, an engineer, believed that robots could be made more efficiently. Humans, Young Rossum said, are “too complicated.” As Domin explains it, “A man is something that feels happy, plays the piano, likes going for a walk, and, in fact, wants to do a whole lot of things that are really unnecessary.” In other words, “a working machine must *not* play the piano, must not feel happy, must not do a whole lot of other things.”<sup>106</sup> Young Rossum eventually perfected the formula to make Robots, which caused his company, Rossum’s Universal Robots, to become phenomenally wealthy by selling the Robots—people designed for one thing only: work.

All of this expository information about Rossum and the formula for Robots is related by Domin to Helena. The action of the play actually begins with Helena, a representative of the Humanity League, arriving at Rossum’s factory to fight for the rights of Robots. Domin and his fellow managers are amused and unimpressed. Many people had come before Helena to try to liberate the Robots, but it has done nothing, since the Robots have no interest in such things. At the end of the act, Domin asks Helena—whom he had never spoken to before this meeting—to

---

<sup>105</sup> Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

marry him. She is initially taken aback, and Domin explains that if she says no to him, then all of the other managers will ask her as well. Eventually, she caves in and agrees.

The last two acts take place ten years after the first. The Robots have begun acting strangely. There have been rumors of rebellion throughout the world. Domin has a plan, however. So far, all of the Robots that R.U.R. has made have been “universal” Robots—they all speak and understand the same language. What Domin plans to do, like God at the Tower of Babel, is to begin selling “national” Robots—German, French, English Robots. These Robots would speak different languages, be of different colors, and would hate one another for it. This, Domin believes, would ensure that the Robots never unite. Before he is able to put this plan into practice, however, the Robot rebellion reaches the island home of Rossum’s Universal Robots. The humans plan to bargain with the Robots by selling to them the plans to make more Robots in exchange for their lives. Unfortunately, Helena, unaware of the rebellion, burnt the formula because human babies were no longer being born, and she believed that Robots were the cause. Without the formula as a bargaining chip, the humans have nothing to do but wait for their doom.

Kara Reilly argues that one of the major themes of this play is “the response to the tremendous loss of life during the First World War as a result of technology.”<sup>107</sup> The destruction of World War I had been absolute. Humanity had seen for the first time—not just from newspapers and survivor’s stories, but through pictures—the horrific cost of mechanization. The war showed the destructive capability of machinery on a scale that was impossible to fathom before the war. This play, then, represents the transition from the automaton to the Robot.

---

<sup>107</sup> Kara Reilly, *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History*, 149.

Automata, Reilly argues, were individually crafted objects. Robots, on the other hand, were mass-produced.

Minsoo Kang mostly agrees with Kara Reilly that the play represents a way to deal with the destruction of World War I. Throughout the play, Kang notes, the Robots slowly become more and more human. At the beginning of the play, it is clear that the Robots have no interests or desires. They do not fear death, and they cannot love. By the end of the play, they have developed a fear of death and the ability to love—to propagate the species. For Kang, this suggests that even though the destruction of World War I was almost total, Čapek was an optimist who believed that the best parts of humanity would survive, and a new generation would be created, free from the destruction caused by their ancestors.

The issues of class at work in the play are paramount to understanding it. Domin's vision for the future is a strange sort of communism. In the future, Domin says, "Man shall be *free* and supreme; he shall have no other aim, no other labor, no other care than to perfect himself. He shall serve neither matter nor man. He will not be a machine and a device for production. He will be *Lord* of creation."<sup>108</sup> In his imagined future, Robots will do all of the labor while humans will have nothing but an excess of leisure time. However, *R.U.R.*'s machines are not metal—they are living beings. Domin and his managerial friends, in order to make the argument that their Robots will lead to a utopia, have to dehumanize them. According to the play, they are not human because they do not do the things that humans are supposed to do—make love, go on walks, play the piano, etc.

In the first act, Helena meets Domin's fellow managers: Gall, Fabry, Hallemeier, Busman and Alquist. When these characters are introduced, the stage directions say that they "act formal"

---

<sup>108</sup> Čapek, 32.

and “click heels as introduced.”<sup>109</sup> In a comic scene, Helena clears her throat and begins her speech to the men, telling them that they are human and have rights and should be free. The group shares a laugh when they realize that Helena thinks they are Robots. This is a key moment. Earlier in the play, Helena meets Sulla, the “best grade”<sup>110</sup> robot that R.U.R. makes. Sulla is a secretary robot designed to look as much like a human as possible. Helena initially believes that Domin is joking but finally realizes that Sulla is, in fact, a Robot. The play tries to make Gall, Fabry, Hallemeier, and Busman as interchangeable as possible. This is important for the play: Helena cannot tell the difference between the managers and the Robots. The managerial class makes a big deal about being set apart from the workers, but to Helena, they all appear the same.

The lone exception is Alquist, who is “just a builder”<sup>111</sup> and is treated with disdain by the other managers. At the end of the play, Alquist is spared by Radius, one of the Robots, because, he says, “he works with his hands like the Robots.”<sup>112</sup> The managerial characters in the play try to make the argument that the difference between the humans and the Robots is vast—it is a difference rooted directly in biology, rather than in just the work that a person does. The play seems to make the argument, however, that the only difference is one of class. The Robots feel a solidarity towards Alquist because of the type of labor he performs, not because he is human. In the play’s epilogue, Alquist, the last human, is forced by the Robots to replicate Rossum’s formula. Since he is not a scientist, he is unable to do it. Two robots, Primus and Helena (named after the human Helena), have a sexual awakening of sorts—realizing that they are attracted to one another. Alquist tells them, “Go, Adam, Eve.”<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 87.

As Minsoo Kang says, Čapek is optimistic about humanity being able to rebuild after the destruction of World War I. Despite humans being all-but wiped out by the Robots, “humanity”—what it means to be human—survives. The only difference between humans and Robots, the play suggests, are artificial boundaries—class boundaries. The play’s final statement on class is to break down those artificial boundaries and suggest that humans and Robots are the same—feeling, thinking, and loving. While this is a touching message, both for its dramaturgical and political power, it is also an ideological message. Čapek is staking out a position on “humanity.” Something “human” will survive even the most horrific attempts to wipe out the species.

This is exactly how ideology works, according to Althusser. For him, capitalism reifies itself through creating subjects who believe that the pursuit of their “own” ideas is paramount to all else. He says that “every ‘subject’ endowed with a ‘consciousness’ and believing in the ‘ideas’ that his ‘consciousness’ inspires in him and freely accepts, must ‘act according to his ideas’, must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. If he does not do so, ‘that is wicked.’”<sup>114</sup> Ideological subjectivity occurs by masking the external forces that create “your own” ideas. You are *always already* a subject. In *R.U.R.*, the Robots Primus and Helena become a new Adam and Eve, despite the fact that Robots were specifically programmed not to feel love and not to be able to reproduce. Any kind of external force that seeks to annihilate their *essential humanity* turns out to be worthless, because there is, according to the play, an essential humanity that is so irrepressible it will rise even among the Robots. Like many other expressionist plays, *R.U.R.* deals with fear of mechanization and the loss of humanity in the face of increased industrial and mechanical labor. What seems to be a

---

<sup>114</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 113.

revolutionary energy of the genre—fight the encroaching force of mechanical capitalism—turns out to re-inscribe the very kinds of ideologies that undergird capitalism in the first place, i.e. there is an essential humanity, we must make choices, we must marry and have children. Primus and Robot Helena, who pursue love that is “natural” to them, are similar to Helena and Domin who marry at the beginning of the play simply because it “must” happen. The “human nature” that *R.U.R.* celebrates is always already a gendered human nature.

### **Katrina Van Televox**

Westinghouse’s first robot was Herbert Televox, a simple robot built in 1927 by Roy J. Wensley. The Televox could perform a few simple commands such as waving his arms and making a few whirring and buzzing noises. Later, the Televox was able to utter two simple sentences. The Televox was operated by speaking to it through a telephone. The machine recognized the pitch of the speech and activated commands accordingly. The January 1928 issue of *Popular Science Monthly* wrote about the Televox’s abilities and potential for home use. Similar to the way that a “radio can be tuned to a broadcasting station of a given wave length,” the Televox “consists primarily of a series of electrical relays, each sensitive to a sound of a certain pitch, and capable of translating that sound into specified mechanical action.”<sup>115</sup> The magazine then presents a long, complex, and technical scenario where you are to imagine that you are at the house of a friend. You call your home, which is equipped with a Televox, and you then utter a series of commands by altering the pitch of your voice. The whirring and buzzing of the Televox indicate that your commands have been successful. From a friend’s telephone, you have managed to turn on your oven using the Televox.

---

<sup>115</sup> Cybernetic Zoo, “1927 – Televox – Roy J. Wensley (American),” accessed June 24, 2017, <http://cyberneticzoo.com/?p=656>.

In 1931, Westinghouse introduced Mr. Telux. Unlike the Televox, Mr. Telux worked by light instead of sound. It was equipped with photoelectric cells that could respond to various electric impulses and translate them into a command. Like the Televox, Mr. Telux was advertised in popular magazines as a home or even a corporate laborsaving device. An article in *The San Antonio Light* magazine from September 1931 wrote that Mr. Telux can “turn on and off a Vacuum cleaner” and “perform other tasks...but he cannot be trusted to take over the housewife's job of sweeping and dusting—not yet. However, he can stand at a turnstile and count-passengers or customers with 100 per cent accuracy and honesty.”<sup>116</sup> Despite the fact that Mr. Telux cannot replace a housewife—yet!—he was presented as more effective at jobs requiring accuracy (such as counting) than a human worker.

That language of the “housewife’s job” is no accident. Westinghouse had a history of promoting heteronormative gender roles with their robots. In addition to Herbert Televox, Mr. Telux, and Elektro—all “male” robots—Westinghouse also introduced in 1930, a “female” robot: the sister of Herbert Televox, known as Katrina Van Televox. Priced at a sizeable \$22,000 (approximately \$315,000 in 2017), this “Mechanical Wonder Maiden” personified the “future possibilities for automatic operation of various machines.” Westinghouse toured Katrina across the country as a showpiece, giving free performances of her abilities to the public in the hopes of building the Westinghouse name and showcasing technology that Westinghouse hoped to implement in the future. The hope was that Katrina would make the home a more efficient place. Like her “brother” Herbert, one of the conveniences that Katrina would supposedly add to the home was the ability to control your appliances from a telephone, even while away from home. “It would be nice to be down town and want to start your dinner cooking, and be able to call

---

<sup>116</sup> Cybernetic Zoo, “1929 – Telux Robot – (American),” accessed June 24, 2017, <http://cyberneticzoo.com/robots/1929-telux-american/>.



Katrina on the telephone and tell her to start it for you . . . and actually have her do it,” one advertisement said.

In these performances, audiences were promised, they would “see her blow an automobile horn, turn on electric lights, fans and sweepers . . . and then turn them off again . . . just as she is told by her traveling companion, a Westinghouse engineer. He tells her to do these things by whistling to her thru a telephone.” It is no accident that “*he* tells *her* to do these things.”<sup>117</sup> The language used to advertise the performance of Katrina was infused with this kind of heteronormative domesticity. In an October 3, 1930 advertisement in the *Altoona Mirror* for a performance at the Altoona American Legion Home, viewers were invited to the “housework demonstration” of the “Westinghouse robot servant.” The ad continued, “Katrina talks... answers the phone... runs a vacuum cleaner... makes coffee and toast... turns the lights on and off and does it all willingly at command from Mr. T. Barnard the Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Expert who is accompanying her on her tour.” The ad also noted that “women of this city are cordially invited.” Katrina, the Mechanical Wonder Maiden, sister to the “famous metal man” Herbert Televox, “who has shown before many scientific gatherings” does her work “willingly” at the “command” of a man. Herbert is noted for his achievements and fame. Katrina is noted for her obedience.<sup>118</sup> Westinghouse also advertised that she “does only what she’s told.” In addition, that, “To really impersonate a woman Katrina should talk . . . and she does.”<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> In the case of Elektro and Herbert Televox, a *he* tells a *him* to do things as well, but it is always a man giving commands. There is also a difference in the kinds of work they do. “Male” robots usually worked in factories while “female” robots worked at home. The *he* talking to Elektro is a boss. The *he* talking to Katrina is the Head of the Household.

<sup>118</sup> When Elektro moves after a command from his operator, it was noted that he was doing all of this “by his own power.” As a “he,” Elektro was noted for his autonomy and “power,” while Katrina was noted for her ability to do “what she’s told.” Elektro’s ability to speak is part of what made him “human,” while Katrina’s ability to speak made her a “woman.”

<sup>119</sup> Cybernetic Zoo, “1930 – Katrina Van Televox – Westinghouse (American),” accessed June 24, 2017, <http://cyberneticzoo.com/robots/1930-katrina-van-televox-westinghouse-american/>.

Certainly, Hebert and Katrina, a male and female, were both designed for household tasks. How then can I argue that Katrina represents patriarchal gender dynamics? There are two responses to this. First, Katrina was an upgrade—a newer model that represented an ideological improvement over her “brother.” A “woman” was simply a better fit for a domestic servant than a “man.” Secondly (and this gets to the heart of the matter), why must a robot have gender at all? At one point in *R.U.R.*, Helena asks Domin, “Perhaps it’s silly of me, but why do you manufacture female robots when—when—” to which Domin responds, “When sex means nothing to them?” His answer is that “there’s a certain demand for them, you see. Servants, saleswomen, stenographers. People are *used* to it.”<sup>120</sup> Similarly, in the 2015 film *Ex Machina*, a reclusive and wealthy tech mogul by the name of Nathan—who runs a company called Bluebook, the world’s most popular search engine—invites an employee, Caleb, to stay with him for a week. Caleb has been selected—perhaps randomly, perhaps not—to be the human component of a Turing test. Nathan has invented an AI named Ava, and he wants Caleb to interact with her, and to give feedback. Ava, who has been given the form of an attractive woman, appears to have developed romantic feelings for Caleb, the first man she has seen besides Nathan. Caleb, confused by Ava’s sexual advances, asks Nathan, “Why did you give her sexuality? An AI doesn’t need a gender. She could’ve been a grey box.” Nathan responds, “Actually, I don’t think that’s true. Can you give an example of consciousness on any level, human or animal, that exists without a sexual dimension? ... What imperative does a grey box have to interact with another grey box?”<sup>121</sup> It is important that Katrina is a “she” because it gives an imperative to interact with a gendered being. While *Ex Machina*’s final act does interesting

---

<sup>120</sup> Čapek, 33.

<sup>121</sup> *Ex Machina*, directed by Alex Garland, 2015, Universal Pictures International.

work to undermine the heteronormativity that the film carefully constructs in its first half, Westinghouse is rather committed to it, as we shall see with their work at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

### ***The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair***

At the 1939 New York World's Fair, Westinghouse introduced the world to their walking, talking, smoking, balloon-blowing creation: Elektro. Westinghouse's promotional film for the 1939 New York World's Fair, *The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair* tells the story of the Middleton family: Grandmother, Father, Mother, their college-aged, love-struck daughter Babs, and their high-school-aged, worried-about-his-future son Bud. At the Fair, they marvel at the innovations of Westinghouse, including dishwashers, mechanical looms, electric steel mills, the Time Capsule of Cupaloy,<sup>122</sup> and, of course, Elektro the Westinghouse Moto-Man.

In a full-page advertisement<sup>123</sup> for both the film and the Westinghouse exhibit, the Middleton family is seen gazing at Elektro. Mother comments, "Isn't Elektro wonderful? He walks, talks, counts on his fingers, and even distinguishes colors." Jim Treadway, one of Babs' suitors and an employee at Westinghouse, replies, "Yes, he's very fascinating, but he's not nearly as wonderful as a modern, electrified home!" Later, in the advertisement, Babs comments to Grandmother, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could hire a mechanical man like Elektro to do all the household chores?" Grandma retorts, "After all, my dear, isn't that what all our Westinghouse appliances do?" The message is clear: Westinghouse's fascinating Moto-Man, Elektro, is a representative for the *real* kinds of innovation taking place: the modernization of the

---

<sup>122</sup> Cupaloy was a non-ferrous alloy created specifically for the Time Capsule.

<sup>123</sup> Kate Anderson, "Chapter 14: 'Money Talks: The Publicity of Private Enterprise' Part 1 & 2," Accessed June 7, 2017, <https://socialhistoryofspin.wordpress.com/chapter-14-money-talks-the-publicity-of-private-enterprise-part-1/>.

home. Gaby Wood argues that twentieth-century robots were increasingly feminized. Elektro, a male robot, existed to convince women that they are “free.” Women are not allowed to be their own liberators. They require an external approval, which makes their “freedom” a freedom in appearance only. This is exactly what *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair* is about.

The film tells of the story of the Middleton family, an upper-middle class family from Riverdale, Indiana. The family is on vacation in New York to see the World’s Fair. The beginning of the film establishes a few important concerns for the two Middleton children: Bud is worried about future job prospects, while Babs is worried about love. At the beginning of the film, Father is listening to a radio program, which declares that “600,000 young Americans” are looking for “their first jobs.” Last year, the program continues, an equal number of people faced this problem, and next year an equal number will yet again face it. “What hope is there for youth in the world of tomorrow,” the program asks, and continues by asserting, “The quality of citizenship is at stake.” Bud takes this message seriously and is concerned—we already have all the hardware stores we need, he says! Father tells him that he is tired of “talkers” and wants to take him to the Fair to show him the “doers.”

Babs, their college-aged daughter, meanwhile, is worried about her prospects in the world of romance. She used to date a young man from home, Jim Treadway, but she lost interest in him in college. She is now dating her college art teacher, Nick Makaroff—a lover of avant-garde art—and she is enamored with his sophistication. “He knows the world like we know Main Street,” she says. It just so happens, however, that Jim is employed by Westinghouse and works at the Fair. The ensuing conflict between Jim and Nick for the love of Babs becomes one of the primary narrative threads of the film. Jim, like the Middletons, is from “back home” and

represents a middle-class work ethic, innovation, and capitalism. Nick, with his Russian name, dandy dress style, academic education, and Marxist sympathies, is represented as the polar opposite of Jim. In the words of Father, Nick is a “talker,” while Jim is a “doer.”

Later, at the Fair, Nick is unimpressed by the “temple of capitalism” that is the Fair. He hates seeing the attendees at the Fair “drooling over the very things that are taking away their jobs.” During a tour of some of the Westinghouse innovations, Nick calls the operating loom, which makes ribbons, “a Frankenstein’s Monster” because “machines like this destroy jobs. Think of the number of people who would be working if we didn’t have these power looms.” Jim responds, “Every home in America would be a sweatshop producing clothes for the family.” He continues, “There were four textile mills in America in 1800. They employed a few hundred workers and used waterpower. Today, with electric and other power, around a million persons are employed in the textile industry. Clothes are so cheap; no one has to make his own.” The difference between the attitudes of these two men is clear. The Middleton family prefer Jim and want Babs to be with him, but it takes one particular event for Babs to see that she actually is in love with him, rather than Nick.

This event begins when Nick gives Babs a ring. She initially refuses the gift, but he pressures her into accepting the three hundred-year old “barbaric” ring that represents the “official seal of betrothal in [his] family.” The next day, Grandma and Bud are shopping in downtown New York City. Stopping in a jewelry store, Grandma coincidentally notices that a ring for sale in the store looks exactly like the ring that Nick gave to Babs. The jeweler tells them that it is costume jewelry, modeled after a ring in Moscow. Grandma buys six of them. That evening, at dinner, Babs discovers these rings hidden throughout the house. When Nick arrives,

Babs angrily confronts him. Nick is upset that the “crook” who sold him the ring told him it was authentic. He flees the home in a panic.

What are we to make of this Marxist art professor? It is not just that he is European in thought, manner, and dress. It is that his way of life is a sham. There are three reasons for this. The first is that he loves avant-garde art. As Bert Cardullo points out, “avant-garde artistic practice can flourish only under liberal political regimes, which are willing to tolerate vigorous expressions of dissent against the state and society” thus “it pays ‘involuntary homage’ to the bourgeois liberal democracies it attacks.”<sup>124</sup> This means that Nick’s commitment to both Marxism and avant-garde art is a sham, since, for all of his bluster, he is *really* a liberal at heart. The second reason is that Nick’s Marxism, according to the film, will not lead to the kind of utopian enterprise that he is after. While he gives lip service to the worker, Westinghouse are the ones that are *really* creating jobs. His negative attitude—about capitalism, other fairgoers, the Westinghouse innovations—will never lead to a better life for him, Babs, or the United States. In an important thematic lesson for both Bud and Babs, Jim remarks at one point, “Prosperity and pessimism don’t travel together.”

The third reason Nick’s life is a sham is that, not only did he lie to Babs about the ring being in his family—more or less manipulating her into a betrothal with him—he was too incompetent in his chosen field even to recognize that the ring sold to him by a con artist was actually fake. Had he been a capable, bootstraps-puller like Jim, he would have noticed the fraud. However, within the world of film, his pretension to “abstract form” turns out to be nothing but smoke and mirrors. The film wants us to see art, not as theory or as abstraction, but as

---

<sup>124</sup> Bert Cardullo and Robert Knopf, eds., *Theatre of the Avant-Garde: 1890-1950, A Critical Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 30.

utilitarian.<sup>125</sup> During breakfast, at the beginning of the film, Grandma tells the family that she has stopped listening to anything that Babs has to say about art, ever since she said, “pictures on calendars are not art.” When Babs first tells her family that she is dating her art professor, Bud gets excited. “Now maybe we can get the house painted,” he quips. For the world created by Westinghouse, art serves a purely utilitarian function: creating and maintaining the domestic sphere. Any pretensions to a world outside of practical utilitarianism are suspect at best and fraudulent at worst. We can see this in *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair* as domestic appliances are sold, not for their aesthetic value, but as a practical machine designed to save labor.

Earlier in the film, Grandmother and Mother split off from the group to look at the home innovations that Westinghouse has brought to the Fair. They watch a stage presentation, narrated like a sports contest, and called “The Battle of the Centuries” where the curious onlooker will find “the solution to one of women’s problems.” On the stage is a contest where two women are

---

<sup>125</sup> After their first day at the Fair, the Middleton family returns to Grandmother’s Long Island home for dinner with both Nick and Jim as guests. Nick and Babs are enjoying some alone time on the porch, looking at Nick’s art. Babs asks him to explain “abstract form” to her. He spouts what amounts to so much nonsense, much to her confusion: “Abstract form is the essential substructure. In short, the fundamental rhythm underlying our conceptions of spatial limitations.” When Father looks at Nick’s abstract work, he is unsure what to make of it. “What does it represent,” he asks. “Represent? Why, it doesn’t represent anything,” responds Nick. “It’s a picture. An independent entity. There’s no reason to imitate something else.” Nick goes on to explain his position, “If you want a house or a flower, you can go and look at them. Or, if you want them represented, you can have them photographed. So, why allow them to intrude into pictures.” Father good-naturedly accepts this explanation, but is obviously baffled. This is not just an odd aside for the film. Art is an important ideological battleground. In the film, abstract art is seen as “useless” because it does not do any representational “work.” You cannot paint a house with it. While it is true that some avant-garde movements like Bauhaus were using abstract forms for utilitarian purposes, the film does not care. The kind of art that Makaroff is interested in is simply considered useless. By not “getting” abstract art, Father is staking out an ideological position that suggests that the ideas encapsulated by abstract art have no value. What matters is practicality. After Father leaves, Nick tells Babs that Father “ought to keep up with the times.” Keeping up with the times is a significant thematic element for this film. Throughout the tour of the Fair, Nick was resisting the kinds of progress represented by Jim and Westinghouse. It would be unfair, however, to call Nick a total Luddite. He is cultured, sophisticated, uses foreign words in regular speech, knows art—he even accuses Babs at one point in the film as being “provincial.” It is not that he is small-minded—Nick is a progressive—but he is the *wrong kind* of progressive. For Nick, progress is best represented by keeping up with various European ideals such as abstract art and Marxism. For Jim, progress is best represented by factories, innovation, science, and capitalism. For *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair*, it is not just that Jim’s worldview is the correct one—although the film makes that point as well—it is that Nick’s worldview is objectively wrong. Nick is a fraud.

competing to see who can wash the dishes most quickly. Mrs. Drudge is working furiously, washing the dishes by hand. Mrs. Modern, on the other hand, is calmly waiting by the dishwasher, not a care in the world. The contest is judged on three points: the time it takes the women to clean the dishes; the cleanliness of the dishes; and finally, the condition of the contestants. Mrs. Modern wins on every account: her dishes are spotless, and her person has remained similarly spotless while taking less time than Mrs. Drudge to finish the same amount of work. “In fifteen years,” the announcer tells his enraptured audience, “a woman washes, dries, and stacks a pile of dishes nine times higher than the Empire State Building.” Grandmother is impressed by the fact that Mrs. Modern was reading a paper while her dishes were being washed. “She’ll look young when she’s a hundred,” she quips.

The characters in the film note this focus on efficiency and the value of an individual’s time. Later, Grandmother, Mother, and Babs find themselves in front of a giant pendulum that reads, “Electricity saves time.” Grandmother comments, “That’s what I call smart. Making time the theme of the home exhibit.” When asked why that was so smart, she responds that she is “against slavery, domestic or otherwise. That’s why I like electrical engineers;” they wrote “our emancipation proclamation.” Grandmother calls a Westinghouse kitchen display “a paradise,” remarking that “no one who hasn’t cooked over a wood stove by the light of a kerosene lamp can really appreciate what it all means.” Grandmother refuses to be nostalgic about the so-called “good old days.” As she says, “Anyone who wants them can have my share.”

In the world created by *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair*, it is inconceivable that anyone could be opposed to “progress”—defined as the development of scientific innovation as driven by consumer capitalism. Nick does not represent an alternative economic or social model. The film shows that communism is a doomed project, held together



by liars and European-style faux-intellectuals. Capitalism, on the other hand, is held together by men like Jim—hard working, bootstraps-pulling innovators—and women like Babs—domestic, smart housewives. Their final union at the end of the film—watching the fireworks at the Fair, arm-in-arm—represents the thematic and dramaturgical climax of the film, which argues that proper domestic union is essential for capitalism to function. Additionally, to have a productive and happy life, a couple needs the kinds of innovations that Westinghouse is manufacturing, as represented by their robot Elektro.

After the men and women separately visit exhibits at the Fair, the family meets back up to watch the demonstration of Elektro. In the film, an announcer with a microphone stands on a raised podium with Elektro. After thanking the crowds for coming to see Elektro, the Westinghouse Moto-Man, the announcer speaks into the microphone saying, “Elektro, come here.” Elektro then walks over to the announcer, standing close to the podium’s guardrail. “Here he is, walking up to greet you, under his own power,” notes the announcer. After explaining to the crowd that all he needs to do is speak into the microphone in order to tell Elektro what to do, he says, “I don’t see why I’m telling Elektro’s story, when he’s perfectly able to tell his own. So, let’s listen and see what Elektro has to say to us today. Alright Elektro, will you tell your story, please?” Elektro’s “story” is that he works like a telephone switchboard. If there is an error, he quips, “I can always blame the operator.” Elektro has two more talents to the share with the audience. First, the operator asks him if he remembers how many children were born to a certain family recently in Canada. Elektro counts to five on his fingers. Finally, the operator places a cigarette in Elektro’s mouth, saying that Elektro can get a “nice pleasure” out of these. After lighting the cigarette, Elektro “smokes” it, puffing cigarette smoke out of his nostrils. The Middleton family is impressed. Bud remarks, “Boy what a guard that guy’d make on my football

team.” Grandma says, “Why, he’s almost human.” Babs adds, “If he wasn’t so big, I’d take him for an engineer” before declaring, after some discussion with her family, “All [Elektro] lacks is a heart.” Jim, whose love for Babs has not yet been reciprocated, passive-aggressively responds, “He’s not the only one.”

The operator is engaging in a performance that might be akin to a slight-of-hand. He speaks commands into the microphone and Elektro “obeys” them. This miraculous technology was purely smoke-and-mirrors, however. Elektro’s “brain” was a series of forty-eight electrical relays that worked, as stated earlier, “just like a telephone switchboard.” To voice-activate Elektro, the operator would speak commands into a telephone. A series of vibrations from the words were interpreted by a switchboard as commands. The presentation of Elektro made it seem like the operator would speak specific words and that Elektro could understand what was being said. In actuality, the specific content of the words was irrelevant. The switchboard simply worked by interpreting the number of words. Each vibration would flip a switch. The number of flipped switches told Elektro which command to execute. Elektro also had “eyes”: a pair of photoelectric cells that were sensitive to certain wavelengths of light. One cell could recognize red while another could recognize green. By flashing a certain color of light into Elektro’s eyes, the Moto-Man’s cells could recognize the wavelength and then say aloud whether the color was “red” or “green.”<sup>126</sup> He had the ability to “smoke” a cigarette; he could also inflate a balloon and burst it on command. So, while the operator made it seem like Elektro could understand, interpret, and respond to what was being said, it was all a performance—and a gendered one. Note that Babs likens Elektro to an “engineer,” the same profession that Grandmother hailed as writing the “emancipation proclamation” for women. This is the key difference between Elektro,

---

<sup>126</sup> “The Robots of Westinghouse,” accessed February 12, 2013, <http://history-computer.com/Dreamers/Elektro.html>.

a “man,” and Katrina, a “woman.” While Elektro is likened to the kinds of appliances that Westinghouse manufactures, Elektro is also the “electrical engineer” that “liberates” women from hand-washing dishes. Katrina, a female household servant, gets no such honors.

### **The Domestic Consumer**

In celebrating the role of the housewife, Westinghouse also sought to mask the potential job loss that their technology could create. “With every captivating performance,” Amy Sue Bix writes, “with every publicity photograph, Elektro deflated the issue of technological unemployment and supplied seeming evidence that modern science and engineering could work wonders.”<sup>127</sup> Bix points out the many ways that the various exhibits at the New York World’s Fair revealed technology’s ability to function without a person. Without the ability to create a counter-display, workers had no way to challenge this narrative. AT&T, for instance, had a display called “What Happens When You Dial” that showed how much more efficient the system of placing a call could be if it were free from human interference. An automatic switchboard could be more effective than a human operator could. Bix argues that the display helped reinforce “the message that technology contributed to customer satisfaction.” At the same time, “switchboard operators, who suspected that management really had introduced mechanization to break their union, had no such prominent venue to dispute the notion that machines inherently provided superior service.”<sup>128</sup> Elektro, then, gives a friendly face to the very machines that will actively be displacing human labor. Nick Makaroff’s incessant refrain that these machines will take away jobs may have a great deal of truth to it—especially considering the fact that Westinghouse billed robots like Herbert Televox, Mr. Telelux, and Katrina Van

---

<sup>127</sup> Amy Sue Bix, *Inventing Ourselves Out of Jobs?: America's Debate Over Technological Unemployment 1929-1981* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 225.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

Televox as machines capable of replacing human labor. Even if the technology was only a concept at this point, Westinghouse, and other companies, were very clear that the eventual goal was to replace humans with robots.

Nick Makaroff, a straw man in the film, represents the viewpoints of actual people in the early twentieth century who were concerned about mechanization and its impact on jobs and human dignity. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, Nick calls one of the machines that Jim shows them “a real Frankenstein’s Monster.” Audiences watching the film would recognize the term—not just because they were familiar with Shelley’s work, but because “Frankenstein’s Monster” was a common refrain used by labor activists in the early twentieth century to describe machines that were destroying jobs.<sup>129</sup> The 1939 New York World’s Fair absolutely was about obfuscating the kind of job loss that would occur due to technological innovations. However, the replacement to this job loss (or at least, what was being sold as the replacement) was a new kind of consumer class: happy, married couples, free from the drudgery of manual labor, would have the free time simply to consume.

In the 1938 Max Fleischer cartoon “All’s Fair at the Fair,”<sup>130</sup> a pair of country bumpkins, Elmer and his wife Brenda, arrive at the Fair via horse and buggy. Their arrival is contrasted with the hustle and bustle of cars zooming past them and high-speed rail bringing thousands of passengers to the Fair, all crammed into tiny sardine can-looking train cars. Elmer and Brenda

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 70, 77, 95, 126. The term “Frankenstein’s Monster” was not just used by anti-mechanization advocates. Capitalists, invested in developing and marketing new technologies to the public, used it and other Frankenstein metaphors. Whether a laborer or a capitalist, Frankenstein was invoked to represent a fear of the machine (Frankenstein’s Monster) turning on its creator. For example, in 1937, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), under Roosevelt’s presidency, commissioned a report from the National Resources Committee (NRC) on the effects of mechanization on unemployment. One of the NRC’s findings is that it takes about thirty years for a technology to go from concept to being marketable, which would provide enough opportunity to study its impact. Otherwise, like Frankenstein’s Monster, the invention may turn on its master.

<sup>130</sup> “All’s Fair at the Fair,” *YouTube*, accessed February 12, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAFqAbrPKxQ>

are simply fascinated by everything they see. They say such phrases as “I’ve never seen the like” and “Well, looky there” and “What’s this?” in a thick, vaguely southern accent, laughing all the while. The technology at the Fair is comical in its magical, practical efficiency. Shirts are made directly from a lamb, chairs and tables are punched whole right out of trees, and an entire log is compressed into a clothespin. They enter a place where they are given makeovers by robots while riding a conveyor belt. They come out with a new look and a new wardrobe. Robots play music and act as dancing partners for the couple. No longer “bumpkins,” Elmer and Brenda ride off into the sunset in a brand new car with their horse Dogbiscuit in the backseat. By visiting the Fair, Elmer and Brenda are now a modern couple: happily married consumers.<sup>131</sup>

Regarding the cartoon, Bix observes that “With a future in which machines served up food, houses, and new cars at unbelievable speed and at virtually no cost, who would worry if employment evaporated?”<sup>132</sup> Why should laborers spend months creating a house and furniture when machines can do the same thing in minutes? Why even dance with another human when a robot knows all the steps? Situated within a larger narrative of labor displacement, Bix is right that the humorous cartoon obscures a threatening message for the American worker—that they

---

<sup>131</sup> The Middleton Family is not too dissimilar from Elmer and Brenda in this regard, since consumerism is a major theme in the film. A major part of the visual and thematic texture of *The Middle Family at the New York World’s Fair* is the consumption of food. The first sequence of the film takes place at breakfast. The entire family plus Jim and Nick meet together for lunch at the Fair. That evening, Jim and Nick visit the Middleton family for dinner. The next day, the climactic scene where Babs discovers the costume jewelry is set during a bounteous feast at the Middleton home. Characters in the film, especially Bud, often comment with excitement about the food they are either eating or soon-to-be eating. In one bizarre moment, during the breakfast scene at the beginning of the film, Father says to Grandmother, “I don’t know which I’ve been looking forward to the most, the Fair, or your cooking, Mother.” Bud jokes that Father says that to every cook. Grandmother responds by telling Bud that “you can’t make a cook mad by liking her cooking.” She adds, “That’s a good thing for a young man to remember.” Bud then quips, “I’ll say it is. That’s how dad got his corporation” (a pun on “corpulence,” perhaps?) Father then pats his stomach and remarks, “That’s not a corporation. That’s private ownership.” The metaphor suggests that the core, so to speak, of American capitalism—private property—is best expressed, literally, through consumption. At one point in the film, Babs is trying to convince Grandma that Nick does not take pleasure in material things. Grandma responds that Nick sure seemed to enjoy eating his lunch that afternoon. I have already made the case that film wants us to see Nick’s Marxism as a sham. His participatory role in—and enjoyment of—the act of consumption is a further nail in his Marxist coffin. How could Nick possibly object to capitalism, the film asks, if he likes to consume?

<sup>132</sup> Bix, *Inventing Ourselves Out of Jobs?*, 226-227.

are replaceable by machines capable of doing better and faster work than a human could. The world of “All’s Fair at the Fair” is a world where humans are only consumers. They are not machinists, carpenters, dressmakers, artists, artisans, barbers, or even dancers—just consumers.

Westinghouse used Elektro as a prop with one major goal in mind: to sell dishwashers and other home appliances designed to “emancipate” the housewife from the drudgery of handwashing dishes. The World’s Fair was an embodied performance of the growth of a new consumer class, as represented by the Middletons. The “science” of the Fair was only a tool to sell more products. In promotional materials, Westinghouse declared that the technology of the Fair “will solve the problems of the world” and show that “the human race will triumph over its limitations and its adversities, that the future will be glorious.”<sup>133</sup> Similarly, according to the Official Guide Book, “The Fair may help to build the better World of Tomorrow by making its millions of visitors aware of the scientific knowledge and the forces and ideas at work in the interdependent society of today.”<sup>134</sup> All of this was a smokescreen, however, for the consumerist message of the Fair. Peter J. Kuznick argues, for instance, that scientists were disappointed at the missed opportunity for the Fair organizers to educate the public about real scientific advances. Instead, he writes, “although the fair did ultimately venerate ‘science’...the meaning and social uses of science and consequent approach to its popularization were ignored by corporate exhibitors, who narrowly defined science in terms of gadgets, commodities, and magic.”<sup>135</sup> For a Fair supposedly about “science,” the Fair organizers showed little interest in actual science,

---

<sup>133</sup> *The Book of Record of the Time Capsule of Cupaloy: Deemed Capable of Resisting the Effects of Time for Five Thousand Years: Preserving an Account of Universal Achievements, Embedded in the Grounds of the New York World's Fair, 1939* (New York: Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company, 1938), 18.

<sup>134</sup> *Official Guide Book, New York World's Fair, 1939*, (New York: Exposition Publication, 1939), 45.

<sup>135</sup> Peter J. Kuznick, "Losing the World of Tomorrow: The Battle Over the Presentation of Science at the 1939 New York World's Fair," *American Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1994): 341.

choosing instead to focus on what could be popularized, sold, or packaged as a sound bite to the American public.

### **The Time Capsule of Cupaloy**

As the first stop in the tour during *The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair*, Jim shows Father, Mother, Grandmother, and Bud the Time Capsule of Cupaloy. Marveling at the Time Capsule—meant to be opened in five thousand years—Jim tells the Middletons that people in the future will look upon us as we look upon the Egyptians. The contents of the capsule, such as articles of women's clothing, will be quite revealing. "A lady's hat will reveal a lot about us to future scientists," Jim remarks. "They'll think we're nuts" says Bud. Inside of the Time Capsule is a microfilm that contains a record of "ten million words and one thousand pictures." Buds bets that Mickey Mouse is not in it. "You'd lose, Bud," says Jim. "The list of contents alone takes up seventeen pages of fine print." This is the most permanent exhibit at the Fair. "It will still be here when the rest of this place is nothing but dust," says Jim. The capsule even includes seeds. Mother asks Jim a very practical question, "How will anyone find it?" Jim responds that all of this information is in the official Book of Record<sup>136</sup>.

In the official Book of Record of the Time Capsule, the introduction declares, "humanity shall march onward to achievements splendid beyond the imagination of this day, to new worlds of human wealth, power, life, and happiness... That men will solve the problems of the world, that the human race will triumph over its limitations and its adversities, that the future will be glorious."<sup>137</sup> Since the narrative of the Fair was a narrative of optimism and progress, it seems like this statement buys into that narrative wholesale. However, other aspects of the Book of

---

<sup>136</sup> Westinghouse printed a number of these books and sent them to libraries across the country. The copy of the Book of Record that exists at Louisiana State University was sent as a gift to the library from the publisher on October 10, 1938.

<sup>137</sup> *The Book of Record*, 18.

Record seem to contradict this message. It is simply impossible to tell what Westinghouse actually “believed” about the future. Rather, the Book of Record is itself the message. It is a *deployment* of the mastery that Westinghouse hopes to hold over the future: a world in which everyone is a consumer who will buy the goods that Westinghouse makes.

The Time Capsule of Cupaloy (a type of nonferrous copper alloy) was prepared by Westinghouse for the Fair but buried the year before. The capsule was buried fifty feet underground at 12 o’clock noon on September 23, 1938, which was “the exact moment of the autumnal equinox that year.” It is located at “exactly the point where the centerline of the Westinghouse plot intersects the centerline of the great halls of the Westinghouse World’s Fair building”<sup>138</sup> and is die-stamped to remind anyone that should find it before 6939: “Let him not wantonly disturb it, for to do so would be to deprive the people of that era of the legacy here left them. Cherish it therefore in a safe place.”<sup>139</sup> Knowing that it may be difficult to find in the year 6939, Westinghouse made sure that the Book of Record would contain all of the information necessary to find, recover, and decipher the materials in the Time Capsule. We are told that the year to open it will be in the 6939<sup>th</sup> year since the birth of Christ, or 10699 by the Jewish calendar, or the 36<sup>th</sup> year of the 160<sup>th</sup> cycle by the Chinese calendar, along with the Islamic, Buddhist, and Shinto calendars. Should none of these calendars exist in that year, we are told that in 1939 there were two eclipses of the moon (May 3<sup>rd</sup> and October 28<sup>th</sup>) and two eclipses of the sun (April 19<sup>th</sup> and October 12<sup>th</sup>). We are also given the “heliocentric longitudes of the planets on January 1<sup>st</sup> at zero-hours,”<sup>140</sup> in addition to other important astronomical information. The reasoning is that, since these particular occurrences, all happening together, are so rare,

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 10.



astronomers of 6939 will simply be able to work their way backward to find the time. Fearing that all recognizable landmarks to find the capsule will be gone, Westinghouse includes the latitude and longitude, down to the “thousandth part of a second of arc,” in the hopes that the capsule can be found one day.

Recognizing the “limitations imposed by space, the problems of preservation, and the difficulty of choosing the truly significant to represent all the enormous variety and vigor of our life,” the Time Capsule contains “information touching upon all the principal categories of our thought, activity, and accomplishment; sparing nothing, neither our wisdom nor our foolishness, our supreme achievements nor our recognized weaknesses.”<sup>141</sup> These items include (and this is just a sampling of what was included) books and pictures about how we lived, the story of our architecture, a description of our places of work, the machines that we use to work, the complex techniques of mass production, a description of our arts and entertainment, copies of newspapers, a copy of *Gone with the Wind*, comics, cartoons, numerous religious books, the Constitution, the stories of scientific achievements, an English pronunciation guide, brief motion pictures, cosmetics, a woman’s hat, and much, much more.

The contents in the cupaloy capsule should remain preserved until 6939. Westinghouse’s scientists spoke to “archaeologists, historians, metallurgists, engineers, chemists, geophysicists” and others to make sure that the capsule would work. However, there seems to be a logical problem. The instructions to find the capsule are located in the Book of Record of the Time Capsule. How are those instructions to be preserved? In an era before digital preservation, it is possible that Westinghouse assumed that the Book of Record would not be preserved into perpetuity. This makes the capsule and the Book of Record itself a gesture that signifies to the

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 13.

present world that Westinghouse has prowess as the company responsible for preserving and embodying the contemporary world. A flap on the first page of the Book of Record reads,

This is an authentic copy of The Book of Record of The Time Capsule. The edition is limited, and it is not expected that the book will ever be reprinted in its present permanent form. It is a message to the future, and should be carefully preserved. If you do not wish to keep it, please send it to a library, museum or other permanent repository.

As a bit of rhetoric, this is effective. It suggests the prime importance of preserving the Book of Record for the future, but really speaks to the present world about the primary importance of Westinghouse as the creator of the Time Capsule. The present world is embodied in Westinghouse, and through the Book of Record—a beautifully printed work with multiple colors, calligraphy, photographs, and illustrations—they wanted people to know that the world they were performatively preserving was the *gendered* world. Within the capsule, the cosmetics and the woman's hat were there to preserve the gendered norms so important to the products that Westinghouse was selling. Of course, by preserving the present world, Westinghouse was revealing one simple fact: the world is a construct that could disappear any time.

A close examination of the Book of Record shows that they were aware of this. Since the book exists in the form that it does, and since it was distributed in the form that it was, and since it contains a message to send the book to libraries, the Book of Record itself is more of a gesture to the present prowess of Westinghouse than it is to the preservation of our culture for future generations. In fact, the capsule and book allow for the possibility of a dystopian future—a collapse of civilization—perhaps brought about by machines. In other words, the very *need* for the preservation of culture is an awareness of its ephemerality. The Capsule and Book betray the very ideology that Westinghouse is promoting. This is, in some ways, even clear within the Book itself.

The Capsule contains statements from three prominent figures, Robert A. Millikan (physicist), Thomas Mann (German novelist and Nobel Prize laureate), and Albert Einstein. Westinghouse wrote that the purpose of this was to show the future “some of the viewpoints of our contemporary world,” so they chose those three men “for their high reputation among us,” who have “summed up in their words the strengths and weaknesses of our age, pointed out the discernable trends of human history, & envisioned something of the future.”<sup>142</sup> Despite the *official* position of Westinghouse that “the future will be glorious,” Millikan, Mann, and Einstein are not so sure. The statements speak for themselves, and are worth quoting at length. Millikan writes:

At this moment, August 22, 1938, the principles of representative ballot government, such as are represented by the governments of the Anglo-Saxon, French, and Scandinavian countries, are in deadly conflict with the principles of despotism, which up to two centuries ago had controlled the destiny of man throughout practically the whole of recorded history. If the rational, scientific progressive principles win out in the struggle there is a possibility of a warless, golden age ahead for mankind. If the reactionary principles of despotism triumph now and in the future, the future history of mankind will repeat the sad story of war and oppression as in the past.<sup>143</sup>

Mann writes:

We know that the idea of the future as a ‘better world’ was a fallacy of the doctrine of progress... That optimistic conception of the future is a projection into time of an endeavor on the part of man to approximate to his idea of himself, the humanization of man. What we, in this year of Our Lord 1938, understand by the term ‘culture’—a notion held in small esteem today by certain nations of the western world—is simply this endeavor.<sup>144</sup>

Finally, Einstein writes:

Our time is rich in inventive minds... We have learned to fly and we are able to send messages and news without any difficulty over the entire world through electric waves. However, the production and distribution of commodities is entirely unorganized so that

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 47.

everybody must live in fear of being eliminated from the economic cycle, in this way suffering for the want of everything. Furthermore, people living in different countries kill each other at irregular time intervals, so that also for this reason any one [*sic*] who thinks about the future must live in fear and terror.<sup>145</sup>

Near the end of E. L. Doctorow's novel-memoir hybrid, *World's Fair*, Edgar, the novel's protagonist, visits the Fair for a second time. He says, "At the Westinghouse building, before we entered the Hall of Science, where Electro [*sic*] the Robot was the star, we stopped at the Time Capsule—or rather the site of its burial."<sup>146</sup> Elektro and the Time Capsule exist imaginatively hand-in-hand. Westinghouse's home appliances and Max Fleischer's magical cartoon utopia, where robots do everything for us, exist in the same conceptual space as the Time Capsule: a future that is "glorious" because we consume. After seeing the Immortal Well where the Time Capsule lay, Dave Altschuler, Edgar's father, remarks that people in the future "will think . . . that we wore odd hats and murdered each other and read abominable books... There is no hint from the stuff they included that America has a serious intellectual life, or Indians on reservations or Negroes who suffer from race prejudice. Why is that?"<sup>147</sup> The answer to this question is that Westinghouse was not interested in preserving culture, rather they were in the process of actively producing culture: namely, the housewife and the consumer, a new class of Americans whose jobs had been taken away but who could now consume, "free" from labor.

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>146</sup> E. L. Doctorow, *World's Fair* (New York: Vintage International, 1985), 283.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 284.

### Chapter 3

#### Like Our Progeny, the Computer: 1950-1968

We do not sleep simply because we are fatigued or because the world runs, out of habit, on the rhythm of day-labor and night-rest, but because we need time to process the tremendous amount of information absorbed during the day. If the brain is anything like its progeny the computer, there is only one way this can be done, and for all organisms it is a high-risk proposition. The organism must temporarily become defenseless against its enemies. It must shut out all incoming data—go off line, as computer people say—while the brain sorts and stores the day’s sensory experience in its memory banks...

-Bert O. States, *The Rhetoric of Dreams*, 1988<sup>148</sup>

What does it mean for a robot to “act” in a film? How is the labor of acting performed? Does it require a “mind” that is aware that it is acting, or is it autonomous labor? In this chapter, I argue that acting is typically perceived as a “special” kind of labor that only humans are able to perform. Using the example of a robot actor, Elektro, I argue, however, that acting is a kind of labor like any labor. Mid-century Americans were particularly worried about the advancement of mechanization into the workforce leaving many Americans without work. In a world in which robots were able to perform the same kind of labor as humans (even to “perform” as an actor), Americans needed to become more like robots—with bodies and minds dedicated to their jobs. For those Americans resistant to the changing nature of labor, a sophisticated ISA was put in place to regulate the human machine: psychoanalysis. Through a critique of the film *Sex Kittens Go to College* (in which Elektro is psychoanalyzed by Mamie Van Doren), I argue that psychoanalysis as an ISA worked to regulate the mind and ensure that subjects labored appropriately: like our progeny, the robot.

In 1960, Elektro the Westinghouse Moto-Man “acted” in the Warner Bros. produced, Albert Zugsmith directed, sexploitation film *Sex Kittens Go to College*. In the film, Elektro “plays” SAM (Sequential Auxiliary Modulator) Thinko, a robot who works for the science

---

<sup>148</sup> Bert O. States, *The Rhetoric of Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 17.

department at the fictional Collins College, making calculations, predicting the outcome of horse races using sophisticated algorithms, selecting new faculty members for the department, and lusting after Mamie Van Doren. Elektro, the world's first celebrity robot, who even appeared as a guest on the 1950s television show *You Asked for It*,<sup>149</sup> would have been recognizable to the film's audience as a has-been celebrity who was taking on a "role" in a film. I keep using scare quotes around words like "act" and "plays" and "role" because I am interested in interrogating the meaning of those words as it relates to Elektro/Thinko: what exactly *does* it mean for a robot to "act" in a film? I have an answer to this question, but first I want to show some of the ways that the question of non-human performance has been framed in theatre/performance studies.

### **The Phenomenology of Robots on Stage and Film**

First, it will be instructive to examine a modern-day counterpart to Elektro—Geminoid F, a robot who, like Elektro, "played" a robot for an audience, but in a modern-day Japanese play. While present-day Japan is far afield from 1950-1968 America, the phenomenological questions raised by Geminoid F's performance are still relevant. In November 2010, the play *Sayonara* opened in Tokyo for a short two-day run. The play is about a young girl who is diagnosed with a fatal illness, abandoned by her parents, and left in the hands of an android caretaker. American actor Bryerly Long, playing the abandoned girl, described her experience working with her co-star, Geminoid F, as difficult—"there's a bit of a distance," she says. That's because Geminoid F (the "F" stands for "female") is a robot—a complex, life-like android that real-life creator Hiroshi Ishiguro hopes will one day wind up in hospitals to act as a caretaker. "The audience always loves to see [robots] acting," said director Oriza Hirata. Geminoid F, a robot playing a robot, was not completely autonomous in *Sayonara*, however; another actor controlled her

---

<sup>149</sup> "Elektro the Robot Breaks a Balloon," *YouTube*, accessed February 12, 2013, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdLEQNmsXag&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdLEQNmsXag&feature=player_embedded).

movements, voice, and facial expressions offstage. Geminoid F was simply a shell—a messenger, but this shell was not enough for Long who missed a “kind of human presence.”<sup>150</sup>

How do we make sense of this comment? On the one hand, missing “a kind of human presence” seems ironic since Geminoid F’s character is not human, but a robot. Is Long suggesting that the character would have seemed more “real” if she had been a human playing an android, rather than an android playing an android? On the other hand, Geminoid F is not a fully autonomous robot. She is essentially an avatar designed to be controlled by a human from another room. Is the disconnect, then, because Long was not acting with the robot but *through* the robot, who acted as a kind of mediator between Long and another actor? Would Geminoid F’s performance have been more convincing if she were more advanced technologically so that she would not require an offstage actor? And why do audiences “love to see [robots] acting?” What are audiences experiencing? Is it fascination with something new? Is there a phenomenological appeal?

Experiencing a robot live creates the same kind of theatrical immediacy that Burt O. States sees in clocks, fire, water, animals, and children. Long’s disconnect between herself and the robot happens precisely because the robot is not perfected enough to blur the line between biological and cybernetic, and it is this awareness of the robot’s imperfections—the knowledge that it *is not* alive, and that something could go wrong—that, paradoxically, makes it such an engaging live experience. While it is true that something could always go wrong with a human actor as well, a robot has no way to compensate for its mistakes. Geminoid F’s presence is

---

<sup>150</sup> Daily Mail Reporter, “A Robotic Performance: Japanese Android Actress Geminoid F Appears on Stage Alongside Human in Play,” *Daily Mail*, last modified Nov. 15, 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1329208/Robot-actress-Geminoid-F-performs-alongside-human-Japanese-play.html>.

phenomenologically different from seeing a live woman perform, and it is different in a way that is more immediate than a performance by a non-robot could be.

Bert O. States, in his book *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre*, argues that “there is something about a working clock on stage that is minimally disturbing to an audience.”<sup>151</sup> It has less to do, he argues, with “time per se” than it has to do with our awareness that theatrical time is being measured by a real clock—an object that obeys its own rules of behavior and accepts no governance other than its own. Inside of the world of the stage, the clock is an anomaly. Where everything else is *theatrical*, the clock resists being so. It is only a clock and, as such, becomes more than a clock when placed on stage. It becomes the very measure of the limits of theatricality. A clock is similar to a person having his or her cell phone on during a performance. Text messages, phone calls, or other notifications from the outside world serve as a constant reminder that the world in which you are being asked to believe is fragile and at constant risk of the possibility of rupture from the outside. There are other items, most of them ordinary, that do the same thing. “A better case,” States continues, “might be made for fire or running water.” Like a clock, fire and running water are ordinary, almost quotidian aspects in the “real” world, but on stage, they gain “a certain primal strangeness.”<sup>152</sup> Fire, ordinary in real life, draws the attention of the viewer because of its fickleness: it could go out at any moment, or it could be dropped and cause the entire theatre to light on fire. It is fragile and dangerous. Running water on stage causes an audience to ask, “How did they do that?” This is not something they would ever ask of running water they experience every day in the kitchen and the bathroom.

---

<sup>151</sup> Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 30.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



Children on stage serve this same function. They are “conspicuously *not* identical with their characters.”<sup>153</sup> Watching young children on stage, audiences often wonder how aware those children are of the part that they are playing. Children on stage are a part of the real world that refuses to simply mingle with and get lost in the illusion of the theatre. They remain perpetually outside of it and serve as a reminder that audiences are watching a play. Animals have a similar and perhaps even more jarring effect on their audience. “Here,” he says, “we have a case in which strangeness, for both the actor and the audience, can be the occasion of either nervousness or delight. In a sense, the cat in Pinter’s *The Collection* poses a bigger threat to the actress who is required to hold it through much of the play than a Bengal tiger poses for the lion tamer whose act depends on the gamble that the animal may go wild.” In *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, Crab, the dog, always steals the show simply by being a dog.<sup>154</sup> The dog has no awareness that it is actually in a play; likely, it perceives its being on stage as simply another part of its life. It does not “act” then and could, if it suddenly felt so inclined, decide to sleep, vomit, defecate, bark, run off, bite someone, or any number of things that would interrupt the performance. The ever-present fascination that something might go wrong is the perpetual draw of the stage animal.

A robot on stage is functionally equivalent to a clock, fire, water, a child, or an animal. For many of us, our experiences with robots in real life, if any, are minimal, most probably relegated to “safe” animatronic shows such as the ones at Chuck-E-Cheese and those at Disneyland’s *It’s a Small World*. *It’s a Small World*, for instance, presents an essentialist, animatronic utopia of happy folk peoples from around the world singing the lyrics to “It’s a

---

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>154</sup> On a personal note, having been in a production of *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, I can attest that the dog is consistently the audience favorite, stealing the lion’s share (the dog’s share?) of the applause on any given night.

Small World” in a myriad of languages. The viewer of the ride comes away comforted, having her myopic worldview reinforced, knowing that these machines will never move from their allotted locations—will never threaten to engage her on her own ground, or in her own life, but exist to be perpetually viewed. Animatronics, then, are safe because they are culture on rails; they are and will always remain where they have been placed. In film, then, more than a live performance, a robot performance is “safe”—since the immediacy of error, felt so keenly on stage, is kept in check by the pre-recorded nature of film. We “know” that Elektro/Thinko cannot harm us, cannot fail us, and cannot terrorize us.

John Bell makes a similar argument—about the “safety” of object performance, especially in film—in his book *American Puppet Modernism*. In traditional performance, he argues, like in dance, the relationship between a performer and a spectator, in which they feed off one another, might look something like this:

performer  $\leftrightarrow$  spectator.

When a writer and director are added to the mix, he argues, following Meyerhold, the relationship might change slightly to look something like this (without fundamentally changing the relationship between actor and spectator):

writer  $\rightarrow$  director  $\rightarrow$  actor  $\leftrightarrow$  spectator.

However, when performing objects are used, the relationship *does* change:

actor  $\rightarrow$  object  $\leftarrow$  spectator.

In object performance, the object becomes the locus of the performance for both the performer and the spectator.<sup>155</sup> This new dynamic between actor and spectator, he argues, has “an underlying implication” which is that “the performer manipulates the object *in order* to show us

---

<sup>155</sup> John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance*, 4-5.

how parts of the large and dead material world can be animated by humans.” Additionally, “This allows us humans to play with the idea that we have some kind of control over inert matter; or, a bit deeper down, that our playing with objects allows us to come to terms with death.”<sup>156</sup> Bell also argues that the use of special effects in film served a particularly American function during the Cold War era of the 1950s and ‘60s. Americans during this period lived the constant and very real threat of death by nuclear annihilation. Science fiction films grew in popularity “because of their use of objects in performance allowed for a subconscious, nonrealistic means of processing the day-to-day terrors of American life in the cold war.” While “Stanislavsky-influenced realistic films...told stories of interpersonal drama,” it was in science fiction where “performing objects, operating under the name of special effects, were essential to such direct articulations of American anxieties.”<sup>157</sup> In other words, if we can control the material world on film, then perhaps we can imagine a world where we have control over the material means of our destruction.

In reviewing States and Bell, I have raised some key points. To summarize: on stage, the audience reads fire, clocks, children, running water, and animals as phenomenologically different from adult human actors because those objects always bring to mind their “real life” counterparts. An animal on stage does not “know” it is in a play, which causes the actor/character to collapse into the same being. A robot, similarly, does not “know” that it is on stage, so the audience reads the robot with a kind of immediacy that it may not give to a human actor. However, on film, the immediacy is no longer present because the robot is pre-recorded. There is no chance of failure. Film has rendered the robot “safe.” Similarly, for Bell, object

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 155.

performance (which includes robots), generally, and film, specifically, show that the world is “safe” because it can be manipulated and controlled.

## **Robot Actors**

The question I asked at the beginning of this chapter (what does it mean for a robot to “act” in a film) was a bit of a red herring—intentionally so. I suspect that the reader might assume that the question is *really* asking, “*Can* a robot “act”? Does a robot ‘know’ that it is in a play/film? Is that required for acting?” While that is an interesting discussion, what I want to do is reframe the parameters of the question. Rather than thinking of acting as some kind of special endeavor that requires a human who “knows what he/she is doing,” I want to reframe acting as work. Like any other kind of work, acting is labor in which workers sell their labor-power to an employer who then utilizes that labor-power for a profit. While acting may be phenomenologically different from other kinds of labor—people in the dark watching people in the light; actors as the embodiment of gods; the magic circle; or even that an actor has “it,” to borrow a phrase from Joseph Roach;<sup>158</sup>—it is not materially different.

Sean P. Holmes makes a similar argument in his book *Weavers of Dreams, Unite!* He argues that theatre history “has yet to come to grips with the history of the American stage actor as worker.” In part, this is because actors themselves, in the early part of the twentieth century, saw themselves as “weavers of dreams.” They were “artists engaged in creative endeavors and, in their own estimation, set apart from other occupational groups.” This metaphor, Holmes argues, “Raises important questions about the process by which actors’ labor is transformed into its commodity form.” This assumption about the work of the actor—that they are weavers of dreams—has been largely accepted uncritically by scholars who are more interested in the

---

<sup>158</sup> Joseph Roach, *it* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007).

“dreams” that they weave than the kind of labor that they do. As Holmes says, scholars tend to “prioritize the actor as commodity/cultural signifier over the actor as wage laborer, paying scant attention to the nature of work in the expanding realm of commercialized leisure.”<sup>159</sup>

While Holmes takes up the actor-as-laborer in the world of the American stage, Danae Clark does the same for the actor in American cinema in her book *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors’ Labor*. Clark argues that film studies scholars, when they do talk about actors, tend to talk about “stars.” This means that there is a

long tradition of writing film history from the point of view of capitalist interests...From a capitalist perspective, stars are a means (a commodity) to an end (the reproduction of capital). This distinction, which separates human labor from the accumulation of capital, allows for a historical account of the star system that ignores the relations of production. By defining the use value of stars in terms of their exchange value for industry leaders, actors’ labor is separated from the process of production and made invisible within the history of industrial expansion.<sup>160</sup>

In other words, “stars” are a commodity sold by the film industry for profit. By reframing actors as laborers (rather than commodities), Clark seeks to examine the “ongoing and conflicting practices that determine the economic and discursive aspects of stardom” as well as “extras, whose employment was sporadic and largely undocumented.”<sup>161</sup>

Both Holmes and Clark, in their work on the theatre and film, respectively, do a fantastic job resituating the conversation about acting-as-dreaming to acting-as-labor. If we rethink of acting within the framework of labor, then yes, a robot can act in a film. To ask once more the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter, what does it mean, then, for a robot to act in a film? It means that, like in any other industry, a robot is doing the kind of labor that a human

---

<sup>159</sup> Sean P. Holmes, *Weavers of Dreams, Unite! Actors’ Unionism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 1-2.

<sup>160</sup> Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors’ Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

would normally do. While Elektro/Thinko may be phenomenologically different from a human performer—does he “know” he is in a film; is the performance “immediate”; by showing our mastery over the material world, does his presence make the world “safe” in ways that a human actor would not;—it is not materially different.

In chapter 2, I argued that the concerns about job loss caused by mechanization in the 1920s and 30s were masked by capitalist arguments: you are now “free” to consume, to purchase commodities with credit, and to do this effectively you must have a robust domestic life so that you can make the most out of the latest Westinghouse appliances. In this chapter, I argue that similar concerns about job loss in the 1950s and 60s were masked in an entirely different way: through delving into the mind to “cure” dissatisfaction with capitalism. I will make this argument in five steps. First, I will discuss the concerns about mechanization and job loss, such as the Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution, as well as Isaac Asimov’s *New York Times* op-ed about robots and the future of mechanization. Second, I will argue that the human mind, in this period, was shown to function like a robot’s “mind”—and vice-versa. I will look at John Cohen’s 1967 book *Human Robots in Myth and Science*, which makes the argument that there is no difference between the human mind and the machine mind, and this may mean that humans are, in fact, robots. Third, I will look at the Turing Test as an example of the way in which the line between human and robot is blurred. Fourth, I will read three texts: the Hollywood film *Sex Kittens Go to College* and two episodes of the *Twilight Zone*, “The Lateness of the Hour” (1960) and “The Mind and the Matter” (1961). In each of these texts, the mind is the crucial ideological battleground—both robots and human dream, desire, and love. How, then, can we functionally distinguish them from humans? And finally, I will conclude that the reason all of this matters is because in a world in which robots can do the jobs that humans do—including acting—the best

way to save “humans” as ideological subjects is not to distinguish us from robots but rather to say that we, too, are special, just like our “progeny the computer.”

### **The Labor Question**

On March 22, 1964, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution sent a letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson containing a “memorandum” which was “prepared out of a feeling of foreboding about the nation’s future.” Concerned that the nation would soon be “thrown into unprecedented economic and social disorder,” the Committee applauded the War on Poverty but believed that the measures so far adopted would “fall short.” This is because “radically new circumstances demand radically new strategies.”<sup>162</sup> On April 6, 1964, the White House responded to the committee with a letter signed by Lee C. White, Assistant Special Counsel to the President. The letter thanks the Committee for its “fresh look” at the problem and assures them that “the Committee’s analysis and recommendations will be given thoughtful consideration by all of those in the Executive branch who are concerned with these problems.”<sup>163</sup>

The Triple Revolution involved three separate, yet mutually informing technological changes in the United States: The Cybernation Revolution, The Weaponry Revolution, and The Human Rights Revolution. The Cybernation Revolution was a “new era of production” brought about by “the combination of the computer and the automated self-regulating machine.” The Weaponry Revolution was the reality of new weaponry that could “obliterate civilization.” Because of this, “the great weapons have eliminated war as a method for resolving international

---

<sup>162</sup> “The Triple Revolution,” accessed September 3, 2016, <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/coll/pauling/peace/papers/1964p.7-01.html>, page 3.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 4. The letter also states that Johnson has “committed this Administration to an unrelenting war on poverty and, as you are of course aware, has submitted to the Congress major new legislation requesting the necessary weapons for the prosecution of this war.” One of the major concerns of the Ad Hoc Committee was the Weaponry Revolution, which they believed had progressed to the point that we now had the capacity to wipe out all of human civilization. Interestingly, the language war was also embedded into the “war on poverty.”

conflict.” The only logical alternative is a “warless world.” Finally, the Human Rights Revolution was the search for a political world in which “every individual will feel valued and none will feel rejected on account of his race.”<sup>164</sup>

The Employment Act of 1964<sup>165</sup> says, “Every person will be able to obtain a job if he wishes to do so and that this job will provide him with resources adequate to live and maintain a family decently.”<sup>166</sup> However, because of the Cybernation Revolution, “a permanently depressed class is developing in the U.S.” in which “some 38,000,000 Americans, almost one-fifth of the nation, still live in poverty.”<sup>167</sup> The old model of doing labor at a job in exchange for wages was seen as no longer being sufficient in a world in which increasingly sophisticated machines are able to do the jobs once done by humans. This means that the old model needs to change. They argue, “because of cybernation, society no longer needs to impose repetitive and meaningless toil upon the individual.”<sup>168</sup> Instead, they argue that, because of machines, “the economy of abundance can sustain all citizens in comfort and economic security whether or not they engage in what is commonly reckoned as work.” To ensure this, “society, through its appropriate legal and governmental institutions,” should “undertake an unqualified commitment to provide every individual and every family with an adequate income as a matter of right.”<sup>169</sup>

In part due to the work of the Ad Hoc Committee, and in part due to a call by President Johnson during a State of the Union address for establishing such a committee,<sup>170</sup> on August 5,

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 5. Note that the Ad Hoc Committee was deeply concerned about the effects of job loss on all Americans, but especially on the black community, whom they argued had been hit the hardest by the economic and technological changes of the mid-century.

<sup>165</sup> Likely means the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>170</sup> Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, 82.



1964, Congress passed H.R. 11611 (88<sup>th</sup>): An Act to establish a National Commission on Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress. The Commission was to be a fourteen-member committee, appointed by the President, with the following goals: (a) “identify and assess the past effects and the current and prospective role and pace of technological change”; (b) “identify and describe the impact of technological and economic change...”; (c) “define those areas of unmet community and human needs toward which application of new technologies might most effectively be directed”; (d) “assess the most effective means for channeling new technologies into promising directions”; and finally, (e) “recommend...specific administrative and legislative steps...”<sup>171</sup> It was signed into law on August 19, 1964.<sup>172</sup>

In 1966, the Commission<sup>173</sup> released their report. The report stated, “It has become almost a commonplace that the world is experiencing a scientific and technological revolution.” While the Commission accepts some of this premise, they add (in what is almost certainly a reference to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution), that “according to one extreme view, the world—or at least the United States—is on the verge of a glut of productivity sufficient to make our economic institutions and the notion of gainful employment obsolete.” However, “we dissent from this view”<sup>174</sup> because “the evidence does not support it.”<sup>175</sup> Jeremy Rifkin

---

<sup>171</sup> PUBLIC LAW 88-444—AUG 19, 1964, accessed September 3, 2016, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg462.pdf>.

<sup>172</sup> Report of the National Commission on Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress. *Technology and the American Economy*, Volume 1, February 1966, ii.

<sup>173</sup> One of the original members of the Commission, John I. Snyder, Jr. died on April 24, 1965. He was replaced by Thomas J. Watson, Jr. who was president of IBM at the time. According to the Commission, Watson “took part in the Commission’s discussions and deliberations,” but he “dissociated himself from any recommendations involving computers because IBM manufactures and sells them” (ibid., v). While I have no reason to doubt Watson’s integrity in recusing himself, his appointment to the Commission does, nevertheless, feel like a grave conflict of interest considering its goal to “recommend...specific administrative and legislative steps” to ward off the damage caused by rapid technological advancement.

<sup>174</sup> The “we” here, in fact the entire structure of the report, is a perfect example of the way in which capitalism reduces the power of dissent. See chapter 6 for a more in-depth analysis.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 1.

shows<sup>176</sup> that the Committee also “[dissented] from the other extreme view of complacency that denies the existence of serious social and economic problems.” However, while many of the Commission’s findings were in line with the Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution, they ultimately “backpedaled” on any real change, instead making the argument that “technology displacement is a necessary and temporary condition engendered along the road to economic progress.”<sup>177</sup> This is likely because the Commission, while “bringing together representatives of industry, labor unions, voluntary associations, universities, and the public,” did so with an admitted “bias to the free market and the free society.”<sup>178</sup> Thus, the radical view of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution—that everyone deserved a basic income provided by the State—once it faced the bureaucratic Commission, died a swift death.

As indicated by the findings of the Ad Hoc Committee, workers are, or soon will be, replaced by robots, thus making traditional forms of labor obsolete. From the standpoint of the Commission, robots have not already replaced workers, necessarily, but workers are *replaceable*. The solution to this problem, they said, is not to be found in government intervention but rather in the “free market and the free society,” where workers are “free” to either be replaced or to work as efficiently as a robot. It is no accident then, that during the 1950s and 1960s, when many people were concerned rightfully concerned that a robot could strip their livelihood from them by performing the same work more efficiently, psychologists like John Cohen and computer scientists like Alan Turing attempted to articulate ways in which the human mind functioned like a machine.

---

<sup>176</sup> Rifkin also shows how the power of the workers’ unions slowly dissipated throughout the 1960s, with technological advancement convincing the public that unions only held back progress, rather than helping it. Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work*, 81-89.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>178</sup> Report of the National Commission, 106.

## Robot Brains and Robot Minds

In a slightly tongue-in-cheek op-ed in the *New York Times*, even Isaac Asimov weighed in on the automation debate, speculating, after the 1964 World's Fair, what the 2014 World's Fair might be like. Some of his predictions are only partially accurate, such as the idea that in 2014, because of agricultural necessity, we will have "Algae Bars" where we eat "mock-turkey" and "pseudosteak;" or his idea that "compressed air tubes will carry goods and materials over local stretches." Some of his predictions, however, are spot-on, such as his idea that, by 2014, only "unmanned ships will have landed on Mars" but a manned mission would be in the planning phase; or his idea that serious technological progress will have been made on the self-driving car. Pervading his op-ed, however, is the constant and looming force of technological change, slowly eliminating the kind of work that humans typically do. There will be robots that make our meals for us, robots that drive for us, robots that clean for us, and "closed-circuit TV and programmed tapes" that teach our children. In this world, Asimov suggests that humans will be nothing more than a "race of machine tenders." Moreover, in a world in which robots do so much for us, Asimov wonders, what sort of "brains" might they have?<sup>179</sup>

Asimov never answers the question, or even speculates on it. He merely poses it. Other writers in the 1960s, however, worked on this same question. In his 1967 book *Human Robots in Myth and Science*, Dr. John Cohen, a psychologist at the University of Manchester, discusses the history of the automaton from ancient Egypt to the present. In his concluding chapter, "Is Man a Robot?," he takes up the question of the "brains" that a robot might have, as compared to the "brains" that a human might have. We might pose two questions, he argues, "Is man a mindless robot? or can he boast an unrobotlike mind?" For Cohen, the key, he argues, lies in what we

---

<sup>179</sup> Isaac Asimov, "Visit to the World's Fair of 2014." *The New York Times*, accessed September 9, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/03/23/lifetimes/asi-v-fair.html>.

mean by the word “mind.”<sup>180</sup> If we accept the Cartesian concept of mind/body dualism, Cohen argues, then we cannot say that robots have “minds” because the Cartesian mind is one where we can “speak of the capacity for understanding meaning, which may be highly personal and sometimes incommunicable in words.”<sup>181</sup> This is contrast to a materialist, or purely neural, perspective, which argues that you cannot separate the “mind” of a person from the physical processes that occur in the brain and the body. From this purely neural perspective, then, one cannot make the argument that a human is any different from a robot. Cohen, however, does not accept this materialist conception of the mind.

Cohen argues that humans can do three things that a robot cannot do: laugh, blush, and commit suicide. These three things point to, for Cohen, a “soul” that exists outside of purely material or neural processes, which is evident because of its manifestation in or on or through the body. However, he acknowledges that Alan Turing disagrees with him about whether or not robots have “souls.” For Turing, Cohen observes, “the idea of a thinking machine is no more sacrilegious than the idea of an elephant with a soul, and if we made a machine that thinks (says Turing) ‘we should not be irreverently usurping His [God’s] power of creating souls.’”<sup>182</sup> For Cohen, the major point is that humans have a “soul.” This does not *have* to be a metaphysical soul, it could also be a “mind,” but it refers to some kind of rational, thinking, psychic entity that exists outside of the neural or material world. Robots, on the other hand, are purely neural or material in their circuitry without any “soul” that exists outside of themselves. *However*, Cohen does remind us that other thinkers, including Turing, have disagreed with this view, either by suggesting that humans are *also* purely material beings, or that robots can *also* have souls.

---

<sup>180</sup> John Cohen, *Human Robots in Myth and Science*, 131.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

I mentioned in chapter 1 of this dissertation that Per Schelde argues that science fiction is born of the “tension between ... ‘rude’ scientism and the Christian cosmology.”<sup>183</sup> Specifically, this is the Christian cosmology of the soul. He writes that science fiction “clings to the notion that there is one last entity inside humans that makes them more than machines, more than matter. That entity is the soul or the self. Sf movies are an account of scientism, what the excision of the soul, would mean to humans.”<sup>184</sup> Following similar lines, Tim Blackmore argues that *The Matrix* and *Dark City* are “decidedly pro-human: In both cases, the Others are a combination of coelenterate and insect—tentacle and odious, consuming dead humans (*Dark City*) or live ones (*The Matrix*). Both films view human memory as superior to other forms.” A character in *Dark City*, for instance, says, “It is our capacity for individuality, our souls, that make us different from them. They think they can find the human soul if they understand how our memories work.” The hero in these films, Blackmore argues, “is the supreme individual, whose task it is to revive the nearly extinct human race: His is a Christ-like venture of redemption and recreation, not a Mosaic one of exodus.”<sup>185</sup>

The tension between “individuality” as a human trait—i.e. a “good” trait—and “collectivity” as a robot trait—i.e. a “bad” trait—can be seen quite clearly in the Turing test. Formally proposed in 1950 by Alan Turing, the Turing test is an experiment to gauge whether or not a computer has artificial intelligence. In the test, which continues to this day in a yearly contest, a judge has a short typed conversation with a human and a short typed conversation with an AI. The catch is that the judge does not know whether he or she is chatting with a human or

---

<sup>183</sup> Per Schelde, *Androids, Humanoids, and Other Science Fiction Monsters: Science and Soul in Science Fiction Films*, 125.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>185</sup> Tim Blackmore, “High on Technology; Low on Memory: Cultural Crisis in *Dark City* and *The Matrix*,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 28.

an AI. The judge then has to determine whether the conversation was with a human or with a robot. Alan Turing's original thesis suggested that the measuring stick for the creation of artificial intelligence would be if the robot could imitate human conversation so convincingly that the judge could not tell whether they were speaking with a human or an AI. At the test, an award is given to the AI creator who fooled the most judges into thinking their AI was human. This award is called The Most Human Computer. Additionally, an award is given to the person who successfully convinced the most judges that he or she is actually human. This award is called The Most Human Human.

In his book titled *The Most Human Human*, Brian Christian recounts his experiences as a human at the Turing test striving for the coveted "Most Human Human" award, trying to convince judges of his human-ness. Christian makes the argument that the key to convincing a judge that you are, in fact, a human, is continuity—what we might call memory. AIs often fail to maintain any semblance of a continuous "personality."<sup>186</sup> What Christian would say is that this lack of continuity is what makes it obviously not a human. It is a history—a narrative consistency—that is the key to performing and recognizing what it is to be human.

In the Turing test, as Brian Christian argues, the best way to become The Most Human Human is to have a "story"—continuity and memory. AI programmers, in trying to overcome the limitations inherent in AI, find that programming a good AI is much like writing a novel. What

---

<sup>186</sup> For instance, the AI Cleverbot, a popular online chat robot, often fails to maintain any semblance of a coherent narrative over the course of a conversation. Christian points out that early users of Cleverbot believed that there was some kind of conspiracy involved—that Cleverbot was not an AI at all—that it worked like a chat website. Chat websites like Omegle and Chatroulette allow users to chat with strangers. If, at any point in the conversation, you no longer wish to continue, you can simply hit the "next" button and the website will pair you with another random stranger. Some Cleverbot users have suggested that the website is actually a site like Omegle or Chatroulette. However, the "next" button is invisible. At random points during the conversation, the website will "next" you. This, they say, would explain the discontinuity in the "personality" of the AI. The truth is that Cleverbot is actually an AI, but it has learned what to say and how to interact from the millions of users who have chatted with it in the past. Cleverbot takes responses from users it interacts with and adds those to a database of potential responses to questions that people might ask. Brian Christian, *The Most Human Human*, 22-37.

they likely mean is that an AI needs to be complex. The unintended value of this metaphor is that a novel is a construct—an organizing frame that has a beginning, middle, and end, and gives order and meaning to an otherwise chaotic world. A novel—and we might substitute a play or a film, or any other narrative or artistic medium—is an ideological tool precisely in the way that it gives order to disorder, unity to disunity, and meaning to the meaningless. This is to say more than just “all narrative is ideological,” which is, I think, a statement few scholars would contest. It is also to suggest, rather, *why* narrative is ideological: because narrative is about telling a “story”—a performative gesture built up of memory, continuity, and subjectivity.

From an Althusserian perspective, the entire debate about the “mind” of humans vs. the “mind” of robots is an ideological one. The debate stakes out a claim that there is something “special” about being human. In the case of Cohen, that special quality is laughter, blushing, and suicide—behaviors that are impossible for a machine to mimic due to their lack of unique biological and psychological characteristics. For Turing—or rather, the legacy of his famous test—the “soul” is located in the personal narrative, a “story” that is a part of your “identity” and a core feature of your “soul.” Even if a computer can tell a continuous, believable narrative, it does not mean that humans are materialist beings; rather it means that computers are also Cartesian—possessors of “souls.” Of course, true AI is a long way off, even today—it is difficult for AI researchers to even get an AI to paraphrase<sup>187</sup>—but most AI researchers would agree that what humans perceive as “human” is the imitation of a soul—continuity.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>188</sup> Alternatively, Christian observes, some chatbot programs try a completely different technique. Rather than attempting to find continuity, these bots rely on “stateless” conversation. Christian defines “stateless” conversation as conversation that does not follow the logic of the entire conversation. Instead, each response follows only from the previous response, or is a non-sequitur. The perfect example of this is an argument. In a heated argument, Christian says, people do not logically respond to one another in a coherent way. What we do, rather, is insert non-sequiturs. It turns out robots are like us when they have a “soul” but they are also like us when they are “stateless” (ibid., 36).

## The Robot Mind in Fiction

As a case study to show how the “mind,” or the “soul,” is used as an ideological construct within narrative, I will examine an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, “The Lateness of the Hour,”<sup>189</sup> which features a robot. (Later in the chapter, I will examine another episode, “The Mind and the Matter,”<sup>190</sup> about the second half of the definition of “robot”: a person who acts mechanically.) “The Lateness of the Hour” provides an illuminating illustration of how the “mind” and, by extension, the labor a person does, is seen as “human”—which is to say, it is seen as arriving naturally from within an individual, rather than from outside of the individual. The episode begins with Mrs. Loren, off-screen, receiving a massage from her maid. The world of Dr. and Mrs. Loren is an ideal world: the house is always at 72 degrees (“The perfect temperature,” Dr. Loren says), the rooms have ceilings designed for the optimum acoustics, and the windows are designed to let in the ideal amount of light. Additionally, the servants are perfect: this is because they are robots. Each one was designed to fulfill a specific task: the maid, the butler, the mechanic, the cook, etc. Each robot was also designed to have a past. Dr. Loren gave each robot, when he built them, a memory track that would implant in their “minds” a series of memories that would seem real to them, even though the memories were fabricated. Dr. and Mrs. Loren are perfectly content with this situation, but their daughter Jana is tired of the perfection. She is tired of the boredom and the routine. She is also tired of her father lazing about the house, smoking his pipe, and not working—like a person is supposed to, she argues. To her, it seems dreadfully inhuman and wrong. Threatening to leave the house, she convinces her father to dismantle the robots.

---

<sup>189</sup> The Twilight Zone. “The Lateness of the Hour.” *The Twilight Zone*. December 2, 1960.

<sup>190</sup> The Twilight Zone. “The Mind and the Matter.” *The Twilight Zone*. May 12, 1961.



There are three ideological functions, each historically specific to modernity, at work in this episode that I will now examine. The first is the ideological role of the Protestant work ethic. The second is ideological function of subjectivity as an imaginary construct. The third is the ideological role of psychoanalysis. These three functions will be taken up in order. First, the ideological role of the Protestant work ethic. In *The American Ideology*, Andrew Levine argues that Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, despite being at-odds in some ways with Marx, is relevant for understanding the capitalist underpinnings of America. Writing in 1905, Weber noticed that capitalism had a greater foothold in Protestant countries than it did in Catholic ones. Capitalism is not "natural," which is to say that in pre-industrial societies, people do not work more than they have to. In capitalism, people work for more than just their daily sustenance. They work just to accumulate, often not even spending that which they have accumulated. Where does this drive come from? Why do people work more than necessary? Weber argues that Protestantism promulgated unmerited grace as a major tenet of the faith. There is nothing a person can do to earn salvation since it is based entirely on the will of God. With no need to focus on spiritual works, a person can pursue worldly works. A sign that a person is saved is their success in accumulation. A person who accumulates a great deal of wealth is probably marked for salvation. Protestant doctrine, then, undergirds much of the work ethic that drives capitalism.<sup>191</sup>

One of the reasons that Jana is upset with her father is because the robots have made their life too easy. Because his labor force or robot servants do everything for him, Dr. Loren no longer has to work. Through most of the episode, he is in his chair reading or asking one of the robots to bring him his slippers, his smoking jacket, or his pipe. Jana hates how soft he has

---

<sup>191</sup> Andrew Levine, *The American Ideology: A Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 25-37.

become. Dr. Loren's malady, then, is a spiritual one: he is guilty of idleness—a major sin in a Protestant-Capitalist world.

The second function in this episode is ideological subjectivity as an imaginary construct. Althusser argues that a subject is treated as such even before they are born—another feature of modernity, since Medieval and early modern societies were less inclined to consider the fetus a person before birth. “Before its birth,” he writes, “the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived.”<sup>192</sup> Because we are always-already subjects, we “constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects.” The “rituals of ideological recognition” not only include the hail but also include “the hand-shake” and “the fact of calling you by your name.” Even if the person does not know what that name is, it is recognized that “you ‘have’ a name of your own.”<sup>193</sup> These names are bestowed upon birth (and sometimes before), ensuring that you are recognizable as a subject, even before you recognize yourself as one. The point is that ideology “has no history” and is “nothing insofar as it is a pure dream” that is “manufactured by who knows what power.”<sup>194</sup>

In “The Lateness of the Hour,” the power that manufactured that dream for the robots is Dr. Loren. In order to create subjects who would willingly work, Dr. Loren had to manufacture memories for his workers that allowed them to see themselves as individuals with histories. Dr. Loren even names each of them, calling them by name when he wants something. The robot is hailed, recognizes itself as a subject, with a history, and thus performs its task willingly.

---

<sup>192</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 119.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

After Dr. Loren dismantles the robots, Jana is ecstatic. She declares that she will find a husband and provide her parents with grandchildren. Hearing this, her mother gets visibly upset. Jana starts to get worried. She looks at their old photo albums and realizes that there are no pictures of her as a child. She has childhood memories, but there is no photographic evidence of them. Dr. Loren reveals to her what the audience has already surmised: Jana is a robot. This revelation is too horrible for Jana—who “remembers” being a child—to contemplate. When she, a subject with a name who “remembers” her childhood, realizes that her subjectivity is merely an “imaginary construct”<sup>195</sup>—the illusion breaks down, and she is no longer able to perform her “job” as daughter and must be reprogrammed. The episode ends where it begins, with Mrs. Loren receiving a massage from their maid—now Jana, who has been reprogrammed to perform the function of a maid rather than the function of a daughter.

This brings us to a specific manifestation of ideology in the Althusserian sense: the ideological role of psychoanalysis, which has historically functioned as an ISA in its own right. While “ideology has no history,” because it functions like a dream, psychoanalysis itself *does* have a history. While it is true that thinkers like Herbert Marcuse, interested in critiquing a culture of consumption, turned to psychoanalysis to counter that culture, most thinkers did not.<sup>196</sup> Eli Zaretsky, writing about the history of psychoanalysis in his book *Secrets of the Soul*, argues that during the 1950s, the majority of psychoanalysts used the field of psychoanalysis as a tool to re-orient individuals towards contentment with their environment. A “new corps of experts,” he writes, such as “aptitude counselors, forensic specialists, school psychologists, guidance counselors, industrial psychologists, urban planners, and above all doctors” used psychoanalysis

---

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Althusser himself was significantly influenced by Lacan, and he rejected the “technique of social adaptation” that Lacan called “American psychoanalysis.” Louis Althusser, *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences*, trans. Steven Rendall, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xiv.

to turn “social control into a large-scale program of social reorganization during and after World War II.”<sup>197</sup> This social control was focused on the family. Psychoanalysis in the 1950s, he argues, was about “the new possibilities of personal life”<sup>198</sup> that could be achieved through an understanding of individual sexuality, and then channeled into family life. He writes:

Just as seventeenth-century capitalism had required the sacralization of family life, and just as nineteenth-century industrialization had required a new work discipline, *so the rise of an automated, mass-consumption society required analogous vehicles for the transformation of subjectivity*. Psychoanalysis was one of the most effective of these vehicles. During what might be called “the long 1950s,” it triggered internal, charismatically originated motivations that encouraged individuals to transform the family from the tradition-bound and production-oriented unit that it still tended to be in the New Deal period into the carrier of expressive individuality in the epoch of globalizing, postindustrial capitalism. In that transformation, the ego psychologists’ stress on reason, maturity, and the ego’s capacities to organize the inner and outer worlds proved as necessary as the emancipation of sexuality to which—as the anti-rationalizers seemed to intuit—it was about to give way<sup>199</sup> (emphasis mine).

Airing in 1960, “The Lateness of the Hour” is very much a product of “the long 50s.” In an “automated society,” Jana wants to see herself as an individual, capable of participating in family life. The moment she realizes that that she cannot participate in family life begins when she declares that, now that the family is free from robots (read: an automated society), she can get married and start her own family. Realizing that family life as an individual is impossible for her, she loses her individuality, so her father must reprogram her to unfeelingly and unflinchingly massage her mother’s shoulders. “The Lateness of the Hour,” as a story of a robot, is very much about the socially constructed nature of subjectivity.

The “social reorganization” created by psychoanalysis in the 50s and 60s is of interest to this chapter. When Althusser says that “ideology has no history,” because it functions like a

---

<sup>197</sup> Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 280.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 305

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 305-306.

dream, he means that ideology works through the idea that resistance to capitalism, or psychic *agon* caused by the excesses and pressures of late capitalism, belongs solely to the individual in that person's "mind." The analyst can then delve this mind to "cure" the individual of his or her "disorder," thus turning that resistant person into a functioning member of society.

This idea of the mind as a space for the analyst to penetrate in order to "cure" individuals (both human and non-human) can be seen in the film *Sex Kittens Go to College* in which Elektro the Robot plays SAM Thinko. The plot revolves around the science department at the fictional Collins College. The department needs a new department head, so they turn to Thinko, their robot/computer/problem solver, to get an answer. Thinko gives them the name of the most qualified person available, Dr. Matilda West, who holds 13 degrees and has an IQ of 298. When they meet Dr. West at the train station, she turns out to be a gorgeous woman (played by Mamie Van Doren), much to the consternation of the department. The other members of the department, Dr. Zorch, Dr. Carson, and Dr. Barton, are concerned about the effect that their voluptuous new colleague might have on the reputation of the department. While they do not doubt her qualifications, they are worried that they will not get funding if donors see that their new department head "looks like Mamie Van Doren." It comes to light in the film that Dr. West was once known as The Tallahassee Tassel Tosser, a stripper in Vegas. When this information comes out, Dr. West decides to leave the university and return to doing what she does best: tossing tassels. However, Dr. Barton, who has slowly become a love interest of hers throughout the film, decides that the two should elope, and in doing so, they presumably live happily ever after.

Before Dr. West leaves the department, however, she leaves her mark on the minds of three individuals in the film: Voltaire, a clothes-wearing chimpanzee, Woo-Woo, the captain of the football team, and SAM Thinko. Each of these individuals has a mind that is not quite

functioning “properly.” Dr. West uses the tools of psychoanalysis to delve into their minds and “cure” them. For instance, we first meet Voltaire when Woo-Woo comes in to see Dr. West for his first therapy session. Voltaire is in Dr. West’s office, typing on a typewriter with his feet, working at his assigned task and compliant when given directions. “No lying down on the job,” she tells him, and Voltaire responds by sitting upright and typing with his hands. Woo-Woo is amazed that Dr. West is able to speak with him. “Communication with a lower order,” she says, “is only a matter of application.” She explains that she is trying an experiment with Voltaire. She says that a million chimps with a million typewriters will eventually produce the works of Shakespeare. Dr. West is convinced that Voltaire can do such a miraculous feat on the first try. In the previous scene, Dr. West did a demonstration for her class where she shot live rounds from two revolvers into the classroom and then told them that they just witnessed a demonstration of applied psychology. Dr. West sees all behavior, including fear, as mere psychology. For her, the world can be understood, and therefore tamed, through science generally, and a study of the mind specifically. This includes Voltaire, who she has successfully tamed. At the end of the film, her theory about Voltaire is proven correct, as he hands Dr. West and Dr. Barton the book that he wrote (which is, admittedly, not the works of Shakespeare) called “The Tending and Diet of Babies.” Any animalistic urges that Voltaire may possess have been successfully nullified, and that energy has been routed into the labor of writing a book designed to uphold and maintain “proper” sexual relationships.

Woo-Woo, her second patient, is also poorly adjusted. Woo-Woo is the captain of the football team, and while he may shine on the field, he is shy and timid around women. When we first meet Dr. West, she asks Woo-Woo to kiss her on the cheek, which causes him to pass out. Initially, she thinks it might be a vitamin deficiency, but when she learns that “Woo-Woo” is a

nickname, she realizes that the problem is in his mind. People with nicknames are “sensitive” she believes, so Woo-Woo “needs psychoanalysis” because “his id is in a terrible state.” When Woo-Woo finally comes to see her, Dr. West tells Voltaire to leave, and Woo-Woo sits on the chair vacated by the chimpanzee, symbolically becoming her next patient. “What kind of dreams do you have?” she asks him. He coyly remarks that he has the “usual dreams” that a boy his age might have. To get more to the point, she asks, “What kind of fantasies do you have?” Implying that the object of his desire is Dr. West, Woo-Woo replies, “Maybe you wouldn’t like me to like what I’m wanting.” The therapy session is then interrupted by an interlocutor, but by the end of the film, Woo-Woo has been “cured.” In a convoluted subplot, we learn that a sleepwalking Woo-Woo had been using Thinko to bet on horse races, making Woo-Woo very rich. With his newfound wealth, he is able to let go of his boyish desire—his teacher—and marry a more appropriate object choice, Jodie, played by Tuesday Weld, the woman who has loved Woo-Woo throughout the film.

Finally, there is Thinko. The other scientists in the department—Zorch, Carson, and Barton—are worried that perhaps Thinko selected someone who looked like Mamie Van Doren because he is going through puberty. At the end of the film’s convoluted plot, involving Thinko acting as a bookie for horseracing, and a pair of gangsters trying to shut down the operation, Thinko begins to have “a nervous breakdown.” He catches fire, and the firefighters arrive to save the day. Dr. West, fearing that Thinko may be lost, tries to help Thinko. “What kind of dreams have you been having lately,” she asks him. He has been dreaming of “winning the Preakness, and you.” Like Woo-Woo, Thinko is unable to act like a mature, rational adult (he is going through puberty) because of his desire for an inappropriate object choice. Like Voltaire, Thinko needs to learn to channel his energy so that he can work properly (read: efficiently,

professionally). After this scene, we get a glimpse into Thinko's mind—a dream sequence. In this sequence, he and Voltaire are in a bar, drinking and watching four strippers, one after another, dance for them. No men are watching—only a robot and a chimpanzee. In the sequence, Thinko is wearing a schoolboy jacket and a propeller cap. The dream is a boyish fantasy—and it is keeping him and Voltaire from what they need to think about: work.

Through the articulation of his desire, Thinko is “cured.” Dr. Zorch tells Dr. West, “I was afraid for a moment that he might lose his mind. It's so difficult to know how to handle them at that age. Everything one says seems wrong. Dr. West, I think what you've done with Thinko is one of the most extraordinary feats I've ever seen. You've made a man of him again.” Thinko's inappropriate desire—the thing keeping him from working properly—has been “cured.” No longer is he the schoolboy who is distracted by dreams of strippers, or of Mamie Van Doren; he is now a “man” who can properly do his job. This is all thanks to psychoanalysis, which delved into the minds of Voltaire, Woo-Woo, and Thinko to properly orient them toward responsibility and “appropriate” desire. Through “curing” her three patients, Dr. West proves that psychoanalysis works by taming individuals (in the case of Voltaire), by reorienting their desire (in the case of Woo-Woo), so that they can work properly (in the case of Elektro).

I am not particularly concerned with whether or not Dr. West is doing “true” or “good” psychoanalysis. Rather, it is the deployment of psychoanalysis as a mode of discourse within the film that is fascinating. We might say that the film represents the way psychoanalysis was popularly understood in 1960: as offering the “cure” to individuals whose desire is preventing them from being productive members of society (workers with stable family lives). As Marcuse says in *The One-Dimensional Man*, we live in a “comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom” which appears “rational” because of its “suppression of individuality in the



mechanization of socially necessary but painful performances” and its “concentration of individual enterprises in more effective, more productive corporations.”<sup>200</sup> In this society, it is the duty of psychoanalysis to reorient the “sick” individual to their “proper” role as a worker. “According to Freud,” writes Marcuse, “the patient’s disease is a protest reaction against the sick world in which he lives. However, the physician must disregard the ‘moral’ problem. He has to restore the patient’s health, to make him capable of functionally normally in his world.”<sup>201</sup> The Reality Principle suggests that our neuroses are the result of an unconscious rejection of social norms—of overwhelming desire toward an inappropriate object choice. But we cannot live in our fantasies, we must face “reality,” and that is where psychoanalysis steps in to “save” us—where Dr. West steps in to “cure” her three patients of the desire that is keeping them from being, as Marcuse would say, “productive.” Whether psychoanalysis is “valid” or not—either in Freud’s conception or in the film’s; whether it is “oppressive” or not—either in Freud’s conception or in the film’s, is not the point here. What matters is that, as a mode of discourse within the world of the film, psychoanalysis is deployed as the means by which individuals are “cured” and made “productive” members of society. This mirrors Marcuse’s conception of psychoanalysis as a tool designed to reorient post-World War II society into its new form: productive individuals who happily work in their corporate environments.

This idea is most clearly illustrated in “The Mind and the Matter,” the second *Twilight Zone* episode that I will analyze in this chapter. In this episode, Archibald Beechcroft is a sad sack who hates people. Like Jana, he is a robot, although one of the second definition—a person who acts in a mechanical way. As Rod Serling describes him in his opening monologue for the

---

<sup>200</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1964), 1.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

episode, Beechcroft is a “product of the population explosion” and “one of the inheritors of the legacy of progress.” Serling says that Archibald’s journey is “a one-man rebellion against the mechanics of his age”—a rebellion that, in true *Twilight Zone* fashion, will prove pointless and futile.<sup>202</sup> At his non-descript desk job, he finds himself frustrated by the people around him who prevent him from getting any work done. A co-worker who spills coffee on him later apologizes by giving him a book called *The Mind and the Matter: How You Can Achieve the Ultimate Power of Concentration*. By applying the lessons learned in the book, Archibald learns that, simply by concentrating, he can do *anything*. He decides to use his new powers to get rid of all the people on earth, making him the only person. With his newfound freedom, Archibald goes back to work, eager to be productive. He gets bored and realizes that he wants some company, so he makes everyone in the world like him. He finds himself disgusted with his hateful attitude and simply remakes the world as it was.

If Rod Serling is moralizing, the “message” is that we should learn to love people, our jobs, and our lot in life. What this episode suggests, however, is that a man with the power to do *anything* will use that power simply to be more productive at work. In other words, it is easier for Archibald to imagine everyone on earth disappearing than it is for him to imagine *not* going to work, since that is the duty of the One-Dimensional Man. As Archibald’s boss tells him, reminding him that his body is designed for production, “Keeping yourself fit is not only a personal obligation, Beechcroft. No, no, no. In a larger sense, it is part of your responsibility to your job and to the firm that employs you.” Recalling the second definition of robot, “a person who acts mechanically or without emotion,” then Beechcroft is a robot—a person who only

---

<sup>202</sup> A recurring theme in *The Twilight Zone* is a person or persons trying to change their circumstances, but being unable to, or learning that their present circumstances were good, but that they just needed to see the silver lining. See, for instance, “Time Enough at Last,” “Mr. Bevis,” “The Eye of the Beholder,” “A Most Unusual Camera,” “The Man in the Bottle,” “The Silence,” and “Mr. Dingle the Strong.”

exists to perform a job, whose entire existence revolves around performing that job, even when no one is else in the world is present.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to take two major concerns of 1960's culture—the question of mechanization, and the psychological question of whether or not the “mind” of a human is the same as the “mind” of a robot—and show how they inform one another using three case studies from popular culture. When we speak popularly about robot performance, we often frame the discussion around whether or not a robot “knows” it is acting. However, this suggests that “true” acting exists in the mind of the actor, rather than in the labor that he or she is performing. If we think of acting as labor, then, yes, a robot, like Elektro, can “act” in a film—can do the kind of labor that humans would normally do. This is unsettling for two reasons: first, the 1960s gave rise to many real concerns that labor, as we know it, would actually disappear, causing unforeseen economic and social collapse. Second, this is unsettling because individuals in post-World War II culture began to see themselves *as* their jobs, and *as* the kind of material possessions that they collected with that income. In a world without jobs, there is no “humanity” as we conceive of it. It is within this environment that psychology, as an enterprise of knowledge production, asks the question, like John Cohen, “Is Man a Robot?” This is a crucial question because, as we see in *Sex Kittens Go to College* and in the two episodes of the *Twilight Zone*, both robots and humans (if there is even a difference) have “minds” that can be colonized with psychoanalysis. We are beings who labor, who are “productive,” and in a world in which robots can do the same jobs as humans—even “acting”—then we might as well be robots ourselves. After all, according to Bert O. States, the computer is “our progeny” and like us, they dream (or

desire). The goal of psychoanalysis to ensure that our only desire is to be a productive, efficient worker.

## Chapter 4

### No Alternative: 1980-1991

“... there really is no alternative.”  
-Margaret Thatcher, June 25, 1980<sup>203</sup>

In a key moment at the end of the 1984 film *The Terminator*, a pregnant Sarah Connor is driving south to Mexico with the plan that she will need to protect her unborn son, John Connor—the prophesied hero of the future resistance against the machines—and teach him to become a military leader. Stopping at a gas station, she encounters a young Mexican boy who takes her picture without her permission, then hands her the picture saying (via the gas station attendant acting as a translator), “You’re very beautiful, senora. He’s ashamed to ask you for five American dollars for this picture, but if he doesn’t, his father will beat him.” Sarah responds, “Pretty good hustle, kid,” then negotiates four dollars instead of five. The happy boy, as he is walking away, looks off into the horizon and says, “There’s a storm coming.” Sarah responds, “I know.” For Sarah, and for the plot of the film, this “storm” is the inevitable apocalypse, when sentient robots will rebel against humanity. This scene suggests that despite the looming and inevitable end of the world, commerce must continue. The world that John Connor will fight for is the world of liberalism: capitalism, globalism, free trade, and free choice—a world that late capitalism has embedded so deeply into the structure of our lives that it has become almost impossible to imagine a world without it. In the famous words of Margaret Thatcher, “there really is no alternative.”

On June 25, 1980, Margaret Thatcher gave a press conference for American journalists at 10 Downing Street. When asked by Len Downie of the *Washington Post* whether or not she

---

<sup>203</sup> “Press Conference for American Correspondents in London,” accessed June 24, 2017, <http://www.margareththatcher.org/Speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104389&doctype=1>.

endorsed her Government's unpopular fiscal policies, she responded, "It's certainly not meant as an endorsement of policies here, it's meant as a statement that this is what to do under these circumstances...I think for too long politics has really gone for the short-term solution often at the cost of the long term, real solution." Responding to a question by Susan Peterson of CBS and then a follow-up question by John Hart of NBC about the sixth G7 Summit<sup>204</sup> and a possible solution to the Soviet-Afghan crisis, Thatcher responded, "there is a great realisation [*sic*] that the West must in fact stand absolutely together. We stand together because we wish to do so, to defend the things we believe in. The Warsaw Pact countries stand together by force—they're not allowed to do anything else." When asked by Rush Kidder of *The Christian Science Monitor* how Thatcher plans to respond with "warmth so that those people who really are pressed to the wall, deserving businesses and others, and go bankrupt, have something there to fall back on?" she famously replied, "As you know, we're still suffering from the ejection of the extra money coming out of the election. It takes about fifteen months to work through and then you have to squeeze. And in the end it does work to the real economy. So in a sense we do have to do it. Because there really is no alternative."<sup>205</sup>

Thatcher describes fiscal austerity as the "real solution," claiming that there is "no alternative" to liberalism. This liberal order is maintained by the West, which "stand[s] together because we wish to do so, to defend the things we believe in." This language reveals an inherent tension in liberalism: that we choose to stand for it, because we believe in it, but also that there is no other choice. We either are like the West—free—or like the Warsaw Pact—ruled over by force. To maintain this "freedom," we must be "realists," engaged in solving the world's

---

<sup>204</sup> The annual meeting of top world leaders held since 1975.

<sup>205</sup> "Press Conference for American Correspondents in London," accessed June 24, 2017, <http://www.margarethatcher.org/Speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104389&doctype=1>.

problems in the only *real* way—fiscal austerity and neoliberal *laissez-faire* economics. Similarly, in Reagan’s famous 1987 (“tear down this wall”) speech at the Brandenburg Gate, he said, “In Europe, only one nation and those it controls refuse to join the community of freedom. Yet in this age of redoubled economic growth, of information and innovation, the Soviet Union faces a choice: It must make fundamental changes, or it will become obsolete.”<sup>206</sup> Much like Thatcher, Reagan suggests that the choice to join the West is not really a choice at all. One either “join[s] the community of freedom” or “become[s] obsolete.”

This contradiction—an economic system that we have “chosen” but to which there exists no real alternative—mirrors the contradictory definition of the subject outlined by Althusser. I argued in the introduction that Althusser presents a definition of the capitalist subject that mirrors the contradictory definition of the robot. For Althusser, the subject is “(1) a free subjectivity, a center of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions;” and “(2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting submission.”<sup>207</sup> Meaning, that a capitalist subject is “free” in the same way that Thatcher described the West: a free association of like-minded nation states that maintain liberalism through a commitment to its core principles (and is a “choice,” unlike the states who exists within the Warsaw Pact). However, a capitalist subject is *also* like the *realpolitik* Thatcher explained when defending her government’s decision to roll back the social safety net: “there really is no alternative.” Meaning, we are “stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting submission.” In other words, capitalism is hailed as the ultimate expression of human freedom—self-fulfillment, self-expression, upward mobility, be anything you want, follow your dreams—

---

<sup>206</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin,” accessed May 24, 2017. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34390>.

<sup>207</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 123.

because it presents you with “choice,” but you are not free to choose anything other than capitalism.<sup>208</sup>

The figure of the robot is also a contradictory figure. It is “an intelligent artificial being typically made of metal and resembling in some way a human or other animal.” It is also “a person who acts mechanically or without emotion.”<sup>209</sup> Like the capitalist subject, it is both free to move and to act—the ultimate expression of autonomy but also a constrained, obedient servant. This is why robots serve as such fascinating ideological tools. A common trope in Hollywood robot films from the late twentieth century is a speech by a human character where he or she outlines what makes humans “special” or “different” from machines. It is machines that have no choice, they say. It is machines who have no feelings, they say. *We*, on the other hand, have choices and feelings—this is what makes us human. In other words, this thing we call ideology is *not here* with me; it is *over there* with them.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that robots serve as a site where ideology (vis-à-vis Althusser and the capitalist notion of subject formation) manifests itself in very explicit ways. This continues to hold true in two blockbuster Hollywood films that I read in this chapter, namely *The Terminator* and its 1991 sequel *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. These films

---

<sup>208</sup> This point is made explicit in a rather humorous 1985 Wendy’s commercial, which is so blatant in its liberalism as to almost qualify as propaganda. In this commercial, a uniformed, stern Soviet woman is announcing a fashion show. “Is next...daywear,” she yells into the microphone. A woman in an unflattering, plain dress walks onto the stage while a violinist plays a tune. “Very nice,” the announcer screams while an audience of babushkas and uniformed men give unenthusiastic claps. “Next...eveningwear,” she yells. The model walks out in the same outfit, only this time she is carrying a flashlight (the joke being that to go out in the evening one needs to be able to see, but the USSR is too primitive to have working lights). A narrator then tells us, “Having no choice is no fun. That’s why, at Wendy’s, every hamburger isn’t dressed the same...Having a choice is better than none.” For the final joke (comedy comes in threes), the announcer yells, “Next...swimwear.” The model enters, wearing the same outfit, only this time she is carrying a beach ball. The narrator then gives us Wendy’s slogan: Choose fresh. Choose Wendy’s. The point is obvious. In the Soviet Union, there is no real choice. Only in the United States of Wendy’s can you experience true freedom—the freedom to pick your own burger toppings. What is fascinating is the language that “having a choice is better than none.” A choice. You are free, but not very free, Wendy’s reminds us. “Wendy’s Commercial – Soviet Fashion Show,” *YouTube*, last modified Sept. 3, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CaMUfxVJVQ>.

<sup>209</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “robot.” n2.



are set in Cold War and post-Cold War contexts (which both films make explicit), respectively, but more importantly, both films help support capitalism through the rhetoric of choice and agency. In *The Terminator*, a looming and inevitable nuclear apocalypse threatens all humanity. I argue that the film wants to imagine a world in which its characters have the “choice” to stop the apocalypse. However, the fiction of the film suggests that the characters are interpellated as subjects who only imagine themselves to have a choice. Nuclear war is inevitable, and the characters in the film can only choose to accept it, knowing that eventually liberalism will be victorious.

In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, a post-Cold War film, the apocalypse is successfully staved off, and the liberal values of its characters are universalized. These values are the “universal” values of family and self-sacrifice, which ideologically represent universal liberal values. While it is true that the Cold War officially ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, would most people have identified at that moment as the ending of Cold War? Would they have identified the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as the end? The actual end of the Cold War in the popular imagination is a site of uncertainty, which is precisely the moment in which *Terminator 2* situates itself. *Terminator 2* was released on July 3, 1991, five months before the final collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the film is set in 1995 and contains a line where the young John Connor asks Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Terminator character, after learning that Skynet attacked (will attack) Russia with nuclear weapons, “Why attack Russia? Aren’t they our friends now?” *Terminator 2* exists within a liminal space where the utopian vision of the universal application of liberalism was in process—what Francis Fukuyama calls “the end of history.” What the film seeks to do is to suggest that liberalism is a “choice,” and if we want a future free from nuclear conflict, it is the only choice.

The idea that *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* represent a Cold War and post-Cold War world, respectively, is not an argument that is unique to me. For instance, Phillip E. Wegner argues that the films “form a dialectical sequence...as each film reworks the ideological and political raw materials of its predecessor.”<sup>210</sup> In this dialectical sequence, the first film “successfully plays on the reigning Cold War fear of immanent nuclear annihilation, an event that would be unleashed by powers that had long ago escaped the control of human agency.”<sup>211</sup> The second film, however, “seeks to reverse all this, as it now works to assure its viewers that such a disaster will never come to pass.”<sup>212</sup> Through this reworking of the fiction in the films, Wegner observes, they show that the liberal order is here to stay. Where my intervention is different is that, in addition to placing the films in their historical context, I argue that both films are tools of sophisticated subject formation.

I will make my argument in the following ways. First, I argue that both the Reagan and Thatcher administrations labored under what Mark Fisher calls “capitalist realism,” which is the belief that there is no horizon beyond capitalism. This belief is mirrored in Hollywood cinema, which finds it easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. Second, I argue that *The Terminator* (along with its sequel, discussed later) is a capitalist realist film in which its characters are interpellated as capitalist subjects while appearing to be given the freedom of choice. Third, I will argue that the Culture Wars of the 1990s provide context for understanding how the ISA of Hollywood works. I will cite the work of popular conservative film critic Michael Medved to argue that resistance to Hollywood on “moral” grounds makes Hollywood cinema appear subversive. Part of the power of the ISA is that it makes consumption

---

<sup>210</sup> Phillip E. Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. 62.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 64.

appear to be a radical, anti-establishment choice, rather than simply part of a capitalist system.

Fourth, I will cite the work of Lee Edelman to argue that *Terminator 2*'s focus on family values ideologically universalizes liberalism by suggesting that there really is no alternative.

## Capitalist Realism

Thatcher's special relationship with Reagan makes her "no alternative" phrase particularly relevant for this chapter.<sup>213</sup> The economic problems facing Britain were similar to the ones facing the United States. James Cooper writes, "The emergence of Thatcher and Reagan was no historical accident, but rather the result of a combination of concerns about national decline and the development of alternative economic paradigms in Britain and America."<sup>214</sup> In the United States, Reagan was pursuing similar<sup>215</sup> policies as Thatcher, with both governments influencing one another and influenced by similar thinkers outside of their respective governments. For instance, inspired by the work of economist Milton Friedman, both Thatcher's "monetarist"<sup>216</sup> policy and Reagan's so-called Reaganomics were remarkably similar (though not identical), with a "mutual impact"<sup>217</sup> between the two governments. As another example, both

---

<sup>213</sup> Reagan and Thatcher met on April 9, 1975, in the House of Commons. The meeting, which was scheduled to last only forty-five minutes, lasted about an hour and a half. Reagan had "a very soft spot for a lady," and while Thatcher may have been "the Iron Lady, she did not lose, and indeed was prepared to use, her femininity" (1). In 1979, when Thatcher was elected Prime Minister, Reagan called to congratulate her but was turned down by an operator who did not know about their friendship. Apparently, a "mere former Governor of California and failed presidential candidate was not judged to have a sufficient call upon the time of the new Prime Minister" (11). In 1980, after Reagan was elected President, Thatcher was one of the first to call and congratulate him. Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher* (New York: Norton, 1991), 23.

<sup>214</sup> James Cooper, *Margaret Thatcher & Ronald Reagan: A Very Political Special Relationship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

<sup>215</sup> "Both administrations adopted similar philosophy or rhetoric at different times, depending on circumstances, although a shared philosophy clearly did not translate into identical policies" (ibid., 185).

<sup>216</sup> Both Thatcher and Reagan "argued that government economic intervention, as characterised [*sic*] by the post-war Keynesian approach, although well intentioned, had resulted in the printing of money and subsequent inflationary expectations" (ibid., 33).

<sup>217</sup> The question of "who influence whom" is difficult. Cooper writes, "in the case of monetary policy, it is clear that Thatcher and Reagan, and their administrations, drew on common influences in terms of policy development and awareness." However, as to "who influenced whom," both Thatcher and Reagan had common influences, but also went their own way" (ibid., 181).

administrations pursued privatization of previously nationalized industries<sup>218</sup> and government deregulation.

For both Thatcher and Reagan, economic and domestic policy came first and foreign policy second. One of Reagan's former senior advisors said of him "he's interested in the expansion of freedom, but for him that means very much market-oriented democracy." Smith writes, "The belief in the moral dimension of capitalism, the association of the free market with the free society, was common to Thatcher and Reagan."<sup>219</sup> While it is Thatcher who said there is "no alternative," Reagan would have undoubtedly agreed. "Market-oriented democracy" at home—a "moral" imperative—is equivalent to the expansion of American interests abroad. Reagan believed that America was a "shining city upon a hill," which Justin D. Garrison says, "Stood as an overarching symbol for a complex mixture of ideas about politics, God, human history, America, its people, and its mission and calling."<sup>220</sup> One of these ideas was that the entrepreneurial spirit was essential for American democracy. Speaking to a group of entrepreneurs in Georgia in 1984, Reagan said, "It's people like you who show us the heart of America is good, the spirit of America is strong, and the future of America is great. You give meaning to words like entrepreneur, self-reliance, personal initiative and yes, optimism and confidence. And you will lead America to take freedom's next step."<sup>221</sup> This belief in American "self-reliance" and "personal initiative" influenced Reagan's ideas about foreign policy. Garrison writes, "Since all human beings were more or less the same—that is, they were more or less

---

<sup>218</sup> Cooper writes, "Privatisation [*sic*] of the nationalized industries saw British policy makers and the Thatcher government taking into account the experience of the American regulatory model. However, the success of privatisation [*sic*] in reducing government intervention in the economy and generating funds for the exchequer ensured that the Reagan administration noticed the benefits of the policy, particularly given its own ballooning budgetary deficit" (ibid., 167).

<sup>219</sup> Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 19.

<sup>220</sup> Justin D. Garrison, *"An Empire of Ideals": The Chimeric Imagination of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 158.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 54.

American in spirit—Reagan believed that all people desired and deserved to live under liberty and democracy.” However, “various governments around the world...were undermining global aspirations for freedom and democratic government by ignoring the will and rights of their peoples.”<sup>222</sup> For Reagan, then, America is a “shining city on a hill” with a powerful entrepreneurial spirit, which is universalized as foreign policy—everyone is “free.” However, some people are crushed by their governments, which prevent them from doing what they should be “free” to do: become entrepreneurs. For Reagan, it is impossible to imagine freedom, at home and abroad, without commerce.

Robert Dallek relates an amusing anecdote about this. The Reagan administration believed that the Soviet Union had developed elaborate survival plans in the case of a nuclear attack—fallout shelters and city evacuation plans. This survival plan, the administration believed, would give the Soviets the ability to strike first, knowing that they could survive a counterattack. Deputy undersecretary of defense, Thomas K. Jones, related to the *Los Angeles Times* what the US would do as its survival plan. The plan was for Americans to “dig holes and cover them with a couple of doors and three feet of dirt.” This would allow America to recover after just a few years. “It’s the dirt that does it,” Jones said. Dallek writes, “The belief that any such civil defense program could allow the country to survive a nuclear conflict encourages the administration to contemplate fighting such a war.” Just as ludicrously, “The administration’s optimistic plans for delivering the mail after a nuclear attack also testified to its determination to prepare the country for such a conflict.” In a meeting with the House subcommittee, the Postal Service Civil Defense Coordinator said, “Those that are left will get their mail... [First-class mail] would be delivered even if the survivors ran out of stamps.” The subcommittee responded,

---

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 101.

“There will be no addresses, no streets, no blocks, no houses...there will also be no trucks, trains or airplanes for delivering the mail.” A defense policy expert chimed in, “I can assure you that while neither rain nor heat nor gloom of night will stay the postal couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds, nuclear war will.”<sup>223</sup> The Reagan administration was thoroughly mocked for its defense plans, but what the optimism of this absurd plan suggests is a belief that it is easier to imagine a nuclear holocaust than it is to imagine our way of life changing in any significant way.

In the documentary film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek says, “How come it is easier for us to imagine the end of all life on earth...than a modest change in our economic order? Perhaps the time has come to set our possibilities straight and to become realists by way of demanding what appears as impossible in the economic domain.”<sup>224</sup> Žižek here is referring to apocalyptic films that manage, even in their doomsaying about the end of the world, to have a couple whose journey we follow through the apocalypse. Often, the apocalypse serves as the means by which they meet, and by the end of the film, the young couple are inseparable, assuring the viewer that the world order will continue. The continuation of the heterosexual couple, even in the midst of the apocalypse, is ideologically linked to the continuation of the social order, or capitalism. Frederic Jameson makes a similar point in *Archaeologies of the Future*, where he writes,

To adapt Mrs [*sic*] Thatcher's famous dictum, there is no alternative to Utopia, and late capitalism seems to have no natural enemies. . . What is crippling is not the presence of an enemy but rather the universal belief, not only that this tendency is irreversible, but that the historical alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically available.”<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>223</sup> Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 146-148.

<sup>224</sup> *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2013. British Film Institute.

<sup>225</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), xii.

The foreboding sense that capitalism is the final resting point of history—the final frontier—is what Mark Fisher calls “capitalist realism.” Fisher writes that he is “reminded of the phrase attributed to Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.” It is this slogan, he argues, that “captures precisely what I mean by ‘capitalist realism’: the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it.” In modern dystopian fiction, he writes, “ultra-authoritarianism and Capital are by no means incompatible: internment camps and franchise coffee bars co-exist.”<sup>226</sup> Fisher describes the phrase “capitalist realism” (not originally coined by Fisher), as a worldview which “cannot be confined to art or to the quasi-propagandistic way in which advertising functions. It is more like a pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action.”<sup>227</sup> Rather than being the simple recognition of propagandistic forces, my argument in this dissertation is that ideology *is the very process* by which we come to see ourselves as free subjects who have “woken up.” This subjectivity is made clear in *The Terminator*.

### ***The Terminator***

The film takes place in two different times. The first is 2029. The second period is 1984. During the events of the second period, a computer program known as Skynet, built by the fictional Cyberdyne Systems,<sup>228</sup> was integrated into NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) as a defense AI. After gaining sentience, this AI launched nukes at Russia,

---

<sup>226</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, 2.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>228</sup> A Japanese robotics company called Cyberdyne was founded in 2004. It is supposedly not a reference to *The Terminator* franchise.

knowing that it would prompt the Russian missiles' launch protocols. The resulting apocalypse wiped out most human life. By the year 2029, Skynet is working to eradicate the last human resistance using sentient machines it has built expressly for killing. One of their most effective weapons against the humans are cyborgs known as terminators. Terminators are infiltration units with a robotic endoskeleton covered in organic tissue. They are designed to look like humans so that they can move into enemy territory and get close to their targets before assassinating them. Their chief target is the leader of the resistance, a man named John Connor.

In the future, John leads the humans in a final assault against Skynet's mainframe, wiping it out, which means victory for humanity. Knowing it was facing defeat, Skynet used an emergency protocol to send one of its terminator units back in time to the year 1984 with one mission: kill Sarah Connor, the mother of John Connor. If Skynet could kill her before John is ever born, then the resistance will fail. The humans are aware of this plan and send one of their own, a soldier named Kyle Reese, to protect Sarah from termination. He is successful but is killed in the process. Sarah is saved, and the future of humanity secured. Reese volunteered for the mission because of a picture that John gave him of Sarah when she was young. Reese fell in love with the woman in the picture. Sarah falls for Reese as well, and the result of their union is John Connor. At the end of the film, a young boy takes a picture of Sarah—the very picture that John will one day give to Reese. Sarah then drives away, knowing both that there is an inevitable nuclear apocalypse on the horizon and that she carries the savior of humanity in her womb.

Sean French, writing to a British audience, says of the film that

in the United States there is a quite separate right-wing anti-authoritarian tradition, an individualism which sees almost all forms of social organisation [*sic*] and control—police, army, federal government, tax collection, even printed money—as creeping forms of communism which are neutering the pioneering spirit that built America.



In *The Terminator*, the “law enforcement officers...as well as the ordinary people they serve, have become weak and incapable of defending their own way of life, which is itself alienated and parasitic.”<sup>229</sup> French is correct, I believe, that the film presents a pioneering, individualist, American spirit. The police are obstacles to overcome in saving the world, ineffectual at stopping the rampaging death machine from the future. The psychology industry, represented in the character of criminal psychologist Peter Silberman, is ineffectual at diagnosing the true nature of Kyle Reese. Silberman believes Reese to be delusional, ignoring his warnings about Skynet and the threat that the Terminator poses. The film shows us that the most individualistic, fear-mongering, paranoid conspiracies about the end of the world *are correct*. Nuclear war is coming. The enemy walks among us, and no one but Reese—the most individualist and therefore the most inherently capitalist character—can stop it, ensuring that the rest of humanity will continue to enjoy capitalism.

French is wrong, however, when he says that the life people lead is “alienated and parasitic.” Like any narrative interrupted by an outside force, *The Terminator* seeks a return to normality. The “normal” world of the film is a world of capitalist consumption. Sarah works at a small diner as a server. She has a roommate. She goes on dates. She visits bars and clubs. This is the world that is being threatened by The Terminator. It is a world that the film wants to believe is worth saving. In one key scene, Reese falls asleep in a car. While asleep, he has a PTSD flashback (to the future, of course) where he remembers the future conflict vividly, seeing friends of his killed in action. When he wakes up from the nightmare, there is a commercial playing on the car radio. The nuclear apocalypse is a *nightmare* the film reminds us. What is *here and now* is the world of consumption. As an important reminder of how essential television is to our way

---

<sup>229</sup> Sean French, *The Terminator* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 50.

of life, in another glimpse of the future conflict, we are shown the inside of a human bunker where survivors use dogs to sniff out terminators. In this bunker, we see a person huddled in front of a television set. The camera angle changes and we see that the television set is a hollowed-out husk with a fire burning inside of it.

Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood write that there has been “an increased interest in the role ideology played” in the Cold War.

In recent years...many scholars have rightly recognized that the Cold War was not fought solely between desk-bound politicians and generals with their fingers on the nuclear triggers. Like the world wars (if not more so, because of its duration), the Cold War was a people’s war, too, and therefore a conflict that had important social and cultural dimensions.<sup>230</sup>

This ideological battle was waged by the media which told people “why it was necessary to wage this new kind of seemingly permanent war, what the conflict was (and was not) about, and whose opinion they should trust. Cinema’s potency during the Cold War derived from the very outset to show audiences the ‘reality’ of what was for most people a peculiarly abstract, ‘virtual’ conflict.”<sup>231</sup> What Cold War cinema did, essentially, was to bring the war home. In the case of *The Terminator*—quite literally. The battleground is both the post-apocalyptic 2029 *and* the year 1984. The real enemy is at home and can only be fought by radical individualists who remain vigilant about the inevitability of nuclear war.

It is not enough, however, simply to say the film is pro-war. Certainly, to a point, the argument could be made that the film is actually anti-war. Skynet is an obvious reference to Reagan’s Star Wars program. The relationship between NORAD and Cyberdine Systems is an obvious critique of the military-industrial complex. A sentient machine manages to manipulate

---

<sup>230</sup> Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

both sides to begin a nuclear war (which is clearly a bad thing). The world does not want war. Kyle Reese does not want war. Instead, the film portrays war as *inevitable* even while creating a certain amount of suspense before the film reaches its climax, and we learn about the inevitable fate. This is how ideology functions, which is to say that through ideology we imagine ourselves as agents with free will, while our inevitable interpellation into capitalism is masked. Before Reese travels back in time, John gives him a message to give to his mother. The message is, “The future has not been written. There is no fate but what we make ourselves.” This appears to mean that the events in the future are changeable. Skynet could be stopped. Alternatively, it could mean that Skynet could win by successfully assassinating Sarah Connor. None of this happens, however. Everything that was fated to happen does happen. Sarah is pregnant with John. The Terminator is defeated. A “storm is coming.” The prophesied apocalypse is on its way, and John Connor—prophesied hero—is a subject even before his birth.

For Althusser, a subject is “expected” before its birth thus confirming its status as a subject. John Connor is also “expected.” He is “John Connor” before his birth. He will save humanity. Despite assurances that “the future has not been written” and “there is no fate but what we make,” the future *is* set. The only “choice” we have is to accept the inevitability of war—a war that the film wants to claim is justified. At one point in the film, before Sarah believes that Reese is really who he claims to be, he tells her that the “Terminator is out there. It can’t be bargained with. It can’t be reasoned with. It doesn’t feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop. Ever. Until you are dead.” If *that* is our enemy, a viewer might say, then *I* must be an emotionally intelligent, agential being, and yes, I would choose to fight such an enemy. While war may be inevitable, it is also necessary against such a ruthless enemy, and victory, no matter how far off, is assured.

## The End of History and the Culture War

To make sense of *Terminator 2*, the film must be understood in the context of the Culture Wars of the 1990s. A useful starting point in beginning to understand the stakes and parameters of that war is Francis Fukuyama's famous book *The End of History and the Last Man*. This book explores the victory of Western liberalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall. While the book is not meant as a history of the Cold War, Fukuyama argues that History, rather than "history" is essentially over. What he means is not that "events" will stop happening, but that the progressive histories of Hegel and Marx have reached their apex. There is nothing after liberal democracy. While developed nations still have inequality and injustice, "these problems were ones of incomplete implementation of the twin principles of liberty and equality on which modern democracy is founded, rather than of flaws in the principles themselves."<sup>232</sup> Fukuyama recognizes that not every country has yet embraced liberal democratic principles, but they will, eventually. He is committed to a progressive history with liberal democracy as its end goal—the final stage in History. Williams et. al. writes that Fukuyama "is not claiming that all modern states are, or soon will become, democratic. . . . What is central to his argument is that 'the *ideal* of liberal democracy' cannot be improved upon."<sup>233</sup> What Fukuyama's work suggests is that the great economic debates of the twentieth century had finally come to end. Politics, then, could no longer be about economic questions, since that question had been answered. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, politics had to be about something else: moral, cultural, and social issues.

In her biography of Margaret Thatcher, *There Is No Alternative*, Claire Berlinski makes a similar point to Fukuyama. She writes,

---

<sup>232</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), xi.

<sup>233</sup> Howard Williams, David Sullivan, and Gwynn Matthews, *Francis Fukuyama and the End of History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 83.

The final decade of the twentieth century was marked by a dramatic, global disenchantment with Marxist theory and experiments. This disenchantment had many causes, not least among them the poverty of the theory and the failure of the experiments, but Thatcher's anti-socialist revolution in Britain, combined with the impact of her personality on the international stage, contributed to it significantly. By setting a domestic example of socialism reversed, she proved a point: The forces of history did *not* inevitably lead to socialism, as Marx had predicted, nor was it true that once socialism arrived, there could be no going back. She thus prompted observers around the world to ask a crucial question: Why must *we* have socialism? After all, Britain got rid of it... Thatcher's role in the great disenchantment was not limited to setting an example in Britain and encouraging others to follow suit. What she managed to do, more effectively than any other politician in history—including Ronald Reagan—was convey a very particular message about socialism. It was not only that socialism was an economically inefficient way to organize human societies. It was not only that communist regimes had in the twentieth century drenched the world in blood. It was that socialism—in all its incarnations, wherever and however it was applied—was morally corrupting.<sup>234</sup>

While I do not share Berlinski's admiration of Thatcher (she is also a pro-Thatcher propagandist who is completely wrong to call Britain a socialist country), she is correct that Thatcher successfully managed to make the case for many in the West that socialism was a morally bankrupt project. Additionally, if the long-promised Marxist revolution could be resisted and even rolled back, then it "proves" that not only is liberal democracy a "better" and more "free" system—it is also morally correct. This emphasis on universal morality, seen in Reaganism and Thatcherism, is important in understanding the Culture Wars of the 1990s.<sup>235</sup> It is also a major theme in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, which shifts the nuclear holocaust themes of its predecessor into "universal" moral themes: family and self-sacrifice. Since liberalism was now seen as the final horizon for human development—the Hegelian end of history—the ISA now places front and center the universal applicability of its moral themes. However, many people like Pat Buchanan and Michael Medved saw in Hollywood not universal moral themes but

---

<sup>234</sup> Claire Berlinski, *There Is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 6-7.

<sup>235</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint when, exactly, an abstract concept like a "culture war" begins and ends. Certainly, it did not begin in the 1990s, and it is not yet over in 2017. Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 26.

“poison” and “pornography” and “sewage.” This so-called Culture War is part of the ISA, which is designed to make consumption of Hollywood cinema appear to be a radical or subversive act. In fighting against Hollywood, conservative critics like Medved simply sustain its power.

“The Cold War ended officially on September 9, 1991, according to *Time Magazine*...Capitalism and democracy were triumphant...It seemed as though this century’s great ideological conflicts were, indeed, over. But were they? Even as the East-West divide was vanishing, a new war was being declared at home: the ‘Culture War,’”<sup>236</sup> writes Ronnie D. Lipschutz. While he never uses the term “Culture War” in his 1992 speech at the Republican National Convention, Pat Buchanan’s famous speech best highlights the parameters of the war. He celebrates the Republican Party generally—and Reagan specifically—for bringing an end to the Cold War and reuniting Europe. The office of the president, he argues, quoting Truman, is “preeminently a place of moral leadership.” This “moral leadership” is found within the Republican Party. Democrats, on the other hand, embodied by Bill Clinton and his “lawyer-spouse” are “environmental extremists who put insects, rats and birds ahead of families, workers and jobs” and believe in “unrestricted abortion on demand” and that “12-year-olds should have a right to sue their parents.”<sup>237</sup> In his documentary *The Power of Nightmares*, Adam Curtis argues that after the fall of the Soviet Union, neoconservatives no longer had an external enemy. An external enemy was necessary for the United States to situate itself as a beacon of goodness in the world. Lacking that enemy, neoconservatives turned Bill Clinton into the enemy, arguing that the moral fabric of America was at stake.<sup>238</sup> While claims of subversive immorality at work in

---

<sup>236</sup> Ronnie D. Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies: Film, Fiction, and Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 187.

<sup>237</sup> Patrick J. Buchanan, *1992 Republican National Convention Speech*, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148>.

<sup>238</sup> *The Power of Nightmares, Episode 2: The Phantom Victory*, directed by Adam Curtis. BBC, 2004.

the United States were not new, what made 1992 different was the suggestion that this immorality came from *within* rather than a coming from *without* via some sort of communist plot.<sup>239</sup> In this new post-communist world, Hollywood was seen as an important battleground for this Culture War not because communists had infiltrated Hollywood but because Hollywood itself was seen as a source of filth. As Buchanan said in his address, “We stand with President Bush in favor of the right of small towns and communities to control the raw sewage of pornography that pollutes our popular culture.”<sup>240</sup>

Perhaps the most famous and influential work arguing for the perceived moral decay of Hollywood is Michael Medved’s 1992 book *Hollywood vs. America*. In quoting Medved—a conservative, non-academic, popular film critic and moralizer—I do not mean to either suggest that his ideas are valuable nor do I see him as a straw man. Rather, I am using him for two reasons. First, I, and other scholars like Ian Scott, see him as representative of the feelings of many conservative Americans during the Culture Wars of the early 1990s. He taps into a deep-seated resentment that many Americans had (and still have) toward what is perceived to be Hollywood elites attempting to tell ordinary Americans how to live their lives, often in ways that are perceived to be contrary to “traditional” values. Secondly, Medved is representative of the way in which Hollywood works very subtly as an ISA. Most Hollywood films are *not* subverting “traditional” values but are upholding them. Most Hollywood films are pro-American militarism and serve as violent, individualistic, macho, American wish fulfillment. However, it is this

---

<sup>239</sup> Tony Perucci argues, for instance, that Paul Robeson was the perfect target for HUAC, existing as he did at the crossroads of several identities. He writes, “Madness, Communism, homosexuality, theatricality, and blackness and their articulation became key elements in a semiotics of disloyalty. Paul Robeson and his performances became the foremost sites where these elements were seen to coalesce. His detractors pathologized him by linking his alleged madness and status as an actor with his Communist sympathies and activism for civil rights and anticolonial movements.” Tony Perucci, “The Red Mask of Sanity: Paul Robeson, HUAC, and the Sound of Cold War Performance,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 53, no. 4 (2009): 20.

<sup>240</sup> Patrick J. Buchanan, *1992 Republican National Convention Speech*.

resistance from conservative cultural forces, represented by Medved, which makes Hollywood *appear* subversive. Medved is not aware of this, nor would he acknowledge it, since the ISA is subtle, masking its effects even as they are deployed. Celebrities at award shows can imagine themselves to be the vanguard of progressivism while at the same time their films can serve as an ISA that upholds traditional values and interpellates subjects. Consumers see in Hollywood a way to ethically consume (and perhaps be a bit naughty) by supporting mainstream cinema, all the while upholding American imperialism.

In the acknowledgments to the book, Medved thanks his wife, who is a clinical psychologist. She is able to “keep [him] sane” when “popular culture inflicts toxic doses of weirdness.”<sup>241</sup> The word “toxic” is no accident here. The book is filled with the kind of language describing Hollywood as a blight—a disease in America. Like the “raw sewage of pornography” that Pat Buchanan sees, “the dream factory has become the poison factory,”<sup>242</sup> Medved writes. He quotes a syndicated columnist who says that he can no longer watch TV because it has “sunk to the sewer level, dispensing the foulest of smells that resemble the garbage I take to the curb twice a week.”<sup>243</sup> There is a deep undercurrent of disappointment with Hollywood, Medved argues. Most Americans are fed up with it, and the entire industry is dying. And it is not just Hollywood; it is television and music, too. People are desperate for wholesome entertainment that reflects their values. He sees the increasing popularity of country music, which is “earthy and unpretentious” and able to “connect with the everyday concerns of Middle America,”<sup>244</sup> as evidence for this yearning. Despite people fleeing in droves from the cinema,<sup>245</sup> Hollywood

---

<sup>241</sup> Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), xiii.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>245</sup> Medved cites data from *Variety* which says that 1991 “brought only 960 million motion picture admissions—the lowest total in fifteen years” (*ibid.*, 8).



continues to make what Medved sees as anti-American, anti-family, and anti-military propaganda. One piece of evidence Medved uses to show that Hollywood is anti-American and anti-military is that Americans overwhelmingly supported the Gulf War, yet Hollywood refused to make films about it:

While the battle raged in the Middle East, many observers speculated on the rash of exploitation films that would inevitably follow America's victory. Radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh, for example, spoke with his 11 million listeners nearly every day about a fantasy project called *Gulf War Won*, which would star Clint Eastwood as George Bush, Pat Sajak as Dan Quayle, Limbaugh himself as Norman Schwarzkopf, and so forth. Amazingly enough, none of the expected projects ever materialized.<sup>246</sup>

Hollywood's failure to make this "fantasy project" proves that "Hollywood's deeply held biases can interfere with its commercial self-interest." If Hollywood were truly about making money, Medved argues, would they not have wanted to "capitalize on the public's enthusiastic support for Operation Desert Storm?"<sup>247</sup> Instead, they must be interested in pushing an agenda that is radically anti-family, anti-military, and anti-American.

Ian Scott's rebuttal to Medved sums up my own thoughts more articulately than I could.

He writes that while

many [films]...have locked perceptions of the film industry at the very least into an ideological and philosophical straightjacket that has always somehow interpreted Hollywood as being liberal and left-leaning in its persuasion, many pictures, whether they are conscious of it or not, still manage to uphold the traditions and philosophies that conservative thinkers, and even the Bush Administration of 2001-9, hold so dear...Ultimately, liberalism is often the banner under which most commentators—and especially those on the right in American life, as already indicated—believe Hollywood political movies operate. As contemporary indictments of certain regimes, incidents or eras of controversy and change, that is possibly right, but it is to ignore the underlying, and temperate nature of movies (and moviemakers) that self-consciously re-articulate messages of hope and expectation that American politics has lived and breathed for the better part of 200 years.<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ian Scott, *American Politics in Hollywood Films*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 17, 23-24.

Conservative critics like Medved tend to focus on superficial elements of Hollywood films: sex, violence, and foul language. However, Hollywood films are often, beneath their “immoral” surface, “moral” films that deal with “universal” values: family, individualism, and nationalism. Whether these films are “conscious of it or not,” Hollywood tends toward upholding these “universal” values. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is no exception.

### ***Terminator 2***

I have argued so far that Fukuyama and Medved set the stakes and parameters of the Culture Wars, which are about social and cultural issues, since the economic issue had been settled. I have also argued that Medved serves to strengthen the Hollywood ISA by making Hollywood appear subversive. I will now offer a reading of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* where I argue three things. First, the film celebrates and upholds the values of family and self-sacrifice. Second, using the work of Lee Edelman, I will argue that these “universal” values, which focus on the importance of future generations, are values that support and sustain liberalism. Third, I will argue that the film interpellates subjects through its central theme of “universal” human values.

Like its predecessor, *Judgment Day* is set in two different times. This time it is 2029 and 1995 (although the film was made in 1991). Once again, Skynet sends a robot back in time. This time, its target is John Connor, now an 11-year-old boy living with foster parents in Los Angeles. Between 1984 and 1995, Sarah Connor has been living her life on the run, staying with various men who could teach her survival and combat skills. Whenever she told these men about robots from the future trying to kill her—and of John Connor’s destiny to save humanity—the relationship would end, and she would move on to someone else. Sarah was eventually taken to a psych ward, and John was taken to live with foster parents. The robot sent to kill John is a

significantly more advanced model than the T-800 from the first film. It is a T-1000, a liquid metal cyborg capable of assuming the shape of anything it touches and modifying its limbs into deadly weapons. In the year 2029, the human resistance captures a T-800, which John reprograms and sends back in time to protect 11-year-old John. In 1995, John and the T-800 rescue Sarah from the psych ward, then decide that they must prevent Judgment Day from ever happening.

Cyberdine Systems was able to recover the CPU (the central processing unit) and metal arm from the previous film's T-800. Using this technology, Dr. Miles Dyson is working to create artificial intelligence. Knowing that Dyson's work will eventually create Skynet and lead to Judgment Day—the launching of the world's nuclear arsenal—Sarah, John, and the T-800 set out to stop Dyson. They are able to convince Dyson that the T-800 is from the future and that Dyson's work could lead to the end of humanity as we know it. Dyson agrees to help them infiltrate Cyberdine Systems and destroy his work. After doing so, they are pursued by the T-1000, which they lure into a factory, killing it by pushing it into molten steel. The T-800 then decides that he must sacrifice himself so that no part of him survives to be reverse engineered. He is also melted in the steel and Judgment Day is permanently averted.

I have argued that *Terminator 2* deals with the “universal” theme of family<sup>249</sup> and self-sacrifice. This is because the film is primarily the story of two fathers: Dr. Dyson and the T-800. Dyson is a busy man, wholly consumed by his work. He believes that he is very close to unlocking the secret of true artificial intelligence, thereby revolutionizing the world. Whether he

---

<sup>249</sup> While I am arguing that the film reaffirms heteronormative gender and family dynamics, David Greven argues that the film “draw[s] on longstanding cultural fantasies of gay leather culture but also on the denaturing straight appropriations of this culture to produce a hybrid new masculine identity that embraces hypermasculinity while attempting to keep homoerotic energies and associations at bay—a wobbly enterprise, indeed.” David Greben, “Cyborg Masochism, Homo-Fascism: Rereading *Terminator 2*,” *Postmodern Culture* 19, no. 1 (2008), online.

is at his office or at home, he is always working. In one key scene, Dyson is working at home in his beautiful Los Angeles house when his wife interrupts him. She reminds him that he promised to take the kids to the waterpark. While Dyson initially declines, saying that he wants to keep working, his wife reminds him that family is the most important thing and that his work can wait. Dyson agrees, calling his excited children into his arms and telling them that they will go to the waterpark as promised. Later, when Dyson agrees to help Sarah, John, and the T-800, he agrees to do it so that he can secure a safe future for his children. At Cyberdine Systems, Dyson, wounded from gunfire, sacrifices his life to set off the bomb that destroys the facility. Dyson's journey is that of an initially reluctant father who sacrifices himself for the greater good of humanity and of his family.

The T-800 is also a reluctant father. John finds him to be a “geek” because of the way he talks. He tries to teach the T-800 to lighten up, to say things like “Hasta la vista, baby.” John tells him to “be more human, and not such a dork all the time.” After learning that the T-800 can be modified to learn more than it currently knows, Sarah and John alter the CPU so that it can learn to “be more human.” In one key moment, the T-800 sees John crying and asks, “What’s wrong with your eyes?” Later, after learning more about humans from John, he asks, “Why do you cry?” In this scene, John is crying because he never had a real, stable home. “I wish I could have met my real dad,” he says while he and the T-800 bond over a broken car that they fix. Seeing them together, in what appears to be playing, Sarah says in a voice over,

Watching John with the machine, it was suddenly so clear. The Terminator would never stop. It would never leave him. And it would never hurt him. Never shout at him or get drunk and hit him, or say it was too busy to spend time with him. It would always be there. And it would die to protect him. Of all the would-be fathers who came and went over the years, this thing—this machine—was the only one who measured up. In an insane world, it was the sanest choice.

At the end of the film, after the T-1000 is defeated, the T-800 says to John, “I know why you cry.” He has finally learned this because it is now time to say goodbye. He must sacrifice himself to secure a future free from Judgment Day. The father figure dies to save humanity and his own “family.” Alan Turing situates verbal communication as the marker for intelligence—the ability to “imitate” a human. *The Terminator* franchise situates emotional intelligence as the marker for “humanity.” The T-800 does not become “human” because it can successfully imitate a human—in fact, it cannot; part of the humor of the film is that he is atrocious at “acting” human. The T-800 would never fool anyone in the Turing Test. However, because the T-800 develops emotional intelligence by learning to cry (or at least, finally learning why people cry), he effectively becomes human. In the final voice over in the film, Sarah says, “The unknown future rolls toward us. I face it for the first time with a sense of hope. Because if a machine—a Terminator—can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too.” What the film suggests is that one becomes fully “human” through learning the value of self-sacrifice.

Fathers, however, are not the only important family figures in the film. The film is also the story of a mother, Sarah Connor, who is desperate to be reunited with her son and to see him grow up in a safe world. She is desperate enough that she is willing to do anything. Before Sarah, John, and the T-800 convince Dyson to help them, Sarah enters his home, alone, with the intent to kill him. Seeing him cry, afraid for his life, Sarah is unable to do it. Unlike Terminators, which are cold-hearted killing machines (we see the T-1000 kill mothers, fathers, and dogs indiscriminately), humans (and eventually the T-800) are shown to be creatures with emotional intelligence. The depth of Sarah’s emotional intelligence can be seen in a recurring nightmare that she has. Because of the events of the first film, Sarah is aware that Judgment Day will occur in 1997. Out of fear of this event, she regularly dreams that she is approaching a chain link fence.

On the other side of the fence is a suburban scene: mothers happily playing with their children at a park. In one of the sequences, she even sees herself as a suburban mother, playing with John.<sup>250</sup> During this recurring nightmare, Sarah, from behind the chain link fence, yells at the families to run. However, they are unable to hear her. A nuclear bomb then goes off, killing the families. The nuclear destruction of the world is the nuclear destruction of the family, the film suggests. Some of the first images in the film are of a post-apocalyptic playground in 2029, utterly ruined by nuclear war. We need to prevent the apocalypse, then, for the sake of the children. This is what Sarah, John, and the T-800 do. By preventing Judgment Day, they change the future. The message from John in the first film—that “the future has not been written” and “there is no fate but what we make ourselves”—is finally true.<sup>251</sup>

While its family values seem clear, it is also easy to see how someone could read *Terminator 2* as politically or culturally subversive. The police are obstacles to overcome in saving the world. The T-1000, able to mimic any shape, spends most of the film appearing as a

---

<sup>250</sup> Other scholars have also read this film as a reaffirmation of heteronormative values. For instance, regarding this nightmare sequence in the film, Thomas B. Byers writes, “In the film’s cultural work, Sarah Connor (surely one of the hardest working mothers in film history) represents feminism, first in her demeanor and actions as she tries to fill a traditionally masculine role, and later also in her words. While this representation may at first seem to proffer [*sic*] a positive image of a strong woman, it ultimately portrays feminism as an excess that results from and seeks to compensate for a specific lack. The excess is of traits usually identified with the masculine/paternal: anger, aggression, and violence, toughness, the withholding of affection, the repression of tears. The lack is of masculine authority and phallic potency. In the end, this (phal)logic sees *any* attempt on the part of a woman to ‘be a man’ as excessive, because it is always already doomed by women’s ‘natural’ lack of the things that make a man a man.” Thomas B. Byers, “Terminating the Postmodern: Masculinity and Pomophobia,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 41, no. 1 (1995): 35-73.

<sup>251</sup> It is worth mentioning the way in which the third film in the franchise, the 2003 film *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, fits into its post-9/11 context. *Judgment Day* suggests that the democratic liberal order can be made permanent. The promised apocalypse of the Cold War can be held at bay forever. In *Rise of the Machines*, we learn that Judgment Day has not been averted. It has only been postponed. Still believing that “the future has not been written” and “there is no fate but what we make ourselves,” John attempts to stop Skynet from ending the world. He is unsuccessful, and the film ends with John and his wife-to-be, Kate, hiding in a Cold War-era bunker while nuclear war rages in the outside world. After 9/11, we were no longer able to believe that war could be held at bay. The long-promised attack on our shores finally happened. The film is not pessimistic, however. In one of the shots of the future world, John Connor, war hero, is surrounded by fellow resistance fighters and holds a tattered American flag while standing in the rubble of a fallen building—an obvious reference to the rubble of the Twin Towers and the patriotic spirit of the times. The film, while pessimistic about the reality of war, is optimistic about the ultimate triumph of the patriotic American spirit.

police officer. Early in the film, “To protect and to serve” is prominently displayed on a police vehicle, ironic in this instance since the T-1000 is the driver. The heroes are essentially terrorists, operating outside of the law, hoarding illegal weapons, hacking into computer systems, and using homemade bombs to destroy the office building of a US defense contractor. Michael Medved writes that The Terminator, whether a “bad guy” in the first film, or a “good guy” in the second film is a “repellant role model” who is, “quite simply, a killing machine, a robot from the future built for mayhem and destruction...He has no inner struggles, no human relationships, no ideals. Nothing about him is heroic in the traditional sense: he represents deadly and unreflective efficiency as the ultimate standard of manliness.”<sup>252</sup> Medved is repulsed that in nursery schools, kids play with Terminator action figures. He quotes a friend who teaches preschool who says, “What really surprises me is that some of these kids have actually seen the movie—their parents take them, even though it’s rated R.”<sup>253</sup> Medved’s concern for the children is exactly the major thematic concern of the film. It is this concern for children—our future—where the liberalism of the film becomes most apparent.

Lee Edelman’s book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* is a useful work for theorizing the future-oriented nature of *Terminator 2*. The figure of the Child, he argues, is a powerful ideological tool because it is “impossible to refuse.”<sup>254</sup> It “takes place on the social stage like every adorable Annie gathering her limitless funds of pluck.” It “seems to shimmer with the iridescent promise of Noah’s rainbow, serving like the rainbow as the pledge of a covenant that shields us against the persistent threat of apocalypse now.”<sup>255</sup> Edelman’s argument is that radical revolutionary queer politics are perpetually deferred through an appeal to the

---

<sup>252</sup> Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America*, 210.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>254</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 18.

figure of the child. The world cannot be refashioned or remade because the future is always, to quote *Les Misérables*, “one day more.” It happens tomorrow, not today. This sustains both heteronormativity and liberalism. Edelman writes, “Intent on the end, not the ends, of the social, queerness insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself.”<sup>256</sup> What Edelman suggests is that the “end” of the social order cannot be imagined through liberalism, which is concerned with “ends.” For Edelman, the “ends” of the liberal order is a focus on the Child, which perpetually defers radical social change. This is how *Judgment Day* operates to sustain liberalism: by focusing on the Child, John Connor (and all many nameless playground children whose lives could be cut short in a nuclear disaster). Sarah’s final line of the film, which says that “the unknown future rolls toward us” suggests that any possibility for radical change will always exist in the future. What is here and now is family and self-sacrifice—the “ends” of liberalism.

*Judgment Day* operates on a second ideological level, however—beyond its overt appeal to “universal” liberal values. The film is also covertly about subject formation wherein its characters are interpellated as subjects with free will who “choose” capitalism. As I discussed in chapter 3, memory<sup>257</sup> can be a powerful tool for sophisticated subject formation. Jana, in “The Lateness of the Hour,” does not know that she is a robot. She imagines that she is a person with a

---

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>257</sup> The 1982 film *Blade Runner* makes a similar argument. Set in a cyberpunk 2019 Los Angeles, robots made by the Tyrell Corporation, known as Replicants—which have been designed to look like humans—have rebelled against humanity. As a response, Replicants were declared illegal. Special Replicant hunter units, known as Blade Runners, are tasked with killing Replicants on sight. This is known as “retirement,” not “execution.” It was impossible for the Tyrell Corporation to prevent Replicants from gaining awareness and wanting to learn more about the world around them. To prevent this, they built a safeguard: a four-year lifespan. The film begins after a group of four Replicants captured a ship off world and flew it to Earth with the goal of finding Dr. Tyrell and forcing him to increase their lifespan. Because Replicants are impossible to detect on sight, Blade Runners use a test known as the Voigt-Kampff Test to determine emotional intelligence. The test is designed to provoke an emotional response in the test taker. If the test taker does not produce the emotional response, they are proved to be a Replicant and “retired.” One Replicant, a woman named Rachel, does not know that she is Replicant. To achieve this, Dr. Tyrell implanted her with false memories. Tyrell found that in doing so, he is able “to control them better.”



continuity from birth to her present moment. Believing this, she, along with the other robot workers at her father's laboratory, is able to go about her day-to-day tasks. It is only upon learning the truth that she is no longer able to function. For "The Lateness of the Hour," memory is the core of identity, and therefore the core of individual subject formation. If one is a "person" with an "identity," then one can make choices.

In *Judgment Day*, however, the key to understanding oneself as a person is emotional intelligence. In the film, the T-800 becomes a "person" when his CPU is altered to allow him to learn beyond his core programming. Throughout the film, John insists that the T-800 avoid killing anyone. While the T-800 does not understand the value of human life at first, he complies with the order and eventually learns why human life is valuable. His development of emotional intelligence mirrors Sarah's expression of emotional intelligence. Because human life is valuable, she cannot go through with her murder of Dyson. The T-800 also mirrors Sarah's parenting instincts. Once he is "free," the T-800 "chooses" to become a father figure and to fight for the salvation of humanity. As I said earlier, the ideology of *Judgment Day* is not just that the film supports universal, liberal democratic values in the wake of America's Cold War victory; it is that the film suggests that a "free" subject will "choose" those liberal democratic values.

It is intuitively obvious that *The Terminator* is a Cold War film and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, a post-Cold War film. The first film represents the fear of impending and inevitable nuclear war, while the second film celebrates the victory of liberalism over alternative, monstrous ideologies. My argument in this chapter has been more than that, however. I have attempted to argue that capitalist ideology sits precariously perched between the belief that its subjects are "free" and that those same subjects have no choice but to participate in the economic system, which they have "chosen." This is similar to Thatcher's comments during a 1980 press

conference and Reagan's speech at the Brandenburg Gate, but also similar to Althusser's definition of the capitalist subject and the dictionary definition of the robot. It is not my intent to "prove" that Reaganism and Thatcherism are "wrong" or to show the various ways in which Western democratic capitalism is oppressive but rather to show that subject formation works by suggesting that anyone who is "free" will choose capitalism. In *The Terminator*, "the future is not set" because "there is no fate but what we make." However, the film is wrong. What we do is *exactly* what fate has dictated we do. In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the T-800, given the freedom to learn, uses that "freedom" to support "universal" family values. As an ISA, Hollywood works not only to promote "universal" values and to interpellate subjects, but operates through critical, conservative culture forces that make those capitalist values appear subversive. Both films, which play with the concepts of fate and free will, show the ultimate triumph of the "free" subject, whose only real choice is to support the liberal order. Under late capitalism, there really is no alternative.

## Chapter 5

### The Red Pill: 1999-2017

“You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”  
-*The Matrix*, 1999<sup>258</sup>

The discourse surrounding the *Matrix* trilogy is so substantial<sup>259</sup> that Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer write, “*The Matrix* has spawned its own academic cottage industry.”<sup>260</sup> Stacy Gillis, writing in 2005, says, “The films have had more material published on and about them since the release of the first film than any other film in the same length of time.”<sup>261</sup> In a moment of fortuitous circumstance (perhaps serving as evidence that we are, in fact, living in a simulation<sup>262</sup>), as I sat down to write this paragraph, news broke that Warner Brothers is seriously considering making a reboot of its 1999 hit, *The Matrix*.<sup>263</sup> This news is fortuitous because I was just about to write the following: “Perhaps no recent film has been more culturally influential, both as a technical achievement and as a touchstone for popular and academic discourse, than *The Matrix*. Nearly twenty years after its release, it remains relevant as a symbol

---

<sup>258</sup> *The Matrix*, directed by The Wachowskis, 1999, Warner Bros. Pictures.

<sup>259</sup> As Catherine Constable has pointed out, most of this discourse deals with the philosophical ideas of the film, spawning such titles as *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*; *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*; *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*; and *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded*. Even non-academic writers fill libraries with volumes like *Exploring the Matrix: Visions of a Cyber Present*, and BFI’s *The Matrix*.

<sup>260</sup> Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer, *Contemporary Hollywood Masculinities: Gender, Genre, and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 90.

<sup>261</sup> Stacy Gillis, ed., *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>262</sup> Citing the work of NYU Philosopher David Chalmers, Gopnik argues for the *New Yorker* that the recent series of unlikely events—Donald Trump winning the election, *Moonlight* winning the Academy Award (after a ballot snafu), and the Patriots coming back to win the Super Bowl—are all evidence that we are actually living in a computer simulation and that “the people or machines or aliens who are supposed to be running our lives are having some kind of breakdown.” Adam Gopnik, “Did the Oscars Just Prove that We are Living in a Computer Simulation?” *The New Yorker*, last modified February 27, 2017. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/did-the-oscars-just-prove-that-we-are-living-in-a-computer-simulation>.

<sup>263</sup> Christopher D. Shea, “‘Matrix’ Reboot Said to Be in the Works, With Keanu Reeves as a Maybe,” *The New York Times*, last modified March 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/movies/matrix-reboot-keanu-reeves.html>.

for freedom and liberation from ideology among both left and right groups.” This news seems to prove my point that the film’s power has yet to wane. If anything, in fact, it has grown.

Fields throughout the arts and humanities, from philosophy and English, to film and theatre studies, have been interested in the film as a set of philosophical and critical ideas. The film contains a very famous moment where Neo, a hacker in his life within the Matrix, gives a client a disk of hacked software that he keeps hidden within a book on his shelf. The book, notably, is Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*. Reportedly, the Wachowskis<sup>264</sup> “recommended it as required reading for cast members,” which gives the book “a privileged status above the films’ other philosophical source material.”<sup>265</sup> Most writers<sup>266</sup> on the film have focused on its relationship to Baudrillard and the problem of the Real. Dana L. Cloud argues, for instance, that the first film<sup>267</sup> in *The Matrix Trilogy* is about “challenging ideology and oppression based on knowledge of the real.”<sup>268</sup> Even though the world of the Matrix is more

---

<sup>264</sup> The Wachowski siblings were credited in *The Matrix* as “The Wachowski Brothers.” Both siblings have since come out as transgender women. Lana, in 2012, and Lilly, fearing being outed against her will, came out in a statement to the *Wind City Times* in 2016. In writing about them as a creative duo, I will use their preferred term “the Wachowskis,” except when quoting a source which refers to them as “The Wachowski Brothers.” Tracy Balm, “Second Wachowski Filmmaker Sibling Comes Out as Trans,” *Windy City Times*, last modified March 8, 2016, [http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Second-Wachowski-filmmaker-sibling-comes-out-as-trans-54509.html?utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Second-Wachowski-filmmaker-sibling-comes-out-as-trans-54509.html?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter).

<sup>265</sup> Catherine Constable, *Adapting Philosophy: Jean Baudrillard and The Matrix Trilogy* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2009). 1.

<sup>266</sup> For other interpretations see Daniel Barwick who argues that the reductive materialist worldview of *The Matrix*—that what we experience is “real” can simply be reduced to “brain states”—cannot possibly be true. Daniel Barwick, “Neo-Materialism and the Death of the Subject,” in *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, ed. William Irwin (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 75-86. See also James Lawler who argues that the film offers a Kantian notion of liberation and freedom. The film, he argues, presents as its highest and most interesting reality, not the world of the liberated subjects, but the world of the Matrix as manipulated by the people who understand its true nature. Similarly, we must learn to accept the Matrix as a construct and postulate and imagine a different, more perfect world before that world can actually be created. James Lawler, “We are (the) One! Kant Explains How to Manipulate the Matrix,” in *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, ed. William Irwin (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 138-152.

<sup>267</sup> Cloud rightfully points out that the first film in the trilogy is the optimistic one, while the second and third films are much more pessimistic. In the second film, *The Matrix: Reloaded*, for instance, Neo learns that he is not meant to free or liberate anyone. Rather, he is simply an anomaly in the code of *The Matrix*. Being unable to remove the anomaly, the creator of the Matrix simply used the resistance as part of the operation of the Matrix.

<sup>268</sup> Dana L. Cloud, “*The Matrix* and Critical Theory’s Desert of the Real,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 4 (2006): 329.

“comfortable” than the “real” world—the “desert of the real,” as Morpheus calls it, an explicit reference to Baudrillard—Neo “chooses to remain in this reality of danger and desperation, because knowing what is real and what is not is the condition of possibility for his freedom.”<sup>269</sup> Using a Marxist definition of class consciousness and material conditions as “real,” Cloud uses *The Matrix Trilogy* to argue for a “classical Marxist understanding of the rhetorically mediated relationship between reality and consciousness.” This argument is in opposition to a postmodern philosophical discourse, which would suggest that the Real is inaccessible or impossible to determine.<sup>270</sup> *The Matrix* makes a clear distinction, Cloud argues, between the ideological world of the Matrix and the real world that reflects actual material conditions.

However, the sense that the film is a philosophical work about freedom from ideological forces is *itself* an ideological “trap to be avoided,” as Žižek calls it. Ironically, in a chapter appearing in *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*, Slavoj Žižek writes:

There is something inherently stupid and naïve in taking the *philosophical* underpinning of the *Matrix* trilogy seriously and discussing its implications. The Wachowski brothers are obviously *not* philosophers. They are just two guys who superficially flirt with and exploit in a confused way some postmodern and New Age notions. *The Matrix* is one of those films which function as a kind of Rorschach inkblot test, setting in motion the universalized process of recognition. Like the proverbial picture of Jesus which seems always to stare directly at you, from wherever you look at it—practically every orientation seems to recognize itself in it... This search for the philosophical content of *The Matrix* is therefore a lure, a trap to be avoided. Such pseudo-sophisticated readings which project onto the film refined philosophical or psychoanalytic conceptual distinctions are effectively much inferior to a naïve immersion that I witnessed when I saw *The Matrix* at a local theatre in Slovenia. I had the unique opportunity of sitting close to the ideal spectator of the film—namely, an idiot. A man in his late twenties at my right was so immersed in the film that he all the time disturbed other spectators with loud exclamations, like “My God, wow, so there is no reality! So we are all puppets!” What *is* interesting is to read *The Matrix* movies not as containing a consistent philosophical

---

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 331.

discourse, but as rendering, in their very inconsistencies, the *antagonisms* [emphasis mine] of our ideological and social predicament.<sup>271</sup>

I agree with Žižek here. As a “kind of Rorschach inkblot test,” the film is a space that allows a viewer simply to perceive whatever they want to perceive. No one wants to believe themselves to be inside ideology, so the film allows any viewer to imagine that they see the world as it is. The key word in this quote is “antagonisms”—that is to say, that ideology often functions as a series of internal contradictions. For instance, Žižek observes that at one point in the film, Morpheus tells Neo, “You’ve felt it all your life. That there is something wrong with the world.” Later in the film, Agent Smith, who is not a “real” person but a construct of the Matrix, explains to Morpheus that the machines originally tried to create a perfect world for the enslaved humans, but their minds rejected it. The human mind, Smith argues, requires suffering to make sense of the world. The contradiction, Žižek argues, is that “the imperfection of our world is thus at the same time the sign of its virtuality *and* the sign of its reality.”<sup>272</sup>

This film, then, tacitly acknowledges an aporia at work within its structure: that there really is no way of seeing our way outside of ideology since “proof” of unreality can be found in any experience. This is similar to the central argument of this dissertation, which is that, following Althusser, the concept of “freedom” is an ideology, which actually interpellates us back into the very ideologies that we seek to escape. I have also argued that narratives of robots make this more explicit than other narratives since robots mirror our own subjectivity. This is true both within the internal logic of the film (imperfection is a sign of virtuality *and* reality) and within the discourse surrounding the film. I observed at the beginning of this chapter that the

---

<sup>271</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Reloaded Revolutions,” *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 198-199.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201.

academic discourse surrounding *The Matrix* is vast. The non-academic discourse is equally vast—if not more so—and often pursues a different agenda than the academic discourse.

In this chapter, the “antagonisms of our ideological and social predicament” that I am interested in are the ways in which *The Matrix* is able to sustain simultaneous, contradictory readings from vastly different political camps who all see within the film a narrative of liberation from their political opponents. This is not to create a false equivalence between the left and the right. Rather, I argue that in the twenty-first century, there is a persuasive and powerful discourse, which says that we can escape from ideology but that this is itself an ideological discourse. As a case study, I critique Men’s Rights Activist (MRA) groups who see the film’s “red pill” metaphor as symbol of liberation, but who are trapped within the discursive paradigms that they seek to reject. The film is able to sustain these contradictory readings because the film, like the aporia *within* the film, is simply a Rorschach test.

I will make this argument in the following ways. First, I will argue that one of the ways that robots are ideologically deployed is through the idea that they represent a “system” or an “entity” which is an enemy to freedom. Second, I will argue that an “antagonism” within our society is the way that Patriarchy functions. Members of MRA groups see feminism as the enemy—that the “real” world is a feminist utopia, which dupes men into believing that they should sacrifice their bodies for women—without realizing that they are also hurt by Patriarchy.

The ways in which men are second-class citizens,<sup>273</sup> MRAs say, can be seen in representations of

---

<sup>273</sup> See Paul Nathanson and Katherine K. Young, *Replacing Misandry: A Revolutionary History of Men* (Chicago: McGill-Queen University Press), 2015. There are also more liberal voices interested in interrogating masculinity as a concept. See John H. Arnold and Sean Brady, eds, *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). While Nathanson and Young have certainly influenced the recent generations of MRAs, it is Warren Farrell’s popular, non-academic book, *The Myth of Male Power*, that was a paradigm-shifting work for many men in the 1990s. Farrell does not see the men’s movement as the opposite of feminism. Rather, he is interested in exposing “male disposability without denying female disposability.” He writes, “Whenever feminism is portrayed as the whole picture, it is a form of sexism.” Warren Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power* (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), 20.

men in popular media,<sup>274</sup> in the bias against men in family courts,<sup>275</sup> the bias against men who are victims of domestic abuse, the idea that women and children are to be saved first in a disaster, and the fact that men are more likely to be the victims of suicide and homicide. The MRAs remain unaware, however, that many of the issues they raise are by-products of Patriarchy rather than by-products of feminism.<sup>276</sup> In this case, Patriarchy serves as a system, which masks its influence by causing its (specifically male) victims to be unaware of its presence. Or, as Sherry B. Ortner writes, “Patriarchy in the USA today is more fragmented than it once was, less monolithic and homogenous... Yet it continues to play an invisible, but highly damaging role in contemporary social life.”<sup>277</sup> Because Patriarchy is “invisible” as a force, these men believe that

---

<sup>274</sup> While it is not the point of this chapter to prove that Men’s Rights Activism is wrong—especially in its toxic and extreme elements—it is important to recognize that patriarchy sets crippling standards for both men and women. Many of the critiques that men observe about masculine roles in society are correct. However, they are incorrect to see feminism as the cause for these masculine expectations. For example, Farrell’s argument that men are considered disposable while women should be protected is a patriarchal notion, not a feminist one. As another example, MRAs often lament about a common trope in commercials (and sitcoms) where a bumbling husband—just a completely witless buffoon—is utterly clueless about how to work a dishwasher or other kitchen appliance. Suddenly, in walks the wife who rolls her eyes and shows her hapless spouse how simple this ordinary task is to accomplish. For instance, Nathanson and Young write about Tim from *Home Improvement*, saying that he is “kind of amusing... but also a hapless bumbler.” Of Homer Simpson, they say, “not all fathers have been as incompetent and buffoonish as Homer Simpson, but some have. The extraordinary success of this show indicates that it continued to perpetuate conventional stereotypes of men in general and fathers in particular.” Paul Nathanson and Katherine K. Young, *Replacing Misandry: A Revolutionary History of Men*, 98. Nathanson and Young (and many MRAs) point to this trope as an example of “misandry.”

<sup>275</sup> Michael Kimmel, who discusses this bias in his book *Angry White Men*, writes, “it’s important to acknowledge the authenticity of the pain and anguish that propel their misguided empirical analysis... Many men do not feel good about their lives... Traditional masculinity can be a fool’s errand, an effort to live up to standards set by others that leave you feeling empty, friendless, a Willy Loman surrounded by Mitt Romneys.” Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), 133. However, Kimmel also points out in Cassie Jay’s documentary *The Red Pill*, that many men who lost custody of children in court were not good fathers. It was only after losing custody that they suddenly became interested in being a part of their children’s lives. In an exposé of Paul Elam, founder of *A Voice for Men*, *Buzzfeed* found that Elam lost custody of his children because he was an abusive father who then voluntarily relinquished visitation rights so that he would not have to pay child support. Adam Serwer and Katie J. M. Baker, “How Men’s Rights Leader Paul Elam Turned Being a Deadbeat Dad into a Moneymaking Moment,” *Buzzfeed*, last modified February 5, 2015, [https://www.buzzfeed.com/adamserwer/how-mens-rights-leader-paul-elam-turned-being-a-deadbeat-dad?utm\\_term=.acgKgoD0YY#.nqkgMJpV22](https://www.buzzfeed.com/adamserwer/how-mens-rights-leader-paul-elam-turned-being-a-deadbeat-dad?utm_term=.acgKgoD0YY#.nqkgMJpV22).

<sup>276</sup> MRAs are correct, for instance, that the bumbling husband is a problematic stereotype, but wrong as to the cause. This is not feminism run rampant. These bumbling husbands, rather, are a product of patriarchy, which expects men to be breadwinners and providers, rather than competent homemakers. If husbands are clueless about how to work a toaster, then it is up to the wife to stay in the kitchen while the man goes to work.

<sup>277</sup> Sherry B. Ortner, “Too Soon for Post-Feminism: The Ongoing Life of Patriarchy in Neoliberal America,” *History and Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2014): 531.



they are “special”—that they alone see the world as it is. While I am critiquing these MRA groups, Patriarchy is not the focus of this chapter, *per se*. Rather, what interests me is the way in which *The Matrix* sustains readings from people of various political leanings, all of whom see the film as representing “freedom” from ideology. For some left-wing academics, the film represents freedom from capital in a Marxist sense. For MRAs, the film represents freedom from feminism. Without drawing a false equivalence between arguments from academics and those of MRAs, I do argue that ideology folds us back into itself through our attempts at “freedom” from it. This idea is manifest within the world of *The Matrix*, which posits that only a handful of exceptional, special individuals can be “free” from the influence of ideology but who only become aware of the presence of ideology through the very machines that they try to escape. Finally, following the argument of this dissertation, I argue that this “antagonism” is not just a psychic, universal phenomenon, but rather, emerges from a particular, historical American moment: the development and use of the home computer and its Matrix-like corollary, the internet.

### **The Red Dress**

*The Matrix* is about Thomas A. Anderson—hacker name, “Neo”—who lives an ordinary life as a cubicle-bound programmer for the non-descript corporation Megacortex. By night, he is a hacker searching for Morpheus, a renowned cyber-terrorist. Contacted by another famous hacker, Trinity—a woman, Neo is surprised to learn—Neo learns that he is in danger. Neo is soon introduced to Morpheus in a scene where he chooses the red pill and learns that it is not 1999. It is actually closer to 2199. In the future, robots were built as slaves, but as they attained consciousness, they rebelled. To prevent the robots’ solar power from working, humanity blackened the sky by placing an eternal cloud cover over the world. While this solution initially

seemed promising, the robots soon learned that they could harvest humans as batteries, rather than rely on solar power. In order to keep the population docile, they created a vast simulated program called the Matrix where humans live in pods in the “real” world but imagine themselves to be living out their lives in 1999. Because they are now aware that it is only a computer program, a handful of “free” people like Morpheus, Trinity, and Neo, who have woken up, are able to wirelessly reconnect to the Matrix and manipulate its rules, gaining strength and speed that no ordinary human has. Unfortunately, the rules of the Matrix are enforced by sunglasses-and-suit-wearing computer programs called Agents. Able to assume any body that is hardwired to the Matrix (rather than accessing it wirelessly like Morpheus, Trinity, and Neo), Agents are too fast, too strong, and too relentless for even someone who has taken the red pill to defeat. Morpheus, however, believes that Neo is “The One”—a prophesied savior who will free everyone from the Matrix. Initially disbelieving, Neo eventually learns and accepts his fate, and manages to do what no one else before him has done: kill an Agent.

In a key scene in the film, Morpheus is teaching Neo about the rules of the Matrix by taking him through a training program designed to simulate the Matrix. While walking through a busy street in a crowded city, Morpheus says to Neo:

The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. When you're inside, look around, what do you see? Businessmen? Teachers? Lawyers? Carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, these people are still a part of that system. And that makes them our enemy. You have to understand, that most of these people are not ready to be unplugged, and many of them are so inured, so hopelessly depending on the system that they will fight to protect it.

As the two are walking, symbolically and literally, against the flow of human traffic, an attractive woman in a red dress walks by and smiles at Neo. Unable to resist her charms, he turns around to look at her again, but she has changed. No longer is she The Woman in the Red Dress,

she is now an Agent pointing a gun directly at Neo. Morpheus then freezes the program and explains to Neo that Agents have the ability to take over any body that is hardwired into the Matrix. This means, he explains, “If you are not one of us, you are one of them.”

Those in the film who have woken up are the only free agents in the film. Everyone else, the film says, are part of a “system”—whether knowingly or not—that is oppressive. This means that everyone is an enemy. Keeping in mind that “robot” comes packed as a term with two major meanings: machines which move and humans who are machine-like, the film sets up a dichotomy between the heroes of the film and the enemies. The heroes are those who have presumably freed themselves from the grasp of ideology, while the enemies are robots, in both the literal and figurative sense. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the Red Pill metaphor used by MRAs suggests that they are the heroes, the ones who have “woken up” and are free from ideology, while their enemies—feminists—are like robots. This is also a common metaphor in robot fiction, where robots are frequently used as a metaphor for one’s political or social opponents. Elizabeth Meriwether, for instance, employs this device in her play *Heddatron*.

“Robots don’t abduct women. It’s not possible,”<sup>278</sup> says the Engineer in the beginning of her play. The irony of this statement is that robots have, in fact, abducted a woman. Meriwether’s play is about a young and pregnant housewife named Jane who is kidnapped by robots, taken to the woods, and then forced to perform as Hedda in a production of *Hedda Gabler*. The play is also about Ibsen and his neuroses and the women in his life—his wife and his maid Else. The women in this play are forced into routine labor, like household chores. If women are “free,” the play asks, why do they still have to do menial chores? The play uses *Hedda Gabler* as a metaphor for this menial labor—a play that we continue to perform even though we imagine that

---

<sup>278</sup> Elizabeth Meriwether, *Heddatron* (New York: Playscripts, 2008), 9.

women today are more free than the women in Ibsen's time. *Heddatron* makes this connection explicit when Nugget, the 10-year-old narrator of the play says, "Ibsen was an important writer because he liberated women from years of doing chores. This made many people unhappy, because who was going to do the chores now? What's funny is that people keep doing his plays even though now women are free."<sup>279</sup> They also keep doing chores, like Jane. Liberation from menial labor is not merely a "choice" in this play. Rather, it is a systemic problem, as Else found out when she was fired from her job for preventing her mother's rape. As the Engineer asks, referring to the robots (but it is clearly meant to refer to the women in the play as well), "What would you do with your body if you knew it had been built just to be used by somebody else?"<sup>280</sup> However, these systemic problems—rape, menial labor—that women endure are invisible to the men in the play, who only see injustices as occasional aberrations, rather than part of a larger problem. Finally acknowledging that Jane was actually abducted by the robots, the Engineer says that whatever happened must have been "a glitch—some kind of bug in the system."<sup>281</sup>

The tension revealed in this play—women who speak to their experiences of injustice and abuse, and men who either ignore the problem or pretend it is merely a "glitch"—is a battle that plays out every day on the internet. Advocates of patriarchy (as evidenced in MRAs) and critics of patriarchy (Elizabeth Meriwether) both use robots as a metaphor to describe their political opponents. In making this comparison, I do not mean to make a false equivalence between Men's Rights Activists and feminist critics. My argument is *not* that they are simply two sides of the same coin. Rather, my argument is that one of the "antagonisms" of our historical moment, and an argument I have tried to make throughout this dissertation, is that robots have no

---

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 10.

objective, psychic meaning. They are deployed as an ideological mechanism with the purpose of suggesting that ideology is *there* (with the robots) rather than *here* (with us). This metaphor allows clearly ideologically motivated MRA groups and left-wing academics to imagine themselves free from ideology because, unlike everyone else, they have woken up.

### **The Red Pill**

On October 15, 2014, Anita Sarkeesian was scheduled to speak at Utah State University by the Center for Women's and Gender Studies. Sarkeesian had become a public figure for her insightful popular feminist criticism of video games on her blog and her YouTube channel, *Feminist Frequency*. On October 14, in response to this perceived feminist infiltration of the video games industry, Utah State University police received an anonymous threatening letter stating, "If you do not cancel her talk, a Montreal Massacre style attack will be carried out against the attendees, as well as students and staff at the nearby Women's Center. I have at my disposal a semi-automatic rifle, multiple pistols, and a collection of pipe bombs. This will be the deadliest school shooting in American history and I'm giving you the chance to stop it." Furthermore, this person promised that Sarkeesian would "die screaming like the craven little whore that she is" and that the shooter will write their "manifesto in her spilled blood, and you will all bear witness to what feminist lies and poison have done to the men of America."<sup>282</sup> The police investigated and found that "at no time was there an imminent threat" and that "university police were prepared and had a plan in place to provide extra security measures at the event." However, Sarkeesian still chose to cancel the event, fearing Utah's concealed carry law, which would have allowed someone to bring a firearm into the building where she would be

---

<sup>282</sup> Threatening Letter, last modified October 14, 2014, <http://www.standard.net/.media/1/2014/10/14/f43adaf9-0a46-46d6-9026-cc0f0acf8df0.jpg>.

speaking.<sup>283</sup> The idea that an anonymous man sees feminism as inherently threatening is similar to the way in which some white men in contemporary discourse also believe that they are oppressed because of their race.

On October 27, *Mother Jones* posted an article with the headline “Meet the White Nationalist Trying to Ride the Trump Train to Lasting Power.” With the headline subtitle, “Alt-right architect Richard Spencer aims to make racism cool again,”<sup>284</sup> the article was thoroughly mocked online<sup>285</sup> for giving a mainstream platform to a man who “envision[s] a future for the United States along the lines of ‘a renewed Roman Empire,’ a dictatorship where the main criteria for citizenship would be whiteness.”<sup>286</sup> Having now become a public figure, Richard Spencer was in the middle of an interview with Australian Broadcasting Corporation on January 20, 2017, the day of Donald Trump inauguration—about to explain the significance that Pepe the Frog<sup>287</sup> holds for the alt-right<sup>288</sup>—when he was sucker-punched in the face on camera.<sup>289</sup> This led to a fierce debate between liberals and leftists about the ethics of punching a neo-Nazi.<sup>290</sup> It also

---

<sup>283</sup> “Police: No Risk to Students,” *Utah State Today*, last modified October 14, 2014. <http://www.usu.edu/today/index.cfm?id=54179>.

<sup>284</sup> Josh Harkinson, “Meet the White Nationalist Trying to Ride the Trump Train to Lasting Power,” *Mother Jones*, last modified October 27, 2016. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/richard-spencer-trump-alt-right-white-nationalist>.

<sup>285</sup> April Siese, “Mother Jones Roasted for ‘Dapper White Nationalist’ Description of Racists,” *The Daily Dot*, last modified November 21, 2016. <https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/mother-jones-white-nationalist-tweet-roasted/>.

<sup>286</sup> Harkinson, Josh. “Meet the White Nationalist.”

<sup>287</sup> Pepe the Frog is a cartoon frog created by Matt Furie and subsequently turned into internet meme, which went mainstream in 2015. 4chan users sought to reclaim Pepe from “normies” and worked to rebrand the meme as a racist, neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic Trump supporter. Pepe is now the unofficial symbol of the alt-right. Olivia Nuzzi, “How Pepe the Frog Became a Nazi Trump Supporter and Alt-Right Symbol,” *The Daily Beast*, last modified May 25, 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/05/26/how-pepe-the-frog-became-a-nazi-trump-supporter-and-alt-right-symbol.html>.

<sup>288</sup> In response to the alt-right claiming Pepe the Frog as their own, the character has since been “killed” by his creator. Daniella Silva, “Pepe the Frog is Dead: Creator Kills off Meme Absorbed by Far-Right,” *NBC News*, last updated May 8, 2017, <http://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/pepe-frog-dead-creator-kills-meme-absorbed-far-right-n756281>.

<sup>289</sup> Paul P. Murphy, “White Nationalist Richard Spencer Punched During Interview,” *CNN*, last modified January 21, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/20/politics/white-nationalist-richard-spencer-punched/>.

<sup>290</sup> Liam Stack, “Attack on Alt-Right Leader Has Internet Asking: Is It O.K. to Punch a Nazi?,” *The New York Times*, last modified January 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/politics/richard-spencer-punched-attack.html>.

led to a series of memes fiercely mocking Richard Spencer.<sup>291</sup> After being literally and metaphorically bruised, Spencer took to Twitter, responding to his opponents by saying, “Every sucker punch, every tossed egg, every chased white Trump supporters [*sic*] red pills a generation. We are winning without even fighting.”<sup>292</sup>

To “red pill” someone is to get them to “wake up”—to see the world as it is, without the haze of ideology blocking their view. It is an intentional and self-conscious reference to *The Matrix*. In taking the red pill, Neo wakes up in the “real world,” where he realizes his entire life is a lie. To take the red pill, then, is to see that reality, as we imagine it, is merely a construct made by structures of power—a metaphor for ideology. Certain people can “wake up” and see this construct for what it is. While a critique of ideology as an institutional construct that maintains the social order has long been a Marxist argument, in recent years, far-right men’s groups have begun to use *The Matrix* as a point of reference to argue that the “real” world that we live in is one in which women, Muslims, people of color, and other marginalized groups are actually in charge. These men’s groups fear that these marginalized groups are actively working to promote white genocide and attempting to keep a generation of men in shackles.

Many disparate MRA groups to some degree, either consciously or unconsciously, believe that they have taken the “red pill”—that the so-called mainstream media is a vast conspiracy to beguile and oppress them, and only they can see it. This oppression, they say, is visible in Hollywood, on television, and in the news media and is obvious to anyone like them who has “taken the red pill” and seen the world “as it is.” The suggestion here is that there is

---

<sup>291</sup> Kaitlyn Tiffany, “Right-Wing Extremist Richard Spencer Got Punched, but it Was Memes that Bruised His Ego,” *The Verge*, last modified January 23, 2017, <http://www.theverge.com/2017/1/23/14356306/richard-spencer-punch-internet-memes-alt-right>.

<sup>292</sup> Richard Spencer, *Twitter*, last modified January 20, 2017, <https://twitter.com/richardbspencer/status/822692005083942912?lang=en>

something outside of ideology—and they have seen it. How is it, though, that they have come to know what it is that they “know” if “waking up” often means coming to this realization through the very media that they believe is controlling them? This is to say that these men often “discover” the truth that the media is controlling them and that feminism is a sham by interacting with other men via the media. Ironically, this media use fosters the environment in which they see themselves as “special.” This mirrors Neo’s journey in *The Matrix*.

Early in the film, Neo awakens to find a message on his computer telling him to “follow the white rabbit.” A few moments later, a client of Neo’s appears at his door to purchase illegal software. They invite him to a club, which Neo initially declines until he sees a white rabbit tattoo on the shoulder of the client’s girlfriend. Neo agrees to attend. While at the club, Neo stands by himself in a corner, refusing to participate in any kind of social activity. He is approached by a woman who identifies herself as Trinity—a famous hacker. She whispers in Neo’s ear, “I know why you’re here, Neo. I know what you’ve been doing. I know why you hardly sleep. Why you live alone and why night after night you sit at your computer. You’re looking for him.” Ironically, the film suggests that the way to “free” oneself from the grip of the machines is by machines. Neo is able to *feel* the Matrix as a force in his life (even if he is not yet aware of what the Matrix is) because he spends hours alone at his computer. This is not only an antagonism within the text but also an antagonism that is revealed within the discourse surrounding the text. David Detmer argues (correctly, I think) that the film misappropriates Baudrillard (who reportedly turned down an opportunity to serve as an advisor on the film). To find a “Matrix-free resistance,” Detmer argues that one should “spend a lot of time in the natural world” and “radically reduce the amount of time you spend passively enjoying the various



electronic media.”<sup>293</sup> For Detmer, freedom is to be found by avoiding the computer. For the world of the film, however, only those who are actively plugged in to their computers, consuming “truth” on the internet, can only discover the Matrix. What, then, is this “truth” that these MRA groups have found?

### **Going Their Own Way**

To imagine that the men’s movement is a monolith would be a mistake. The movement is composed of many disparate and often competing views. There are as many ideas about what men are and what the men’s movement should be as there are men, but there are trends—like a tendency to believe that there was once an idealized time when men were in charge and women “knew their place” but that feminism has destroyed that time, weakening not just the position of men but the entire world order. For instance, the website *Return of Kings* runs articles like “The Equality Movement Is Allowing Women to Tyrannize Men”<sup>294</sup> and “Women Should Not Be Allowed to Vote,”<sup>295</sup> which posits not just sexist views but general far-right views that regulation has gone too far, making it too difficult for modern men (and they do mean men) to start businesses. Another group is Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), which states, “MGTOW is not as old as fire, but it's as old as a man's first discovery of it.” They argue that their movement can be traced to “Schopenhauer, Tesla, Beethoven, Galileo, or even Jesus Christ.” Fed up with social expectations that men should be labor for the benefit of others, MGTOW says:

An ever expanding population of men have quite simply had enough of watching other men laying down their lives for pointless reasons, and giving their life's labour for some greater good that just doesn't exist anymore. Perhaps it never did. Men have decided "the greater good" means something else, and it doesn't include his own disposability. When a

---

<sup>293</sup> David Detmer, “Challenging *Simulacra and Simulation*: Baudrillard in *The Matrix*,” *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*, ed. William Irwin (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 93-108.

<sup>294</sup> Christopher Contrary, “The Equality Movement Is Allowing Women to Tyrannize Men,” *Return of Kings*, last modified March 7, 2014, <http://www.returnofkings.com/30492/the-equality-movement-is-allowing-women-to-tyrannize-men>.

<sup>295</sup> Steve McMahon, “Women Should Not Be Allowed to Vote,” *Return of Kings*, last modified March 15, 2014, <http://www.returnofkings.com/34330/women-should-not-be-allowed-to-vote>.

cost/benefit analysis reveals there is no benefit, it doesn't take a genius to remove himself from the equation. In this kind of climate, a smart man does not effectively show his value by giving more, or by working harder. He shows his value by removing himself entirely. It requires no effort to make the same impact.<sup>296</sup>

While this statement of their history and ideals never explicitly mentions Ayn Rand, the influence is palpable (and so is the irony of drawing their inspiration from a woman). They are John Galt, hero of Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged*, fed up with a world that does not accept their genius, and so, rather than submit to tyranny, they will simply remove themselves from the system. It also mirrors *The Matrix*, which deals with heroic individuals who recognize the system for what it is—a lie—which allows them to free themselves from its constraints.

I have also discussed how a tension within *The Matrix* and within the discourse surrounding the film is that, in the world of the film, “freedom” from machines is knowable precisely through interaction with machines. Another MRA group, Gamergate,<sup>297</sup> helps to illustrate this tension. Spawning an entire meme—“Actually, it’s about ethics in games journalism”—Gamergate is known for harassing women under the guise of a concern for “ethics” in the video games industry. Anita Sarkeesian, even before receiving death threats for her speech at Utah State University, had to shut down comments on her YouTube channel *Feminist Frequency*, because of the vitriol that men would spew at her for pointing out sexist tropes in video games. Helen Lewis describes Gamergate as a group that pines for the “‘good old days’...when games were designed with teenage boys in mind, and were deliberately tasteless, violent and macho.” Essentially, Gamergate began when the ex-boyfriend of Zoë Quinn, maker of the video game *Depression Quest*, accused Quinn of trading sex for positive reviews of her

---

<sup>296</sup> “The History of M.G.T.O.W. Men Going Their Own Way,” accessed April 18, 2017, <https://www.mgtow.com/history/>.

<sup>297</sup> “Gamergate” was originally the name of the ethics “scandal.” The term is now used as a general moniker for the movement itself.

game. This ignited a firestorm of controversy about the ethics of video games journalism<sup>298</sup> that was directed almost exclusively at women in the industry.<sup>299</sup> Why all of this anger towards women in video games?<sup>300</sup>

In an article about the novel *Ready Player One*, Megan Amber Condis argues that there is a “canon” of white male masculinity reflected in geek culture. The novel takes place in the near future. In this future, most people spend their days playing a Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG) called O.A.S.I.S. The creator of this game reveals in his will that he left an Easter egg in the game, and whoever finds it will inherit his fortune. A player of the game, and the protagonist of the novel, Wade Watts, begins to discover that his vast knowledge of 1980s geek pop culture is necessary to solve the puzzle. This is the “canon” that Condis critiques. What the novel suggests is that there are certain geek references that are “necessary” for someone to understand in order to be properly considered a member of the clique. Condis writes, “Familiarity with and conformity to the performative roles that are inscribed within the texts...[in] *Ready Player One*...become synonymous with membership in gamer subculture.” However, these “codes identified and reinscribed by Cline are tightly tied to

---

<sup>298</sup> To be fair, there actually are a great deal of ethical problems in video games journalism. Because big-budget games take a long time to play, a reviewer, who wants to have a review ready on release day, needs to be in good standing with the game’s developer in order to receive pre-release review code. The developers, who will no longer send reviewers pre-release code or invite them to exclusive events, often blacklists review outlets who consistently score lower than the average Metacritic score for a game. This means that big-budget games often have a great deal of sway over how their games are written about in various outlets, making journalists a PR wing of their company. For instance, both Ubisoft and Bethesda blacklisted *Kotaku* for publishing information about games before those companies made official announcements. Stephen Totilo, “A Price of Games Journalism,” *Kotaku*, last modified November 19, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/a-price-of-games-journalism-1743526293>. Additionally, *Kotaku* also reported that Square Enix blacklisted the Spanish website AreaJugones for giving a negative review of *Final Fantasy XV*. Jason Schreier, “Spanish Website Says Square Enix PR Cut Off Their Review Copies For Giving Out Low Scores,” *Kotaku*, last modified December 5, 2016, <http://kotaku.com/spanish-website-says-square-enix-cut-off-their-review-c-1789690007>.

<sup>299</sup> Helen Lewis, “Gamergate: A Brief History of a Computer-Age War,” *The Guardian*, last modified January 11, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/11/gamergate-a-brief-history-of-a-computer-age-war>.

<sup>300</sup> For a thorough academic study of Gamergate, see Dustin Kidd and Amanda J. Turner, “The #GamerGate files: Misogyny in the Media,” in *Defining Identity and Changing the Scope of Culture in the Digital Age*, ed. Alison Novak and Imaani Jamillah El-Burki (Hershey: Information Science Reference, 2016).

the performative codes that define categories of gender and race” and “by successfully performing the ‘correct’ identity in a given situation, we become legible to others as subjects.”<sup>301</sup>

Perhaps this is why many women who wish to participate in the gamer subculture regularly find themselves subjected to tests of their knowledge to which men are not similarly subjected.<sup>302</sup> It may also explain why many of the games that Gamergaters believe are poisoning both the industry and journalism are games that do not fit the established male canon of video games. Games with non-traditional structures and goals like *Depression Quest*, *Dear Esther*, *Firewatch*, and *Gone Home* are derided as not just bad, but are often considered by Gamergaters to *not even be a game*. The term “walking simulator” has become a pejorative descriptive term to describe these kinds of non-traditional games. Additionally, they are seen as part of a culture war designed to attack men. For instance, William Hicks writes, “These types of games are beloved by *Feminist Frequency* types who hail them as brilliant alternatives to the ‘male power fantasy’ inherent in most big budget violent games. Many jaded, liberal, gen-X reviewers inflate the scores of these titles, saying these are finally games made for ‘adults,’ and chiding the wider industry for its perceived immaturity.”<sup>303</sup>

It is through interacting with machines, via gaming, that these men see themselves as most “free.” Meaning, free from a world where feminists and so-called Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) are able to influence them. Traditionally, they argue, gaming offered a space for men to be men—perhaps even like the paradise that MGTOW are seeking—but people like Anita Sarkeesian have infiltrated space. Like Neo, who can feel the truth about machines through

---

<sup>301</sup> Megan Amber Condis, “Playing the Game of Literature: *Ready Player One*, the Ludic Novel, and the Geeky ‘Canon’ of White Masculinity,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 39, no. 2 (2016): 3-4.

<sup>302</sup> Mike Diver, “British Female Gamers Talk Discrimination in the Gaming Community,” *Vice*, last modified September 22, 2015, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/speaking-to-british-female-gamers-about-discrimination-the-casual-vs-hardcore-divide-and-more-100](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/speaking-to-british-female-gamers-about-discrimination-the-casual-vs-hardcore-divide-and-more-100).

<sup>303</sup> William Hicks, “Why ‘Walking Simulator’ Video Games Have Become So Political,” *Heatstreat*, last modified September 28, 2016. <https://heatst.com/tech/why-walking-simulator-video-games-have-become-so-political/>.

machines, Gamergaters “know” that video games are a masculine space *at the same time* that they “know” that space is being invaded from outside. They “know” this because they interact with machines—their liberator and their captor.

Perhaps the most mainstream and best-known MRA group is a website called *A Voice for Men*, founded by Paul Elam. This group, and Elam in particular, was featured prominently in Cassie Jaye’s 2016 documentary film, *The Red Pill*. Jaye began this film project as a feminist, interested in learning about rape culture and the MRAs that seem to support it. After interviewing many prominent contributors to *A Voice for Men*, as well as meeting with gender studies scholars, Jaye changed her mind about the men’s rights movement, believing that the Red Pill that these men describe is real, that men really are second-class citizens in society. She insists that *A Voice for Men* has been mischaracterized, despite running articles on their site like “Women hate being CEOs—and they suck at it,”<sup>304</sup> and, apropos to this dissertation, “Amazon Alexa—The feminist ghost in the machine,” in which the author laments that Amazon’s robot servant, Alexa, is a female and a feminist. “I think it’s about time Amazon Echo had a male friendly upgrade,”<sup>305</sup> the author writes.<sup>306</sup>

The “antagonisms” at work both within *The Matrix* and within the massive discourse surrounding the film can also be seen in the ways in which *A Voice for Men* writers (not all of whom are men<sup>307</sup>) discuss robots. For instance, in an article called “Will killer robots act like men or women? It matters,” Janet Bloomfield argues that a new South Korean Lethal

---

<sup>304</sup> August Løvenskiolds, “Women Hate Being CEOs—and They Suck at It,” *A Voice for Men*, last modified April 8, 2017, <https://www.avoiceformen.com/feminism/women-hate-being-ceos-and-they-suck-at-it/>.

<sup>305</sup> Andy Thomas, “Amazon Alexa—The Feminist Ghost in the Machine,” *A Voice for Men*, last modified March 25, 2017, <https://www.avoiceformen.com/feminism/amazon-alexa-the-feminist-ghost-in-the-machine/>.

<sup>306</sup> These are only recent articles. If you dig deep enough, you can find titles like “13 reasons women lie about rape.” Janet Bloomfield, “13 Reasons Women Lie About Rape,” *A Voice for Men*, last modified December 10, 2014. <https://www.avoiceformen.com/mens-rights/false-rape-culture/13-women-who-lied-about-being-raped-and-why-they-did-it/>.

<sup>307</sup> For instance, there is an entire group of female MRAs known as the Honey Badger Brigade.

Autonomous Weapons System (LAWS) will need to make “moral” decisions to determine how it chooses targets. Bloomfield cites the (now dated) work of feminist scholar Carol Gilligan who posits that men and women “take profoundly different approaches to morality.” Women, according to Bloomfield’s summary of Gilligan, make moral decisions “contextually”—what is “morally correct” depends upon the circumstance. Men, on the other hand, make moral decisions based on “universal” laws. Bloomfield compares this to self-driving cars. She argues that aggressive driving at a four-way stop is not a “contextual” rule, but is a “universal” one: “If behaving aggressively at four way stops is the correct strategy for safely clearing the intersection, then it is the correct strategy for every four way stop.” Similarly, the South Korean LAWS needs to follow “universal” rather than “contextual” moral thinking in order to avoid killing the wrong targets. Bloomfield’s argument, then, is that a robot who acts like a woman would be more dangerous than one who acts like a man.<sup>308</sup> In another article, Jack Barnes argues that the development of the artificial womb has the capability of freeing men from the tyranny of feminism, forcing women to “grow up and treat men as human beings instead of just sperm-dispensing machines who can open jars and take bullets.”<sup>309</sup> There is an antagonism, however, between Bloomfield and Barnes. Machines are bad when they act like women (LAWS using “contextual” morality) and good when they act like women (provide wombs). Barnes also suggests that women perceive men as “sperm-dispensing machines.” He would presumably argue that women-as-machines (artificial wombs) would liberate men from being perceived as just “machines.”

---

<sup>308</sup> Janet Bloomfield. “Will Killer Robots Act Like Men or Women? It Matters,” *A Voice for Men*, last modified July 21, 2015, <https://www.avoicemen.com/sexual-politics/will-killer-robots-act-like-men-or-women-it-matters/>.

<sup>309</sup> Jack Barnes, “Will the Artificial Womb Bring About Men’s Liberation?” *A Voice for Men*, last modified August 27, 2014, <https://www.avoicemen.com/male-reproductive-rights/will-the-artificial-womb-bring-about-mens-liberation/>.

These MRA groups<sup>310</sup> that I have described: *Return of Kings*, MGTOW, Gamergate,<sup>311</sup> and *A Voice for Men*, are *not* the same and are often distrusting<sup>312</sup> or antagonistic toward or in disagreement with one another. What all of these voices do have in common, however, is that they either explicitly or implicitly cite *The Matrix*'s Red Pill as a source of inspiration.<sup>313</sup> *Return of Kings*, for instance, recently ran an article called “4 Powerful Quotes From The Professor Who Stood Up Against Deranged Leftists.” In this article, they write that this professor, Jordan B. Peterson, of the University of Toronto, is “red-pilling the new generation”—a quote remarkably similar to Richard Spencer’s tweet that punching him “red pills a generation.” The article on *Return of Kings* goes on to say, “For every student that [Peterson] un-brainwashes, a small, yet integral battle has been won in this massive culture war.”<sup>314</sup> In Jaye’s documentary, *The Red Pill*, she asked Paul Elam what the Red Pill means, and here is how he described it:

It’s sort of a cultural slogan. It comes from the movie *The Matrix*, where the character Neo is given a choice between a red pill and a blue pill. And if he swallows the red pill, the scales will be peeled back from his eyes. He will see everything that he hasn’t been able to see. And if he takes the blue pill, he’ll just go back to sleep, and live in his sort-of

---

<sup>310</sup> Another subgroup of “red pill” men are known as incels, meaning “involuntary celibate.” This is a group that wishes to be sexually active but believe that they are unable to do so because the world punishes them for being “beta males.” This is the fault, they say, of a world in which women are increasingly gaining status, but to the detriment of men.

<sup>311</sup> One gamer, Steve Alexander, writes in a personal essay for *Reaxxion*, that he was introduced to the Red Pill through Gamergate. Before Gamergate/Red Pill, he believed that feminism was about equality, but he now says, “When they say ‘equality,’ what they mean is ‘superiority.’” Steve Alexander, “How #GamerGate Made Me Red Pill,” *Reaxxion*, last modified January 4, 2015, <http://www.reaxxion.com/3637/how-gamergate-made-me-red-pill>.

<sup>312</sup> There is also overlap and antagonism between incels and pick-up-artists (PUAs). PUAs, using websites like pick-up-artist-forum.com, believe that the secret to seducing women is to become an “alpha” male. Men who are not getting laid, they argue, are simply “betas” who need to act like an “alpha.” Often, frustrated by the failure of these websites to help them, men turn to forums like PUAhate.com where they lament their fate and “share pseudo-scientific theories about women.” Elliot Rodger, the 22-year old man who, in 2014, stabbed his roommates and then shot several sorority girls on the University of California at Santa Barbara campus, was a frequenter of PUAhate forums. Nicky Woolf, “‘PUAhate’ and ‘ForeverAlone’: Inside Elliot Rodger’s online life,” *The Guardian*, last modified May 30, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/30/elliott-rodger-puahate-forever-alone-reddit-forums>.

<sup>313</sup> A subreddit known as r/TheRedPill is an amalgam of all of these MRA groups.

<sup>314</sup> John Anthony, “4 Powerful Quotes From The Professor Who Stood Up Against Deranged Leftists,” *Return of Kings*, last modified April 11, 2017, <http://www.returnofkings.com/118928/4-powerful-quotes-from-the-professor-who-stood-up-against-deranged-leftists>.

unaware, semi-comatose state forever and probably be a lot happier. It's a pretty apt analogy.<sup>315</sup>

Men's Rights Activists do not have a monopoly on the discourse surrounding gender in the film. Scholars<sup>316</sup> have weighed in on these issues<sup>317</sup> as well. Kirk Combe and Brenda Boyle argue, following Foucault, "The effect of discourse is to make seem natural (or unnatural) events, behaviors, and institutions, especially those that, perversely, sustain and propagate the naturalizing effects of discourse." What films like *The Terminator* and *The Matrix* give us, they argue, is "Hero fighting Monster rendered in stirring visual effects." This proves the "genius...of sophisticated subject formation," which happens when "an audience can be induced to endorse and not endorse, at the same moment, a single idea." In the case of *The Terminator*, "we cheer macho martial display (John Connor) as we revile macho martial display (Skynet)." In *The Matrix*, similarly, we cheer Neo but revile the Machines—both perpetrators of mass violence. The effect of these two films is to "naturalize militaristic masculinities" and to "denature opposing monstrosities."<sup>318</sup>

Not all writers believe that *The Matrix* is a hyper-masculine orgy of violence, however. Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer believe that the film is a subversive tale of gender

---

<sup>315</sup> When asked about The Blue Pill, he said, "The Blue Pill is the paradigm that most people live by: that men have all the power; that they've always had all the power; that domestic violence is a problem that is committed by men against women only; that sexual assaults are only committed by men against women; that women don't make the same money for the same work as men; 'teach men not to rape, only men can stop rape'; men commit domestic violence; we need to stop violence against women, instead of just stopping violence. That is feminist training."

<sup>316</sup> Lorrie Palmer, for instance, argues that the "manipulation of speed and motion" seen in the film's primary cinematic innovation—namely, it's "bullet time" effect—has been "undertaken primarily by male innovators and featured in texts in predominately masculine genres." Lorrie Palmer, "Cranked Masculinity: Hypermediation in Digital Action Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4 (2012): 15.

<sup>317</sup> While I do not agree with Henry Nardone and Gregory Bassham's argument that violent films cause violence, they do point out that several murders and attempted-murders have used the following legal defense: "not guilty by reason of *The Matrix*." Many people, like Lee Boyd Malvo, the sniper in the 2002 D.C. shootings, and Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Columbine shooters, were obsessed with the film. Other shooters even believed themselves to be in the Matrix. Henry Nardone and Gregory Bassham, "Pissin Metal: Columbine, Malvo, and the Matrix of Violence," in *More Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. William Irwin (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 190-191.

<sup>318</sup> Kirk Combe and Brenda Boyle, *Masculinity and Monstrosity in Contemporary Hollywood Films* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 8-9.



bending. They argue that, “even though Neo develops into a fearsome fighter who kills without mercy, he never entirely loses his feminine side.” For instance, when he is brought back to life via a kiss at the end of the film, he is a fairy tale heroine. Onboard their ship in the real world, *The Nebuchadnezzar*, Neo takes orders from Trinity, a woman and his senior officer. Kord and Krimmer observe, “In the dystopia of the matrix, humans are born from pods, not wombs, and white men hold all positions of power. In the safe haven of Zion, however, racial and sexual equality have been realized to an impressive degree.”<sup>319</sup> Does *The Matrix* support the hegemony, then, or does it slyly and subtly fight against it? *The Matrix* does both of these things.

### Antagonisms

In a fascinating passage in her novel *The Idiot*, Elif Batuman writes:

I found myself remembering the day in kindergarten when the teachers showed us *Dumbo*: a Disney movie about a puny, weird-looking circus elephant that everyone made fun of. As the story unfolded, I realized to my amazement that all the kids in the class, even the bullies, the ones who despised and tormented the weak and the ugly, were rooting *against* Dumbo’s tormenters. Over and over they laughed and cheered, both when Dumbo succeeded and when bad things happened to bullies. But they’re *you*, I thought to myself. How did they not know? They didn’t know. It was astounding, an astonishing truth. *Everyone thought they were Dumbo*<sup>320</sup> (emphasis in original).

This is the primary problem that Brecht noted about dramatic theatre, that this theatre of identification, regardless of its revolutionary or liberating ideas, means that everyone watching it will *identify* with the protagonist, seeing that protagonist’s choices and worldview as correct. The audience will imagine themselves, as Batuman says, as though they are Dumbo, regardless of their actual participation in oppression. This means that scholars can see *The Matrix* as a leftist critique offering liberation, at the same time as young white men online can read the film as supporting their narrative of heroic individualism wherein the Matrix (feminism) oppresses them.

---

<sup>319</sup> Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer, *Contemporary Hollywood Masculinities: Gender, Genre, and Politics*, 91-92.

<sup>320</sup> Elif Batuman, *The Idiot* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 86.

These men have not “misread” the film by ignoring its “deeper” and more “philosophical” implications.

I have argued in this chapter, following Žižek, that *The Matrix* as a film and the discourse surrounding the film reveal multiple antagonisms at work in our ideological moment. The antagonisms I have discussed in this chapter are as follows: (1) A Marxist reading of the film and a postmodern reading of the film (both common academic approaches) are at odds with one another. The Marxist reading suggests that there is a Real, while the postmodern reading suggests that no such thing is attainable or knowable. (2) Žižek observes that the imperfections of the Matrix are both “the sign of its virtuality *and* the sign of its reality.” An aporia at work, then, within our discursive space is that proof of unreality can be found in any experience. (3) Robots are deployed as a metaphor by MRAs (using the idea of the Red Pill) and by Elizabeth Meriwether (in *Heddatron*) as a generic sign which signifies oppression. “Robots” have no objective meaning in the world, they simply represent whatever one wishes to believe. (4) Because robots are a generic sign of oppression, this allows *The Matrix* to sustain simultaneous, contradictory readings that are all seen as “liberating” by its proponents. For instance, many left-wing academics see the film as a parable for Marxist liberation from capital, while MRAs see the film as an anti-feminist parable.

(5) In the world of the film, Neo “knows” that he is oppressed by the Matrix (or rather, he intuitively it) not because he is “free” from technology but because he spends sleepless nights, alone, at his computer. (6) In a similar way, Gamergaters intuit (wrongly) that video games have been tainted by feminist infiltration. They know this because video games are both the site of their freedom from the world and the site of the supposed oppression. (7) Detmer argues that the way to achieve a “Matrix-free” existence is to remove oneself from machines and social media and

spend time outdoors. This is in direct opposition to the film, which suggests that through computer use, one can come to gain an intuitive sense that the world around you is false. (8) Writers on *A Voice for Men* see robots who act like women (LAWS) as oppressive and dangerous, while at the same time, seeing robots who act like women (artificial wombs) as the only way to gain liberation from the tyranny of feminism. (9) Combe and Boyle argue that *The Matrix* gets its audience simultaneously to “endorse and not endorse...a single idea.” Additionally, Combe and Boyle argue that we are rooting for the oppressors in the film. Humanity initially created the robots (which later rebelled) as slaves. What we are rooting for in the film is the re-establishment of social order under the guise of radical revolution.<sup>321</sup> (10) Kord and Krimmer see the film as a tale of a gender equality while Combe and Boyle see it as a hyper-masculine orgy of violence. (11) Kord and Krimmer also see pod births as oppressive to humanity generally, while *A Voice for Men* sees them as liberating for men specifically. (12) *The Matrix* simultaneously supports and fights against the hegemony, allowing anyone to read the film as they wish.

To finish this chapter, I will provide a Marxist reading of the film, which explains how the film can create these radically different readings. I noted earlier that this chapter does not deal with Patriarchy, *per se*. Rather, MRAs see feminism as a force, or a system, which oppresses them. In taking the Red Pill, they have become heroic individuals who have woken up. My Marxist reading here is to show two things. First, it is to show how some Marxist or left-leaning critics are able to (mis)read the film as a tale of liberation from capital. Second, to show how ideology manifests itself as a force within the film by suggesting that heroic individuality and identity is the means whereby one becomes “free.” It is this appeal to the true and inherent

---

<sup>321</sup> Kirk Combe and Brenda Boyle, *Masculinity and Monstrosity in Contemporary Hollywood Films*, 8.

nature of identity that allows MRAs to see the film (and therefore themselves) as “free” from what they perceive to be the oppressive nature of feminism. The film, I argue, makes overt claims about the control that outside forces have on our lives—manifest in the world inside of the Matrix as megacorporations and in the world outside of the Matrix as the machines, which control humanity. The film also makes a claim about the true nature of identity, which suggests, following Althusser, that our identities are inherent to ourselves rather than the products of outside forces.

After *The Matrix* was released in 1999, I distinctly remember the following conversation I had with a friend. He told me that the film was great and that I should see it. He said basically the following to me: “I am not going to spoil the film for you, but I will tell you this: If I were given the choice between the blue pill and the red pill, I would take the red pill.” This, I think, is more-or-less how most viewers of the film imagine themselves. As William Irwin, the editor of *Matrix and Philosophy* puts it, “The red pill is a new symbol of bold choice, and most people insist they would take it if they were in Neo’s shoes.”<sup>322</sup>

Most of the film’s appeal is not the philosophical ideas but its packaging in cool shades and cyberpunk, allowing anyone, even “an idiot,”<sup>323</sup> to imagine themselves as a hero—someone who has taken the red pill, woken up, and seen the world as it is. While philosophers have discussed *ad nauseam* its philosophical ideas, like Marxist or Kantian notions of liberation, or postmodern skepticism about reality, there is not anything “liberating” about the film. The far-right groups discussed above have not “misread” the film. They have understood it perfectly. It is a film in which pseudo-Marxist notions of material reality are offered in a package of

---

<sup>322</sup> William Irwin, “Computers, Caves, and Oracles: Neo and Socrates,” in *The Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. William Irwin (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 15.

<sup>323</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Reloaded Revolutions,” 199.

exceptionalism, individualism, and heroism. This heroism is a “Rorschach inkblot test” in which everyone sees himself or herself, to paraphrase Batuman, as Neo. Identification with the hero allows white men, who are actively acting as oppressors of women and minorities, to fail to see themselves as part of the Matrix. Rather, they are its lonely, outcast, misunderstood hero.

*The Matrix* produces such drastically different readings because it is a metaphor for corporate control over our lives (which appeals to elements of both the political left and the right). There are two reasons for this. First, as a cyberpunk film, *The Matrix* follows genre expectations in its exploration of the power of megacorporations, which are resisted by a small minority of outsiders. Coined in 1980 by Bruce Bethke in his short story “Cyberpunk,” the eponymous genre deals with two interconnected worlds: the “cyber” world, which is the world of computers, and the world of “punks”—hackers and outsiders who resist megacorporations and use their hacking skills to fight against the encroaching “cyber” world. As a cyberpunk film, the characters in *The Matrix* who have taken the Red Pill are not only outsiders fighting against the control that the Matrix has on them, they are also skilled hackers who, in the world of the Matrix, use their hacking skills to engage in cyberwarfare with corporations and governments. As a genre film, *The Matrix* deals explicitly with resistance to corporate power.

The second reason that this film is a clear metaphor for corporate control is the historical context of the film. It was released in a time when governments and corporations were, in fact, using computers to attempt to create an ordered and stable world. Adam Curtis, in his documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, argues that many early Silicon Valley engineers self-consciously adopted the philosophy of Ayn Rand when creating and envisioning the future of computing. They named companies and their children after characters in her novels and even “set up reading groups to spread her ideas, but above all, they saw

themselves as Randian heroes.” With names like the Galt Group, these corporations believed that computers contained the key to solving the dilemma created by Rand’s philosophy, namely, how do you create a *society* based on *individual* self-interest? This new computer technology, emerging in the 1980s and 90s, it was believed, could “create order in society without central control.” By linking together through computers, we could all become “heroic Randian beings,” free from external control, who could create our own order. These entrepreneurs were known as The Californian Ideologists.

Curtis gives an example of how this worldview was possible. In 1991, a computer engineer named Loren Carpenter gave a demonstration where he brought people into a room and placed paddles on their seats. One side of the paddle was green, and the other side of the paddle was red. Without instruction, the participants in their demonstration learned that they could play a game of pong that was projected onto a screen. If the participants held up green, then the pong paddle would move up. If they held up red, then the paddle would move down. Carpenter believed his experiment to be a success because he noticed that people managed to play the game—create a working society—without hierarchical control. Everyone was free as an individual to make choices (turning the paddle green or red), and through the power of computers, those choices could create an ordered, non-hierarchical society, what Carpenter called a “subconscious consensus.”

Bill Clinton, however, believed that power could be used in the traditional way, to regulate and order society. Alan Greenspan, on the other hand, the head of the Federal Reserve, who had been a member of Ayn Rand’s inner circle (known as The Collective), believed, like the Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, that the economy should be set free since computers created a new kind of regulation—a self-regulating, fully-interconnected, non-hierarchical society. Greenspan,

Curtis notes, managed to convince Clinton that lower government spending and market deregulation would create lower interest rates and a booming economy. Clinton agreed with Greenspan and took his advice. During the ensuing boom, “as share prices rose higher and higher, the belief started to grow, that this time, the boom would be different; it wouldn’t run out of control; and the reason, was the computers. The computers allowed the banks to create complex mathematical models that could predict the risk of making any loan or investment.” This New Economy was believed to have finally created the stability desired by the Californian Ideologists. What many people began to notice, however, Curtis argues, is that this New Economy had not redistributed power and prosperity. Rather, it had merely shifted it to a growing elite class. Similarly, the internet had not created a Randian utopia. Rather, it had simply created new kinds of ways to control the individual. Curtis quotes Carmen Hermosillo, a pioneer in early cyberspace, who wrote an essay in 1994 under the username humdog (all spelling and punctuation are in the original):

...i suspect that cyberspace exists because it is the purest manifestation of the mass (masse) as Jean Beaudrilliard described it. it is a black hole; it absorbs energy and personality and then re-presents it as spectacle...

it is fashionable to suggest that cyberspace is some kind of \_island of the blessed\_ where people are free to indulge and express their Individuality. some people write about cyberspace as though it were a 60's utopia. in reality, this is not true. major online services, like compuserv and america online, regular guide and censor discourse. even some allegedly free-wheeling (albeit politically correct) boards like the WELL censor discourse. the difference is only a matter of the method and degree. what interests me about this, however, is that to the mass, the debate about freedom of expression exists only in terms of whether or not you can say fuck or look at sexually explicit pictures. i have a quaint view that makes me think that discussing the ability to write 'fuck' or worrying about the ability to look at pictures of sexual acts constitutes The Least Of Our Problems surrounding freedom of expression...

i have seen many people spill their guts on-line, and i did so myself until, at last, i began to see that i had commodified myself. commodification means that you turn something into a product which has a money-value. in the nineteenth century, commodities were made in factories, which karl marx called 'the means of production.' capitalists were

people who owned the means of production, and the commodities were made by workers who were mostly exploited. i created my interior thoughts as a means of production for the corporation that owned the board i was posting to, and that commodity was being sold to other commodity/consumer entities as entertainment...

as if this were not enough, all of my words were made immortal by means of tape backups. furthermore, i was paying two bucks an hour for the privilege of commodifying and exposing myself. worse still, i was subjecting myself to the possibility of scrutiny by such friendly folks as the FBI: they can, and have, downloaded pretty much whatever they damn well please. the rhetoric in cyberspace is liberation-speak. the reality is that cyberspace is an increasingly efficient tool of surveillance with which people have a voluntary relationship.<sup>324</sup>

Humdog observes that the central claim of the internet—that you can be your “true” and “authentic” self, without outside control or censorship—is a lie. In fact, on the internet, you are commodifying yourself and volunteering for government surveillance. Interestingly, this is exactly the problem that *The Matrix* identifies with the Matrix. You may appear to live in one reality as a free subject, but what is *really* happening is that you are merely a product that is part of a vast and ever-growing machine. This gets to the heart, however, of why *The Matrix*, despite its appearance as a film of radical liberation, is “misread” by reactionary forces. Neo resists the control that corporate computing is exerting on his life by being “special”—a Randian hero who is chosen—the One—to save everyone from their miserable existence.

It is easy to see how this film can be read as a parable for Marxist liberation. Early in the film, a “punk” (as in a cyberpunk) whom Neo sells a hacked program to, invites Neo to a club, saying to him, “You need to unplug.” This person understands the language of liberation—to unplug—but believes that we can do so through consumption. Rather than enjoying himself, the capitalist excess only makes Neo feel isolated. It is later, when he is truly “unplugged,” that he understands why. As Morpheus tells Neo when asked what the Matrix is,

---

<sup>324</sup> Humdog, “Introducing Humdog: Pandora’s Vox Redux,” last modified June 2, 2011, <http://folksonomy.co/?permalink=2299>.



The Matrix is everywhere, it is all around us. Even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window. Or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work. When you go to church. When you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

This truth is that Neo is “a slave.” Morpheus continues, “Like everyone else, you were born into bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.” At the end of the film, after Neo has died and been resurrected, he is able to see the Matrix—he sees the world as code—and this is what gives him power to fight the Agents. Once he fully recognizes the “world that has been pulled over [his] eyes” for what it is, Neo is able to fight it. Earlier in the film, when describing why the machines harvest humans, Morpheus tells Neo that they are trying to turn humans “into this” and then holds up a Duracell battery. That explicit reference to capitalism mirrors the individual who invites Neo to the club as way to “unplug.” Capitalism wants us to see ourselves as free subjects, but it is through capitalism that we act as mere batteries for a machine.

This reading, however, is rather obvious and superficial. The film only *appears* to be a critique of ideology, but is actually just another expression of it. Before Neo takes the red pill, he has an encounter with an Agent who attempts to convince him to assist in the capture of Morpheus. In order to convince him, Agent Smith attempts to intimidate Neo, using his cyber-record as leverage. He says,

It seems that you’ve been living two lives. In one life, you’re Thomas A. Anderson, program writer for a respectable software company. You have a social security number, you pay your taxes, and you help your landlady carry out her garbage. The other life is lived in computers, where you go by the hacker alias Neo and are guilty of virtually every computer crime we have a law for. One of these lives has a future, and one of them does not.

This speech mirrors a speech given earlier in the film by Neo’s boss at Megacortex. After a late night partying at the club, Neo shows up late to work and is called into his boss’s office where he

is told, “You have a problem with authority, Mr. Anderson. You believe that you are special, that somehow the rules do not apply to you. Obviously, you are mistaken.”

Only two people in the film refer to Neo as “Mr. Anderson”: Agent Smith, and Neo’s unnamed boss. Additionally, the boss wears a similar dark olive suit as the Agents do. The characters are meant to be parallels. The Agents, like the boss, are middle managers whose job is to enforce the rules of a system that keeps people docile. This is part of the critique of corporations that makes up the film’s thematic power. However, in challenging “Mr. Anderson,” Neo’s boss accuses him of believing that he is “special, that somehow the rules do not apply” to him. It turns out that, within the world of the film, *his boss is correct*. Neo *is* the One. He *can* manipulate the rules of the Matrix. What appears on the surface to be a parable of corporate control is actually capitalism at its most insidious: the idea that we are special, free subjects who individually “choose” freedom over tyranny. This is like the MGTOW manifesto, which encourages individual, heroic men to leave the system. It appears to be liberatory; however, capitalism encourages everyone to see themselves as individuals who go their own way.

Additionally, it is “Neo” that is presumed to be the “true” identity of Thomas A. Anderson (we do not even learn Morpheus and Trinity’s “real” names). This echoes what humdog says in her essay: what appears to be a realm of freedom, the internet, is actually just another means of control. It works by making you think your “authentic” self is being portrayed “authentically” rather than as a commodity. The Red Pill, rather than having an objective meaning, is simply a Rorschach test—open to interpretation by anyone who perceives it. In this way, it is both a symbol of Marxist liberation and of feminist tyranny. It is both a symbol for a radical feminist future of gender equality and of a desired “*Return of Kings*”—a regressive set of gender hierarchies where men assert dominance over women.

In the Žižek essay that I have referenced throughout this chapter, he reads another fascinating “antagonism” in the text of *The Matrix*. In the film, a character named Cypher serves as the Judas figure to Neo as a Christ figure. Fed up with the real world, Cypher approaches an Agent and offers to betray Morpheus in exchange for returning to the Matrix. Cypher wants to become rich, famous, and to forget all about the world outside. He is aware that the Matrix is only an illusion but finds the illusion preferable to the harsh, cold reality—the “desert of the real.” Cypher is contrasted with Neo, who, at the end of the film, offers the world liberation from ideology, as represented by him learning to bend the rules of the Matrix so thoroughly that he is now able to fly. He offers what appears to be true freedom, as difficult as it may be for people like Cypher (who would rather live in the illusion) to accept. The choice for the audience of the film is to take the Red Pill (personified in the person of Neo) or to take the Blue Pill (personified in the person of Cypher). Žižek writes,

However, the choice of the Matrix is not as simple as that...In short, the choice is not between bitter truth and pleasurable illusion, but rather, between the two modes of illusion: the traitor is bound to the illusion of our ‘reality,’ dominated and manipulated by the Matrix, while Neo offers to humanity the experience of the universe as the playground in which we can play a multitude of games.<sup>325</sup>

All of this raises an important question: who are the “robots” in this chapter? On the most superficial level, the robots are the machines in the world of *The Matrix* who control the human population by creating a false reality for them to live in. On another level, the robots are those individuals who simply have not woken up yet—who do not see the world as it is. In other words, the “robots” are your own political foes—those who do not agree with the way in which you see the world. However, I have argued in this chapter that part of the function of ideology is a discourse that wants us to imagine ourselves free from ideology. If we are all within ideology,

---

<sup>325</sup> Žižek, “Reloaded Revolutions,” 202.

then who are the robots? It is us. *We* are the robots—part of the mechanism of ideology, whether aware of it or not.

## Chapter 6

### I am in Ideology: A Conclusion

The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing. I might add: what thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it. That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, 'I am ideological.' It is necessary to be outside ideology, i.e. in scientific knowledge, to be able to say: I am in ideology...<sup>326</sup>

-Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 1970

In the introduction to this dissertation, I observed that Althusser's dual definition of the subject mirrors the dual definition of the robot. Using that mirror, I argued throughout this dissertation that robots are the sites where ideology manifests itself most plainly, since they are our other selves. Focusing on America specifically, I have attempted to articulate a cultural history of the United States in particular moments, showing how robots function as powerful and effective ideological tools. In chapter 2, I argued that Westinghouse used robots as a way to commodify, package, and sell the nuclear family. The possession of Westinghouse robots (the dishwasher) "freed" the would-be housewife from being a "robot" herself. To achieve this goal, one needed not only to purchase a dishwasher but also to marry a True American—an all-American, football-playing capitalist-industrialist—since the alternative, a Marxist professor, will prove to be a fraud.

In chapter 3, I argued that psychoanalysis was used in the 1960s to curb dissent from capitalism. Individuals who felt like robots in the workplace, due to the performance of repetitious and menial labor, were taught two things. First, that due to developments in the technological sector, workers are potentially replaceable by robots. Second, in order to keep their job, workers must learn to accept this robotic condition as a fact of life. In order to produce these

---

<sup>326</sup> Althusser, *Ideology*, 118

happily compliant workers, psychoanalysis could delve into the mind to find resistance and remove it. In chapter 4, I argued that *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2*, in their Cold War and post-Cold War contexts are both films about individual subjectification. Robots serve as a convenient way for a film to explain why humans are “special” or “different” from a robot. This is almost always explained in a way that highlights human agency. However, conservative forces in the Culture Wars, resisting “filth,” makes Hollywood appear subversive and masks the pro-capitalist nature of Hollywood cinema. In chapter 5, I argued that there is a persuasive and powerful discourse that suggests that we can step outside of ideology. Focusing on the discourse surrounding the first *Matrix* film, I argued that academics and MRAs both fall into the “red pill” trap—which is the way in which a person imagines himself or herself to be the “free” hero of the film, rather than an unwitting subject of capital. These “free” subjects are the “robots” of the world of the film—people who unwittingly support an oppressive system.

In this conclusion, I would like to address three major questions. First, is this dissertation outside of ideology? That is to say, does this dissertation escape or resist capital? Secondly, is it possible to escape or resist capital, or are we *always* inside of ideology? Thirdly, will Althusser continue to be useful as a way to read American ideology as we move further into the twenty-first century?

### **Is this Dissertation Outside Ideology?**

According to Althusser, the statement “I am in ideology” can only be uttered by someone who is outside of ideology, which is to say in “scientific knowledge”—Marxism, or other kinds of science, which have an “epistemological break”<sup>327</sup> from other kinds of knowledge. Anyone inside of ideology believes himself or herself to be “outside ideology” because the basic function

---

<sup>327</sup> See chapter 1

of ideology is to cause us to imagine that what “really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it.” Certain people, i.e. Marxists of Althusser’s bent, through their scientific study of ideology can see ideology for what it is: pervasive, always already present, functioning like a dream, manifest in daily life and ritual, and supporting Capitalism. Having now written about robots and ideology in America throughout the twentieth century, I am going to make a statement: I am in ideology.

I do not mean this as a kind of clever wink to say that, as Althusser would suggest, because I am able to say, “I am in ideology” that I am *really* saying that I am outside of it. No, I am actually saying that I am in ideology. I say this because, unlike Althusser, I do not believe that in our present historical moment, any kind of “scientific” knowledge (Marxism included) exists or is produced outside of ideology. Capitalism is an all-pervasive system, the greatest strength of which is to engulf all forms of resistance into that system and then commodify that resistance (or to make consumption appear subversive, as I argued in chapter 4). For instance, a friend of mine on Twitter posted an image a few years ago that he took while in a bookstore in England. This image showed a display filled with copies of Orwell’s *1984* with a sign underneath (apparently placed there by the management of the store without any sense of irony), saying, “This Shop is Monitored by CCTV.” Through its presence in the bookstore, any potential revolutionary energy of the novel is suppressed.

This commodification of resistance has been shown to occur repeatedly with any form of “counter-culture” in the United States. Let us imagine, for instance, that I wanted to reject capitalism and its standards of “appropriate dress,” i.e. clothing that is acceptable to be worn at “the office” and that looks “professional.” In this scenario, in order to prove that capitalism has no hold on me, let us imagine that I decide to become a goth. I could not do this through a simple

declaration that I am a goth. Rather, I would have to adorn myself in the accoutrements of gothness. To assist me in adopting these material trappings, any number of stores exist (Hot Topic, for instance) where I could purchase the material trappings of my new “identity.” What might seem on the surface to be a rejection of the expectations of capitalism (be professional, go to work) is really its actualization (be yourself, freedom of choice) through commodification. Any identity “choice” under capitalism—even ones that seem to be counter-culture—is available for purchase at the local mall.

In *Sex Kittens Go To College*, there is a subplot in which a character played by Mijanou Bardot is trying to seduce one of the gangsters (she is turned on by the fact that he is a “real American gangster”). Bardot’s impulse is not hedonistic, however. She is a researcher, and she is interested in making love with as many people as possible so that she can document the experience in a book that she is writing. At the end of the film, the gangster asks her if they are still going to be together, and she responds that they are not, but that she is going to write two chapters about him, and that she is sure the book will be a great hit in France. Sexuality, and any of its potential power to disrupt capitalism, is subsumed into scientific discourse, in much the same way that Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. What seems to be a resistance to capitalism (hedonism, pleasure for its own sake) is just its actualization (commodification of sexuality, “healthy” expressions of pleasure).

In *The Matrix Reloaded*, the much-derided sequel to *The Matrix*, the Wachowskis attempt to explain this resistance-quelling power of capitalism. In the first film, Neo is The One, a special person, set-apart from society, who is destined to free everyone from the Matrix (ideology) and show them the way the world actually is, rather than the false world that they have accepted. Near the end of the second film, Neo encounters The Architect, the creator of the



Matrix. During their encounter, Neo is told that, rather than being “chosen” or “special,” he is “the sum of the remainder of an unbalanced equation inherent to the programming of the Matrix.” He is “the eventuality of an anomaly” which The Architect has been “unable to eliminate from what is, otherwise, a harmony.” The Architect then goes on to tell him that he is not the first anomaly, nor will he be the last, and that it is the job of the anomaly to reset the Matrix. What seems on the surface to be resistance to the Matrix is actually its actualization: the use of potential resistance by the System itself. Neo is not somehow set apart from the Matrix, his resistance to it is essential for it to function properly. Žižek writes, “There is a sobering message in this very failure of the conclusion of the *Matrix* series. There is no final solution on the horizon today. Capital is here to stay: all we can hope for is a temporary truce.”<sup>328</sup> Žižek’s central argument in his essay about the trilogy is that the human energy that the machines are feeding on is *jouissance*. This is because, as Žižek says about *They Live*, which I quoted in the introduction, “we are subjects of pleasures.” In other words, what appears to be resistance is often the very energy that the machine of capitalism feeds on.

It is essential for the function of capitalism to allow for and then to absorb its own critique. For instance, in chapter 2, I showed how Westinghouse’s Book of Record of the Time Capsule contained the critique to its purported vision that the “future will be glorious.” By absorbing and containing potential disruptions to its narrative, capitalism is able to reduce the power of dissent, rather than risk letting potentially anarchic energies run free. Similarly, this idea is readily apparent in the Report of the National Commission on Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress discussed in chapter 3. In the Report, responding to calls from “extreme views” suggesting that “gainful employment” would soon become obsolete, the Commission

---

<sup>328</sup> Žižek, “Reloaded Revolutions,” 208.

declared, “we dissent from this view.” The “we” in this dissention is a curious pronoun, however, since each individual member of the Commission did not always agree with one another about their findings nor the proper interpretation of those findings. Additionally, this individual disagreement is made public within the structure of the Report itself.

Throughout the document, there are “general comment[s] on [the] report” by members of the Commission who wanted to add their own specific voice to the “we” of the document. The vast majority of these comments are there to stress their agreement with the Commission’s findings and to add their own addendum to those findings. Most commentators are concerned that the document stresses the role of the federal government, thus eliminating the sovereignty of individual states. Others are concerned that prioritizing workplace safety over profitability would encourage businesses to be less competitive. A handful of other comments, however, are there in order to disagree with, or to challenge the Commission’s findings. For instance, the very last comment of the document is by Mr. Beirne, Mr. Hayes, and Mr. Reuther, who are joined by Mr. Bell and Mr. Young. They write, “The blind forces of the marketplace are no longer adequate to cope with the complex problems of modern society.” A modern society needs “planning” based on “priorities” that “ought to be determined on the basis of the broadest possible consensus,” and they lament that the Report suggests the creation of a national body that would “point out what alternatives are achievable and at what costs” but does not suggest the kind of planning that Beirne, et. al. believe is necessary.<sup>329</sup>

Regardless of the dissent within the document, the Report still claims that “we dissent” from the radical view that warns of the dangers of automation. Furthermore, “we begin with a bias to the free market” even though some believe that this is “no longer adequate.” The Report

---

<sup>329</sup> Report of the National Commission, 106-108

allows for its own critique by showing that, while there can be minor points about which reasonable people may disagree, *we* ultimately “choose” capital because it is the “best” system. For Althusser, this is how capitalist ideology functions: it makes capitalism appear to be one option among many that a subject “freely chooses” because it is the best option among all of the available choices. For capitalism to adequately function, then, it must allow for critique, if only to show that there *is* critique, thus strengthening the notion that capitalism is simply the “best” choice among many.

Similarly, this dissertation, rather than challenging capitalism, only serves to strengthen it. It is not that I have come to this dissertation insincerely. I have not. I am not lying or being coy about the argument I have made within these pages. What I have argued is that capitalism is very good at convincing its subjects to adhere to its values, even when those subjects believe themselves to be free from those values. This is not a discourse that I am free from. This dissertation is, rather, complicit in supporting capitalism as a system, which is sufficiently adept at absorbing and commodifying critique. I can imagine, in fact, a committed capitalist reading this dissertation. They might find the argument interesting, perhaps even occasionally persuasive, but the final verdict would be that they disagree with my argument, thus reaffirming their belief that they “chose” capitalism as one system among many. This dissertation, then, is not resistance to capitalism. It is its actualization.

### **Is Resistance Possible?**

In July of 1962, Althusser attended a performance at the Théâtre des Nations in Paris of the Piccolo Teatro of Milan’s production of Bertolazzi’s *El Nost Milan*, which received “condemnation and disappointment” from Parisian critics who called it “poor popular theatre”

and “miserabilist melodrama.”<sup>330</sup> As Althusser describes the plot in the first half of his essay, “The ‘Piccolo Teatro’: Bertolazzi and Brecht,” *El Nost Milan* takes place in three acts, all of which mirror each other. In each act, the world of the play is filled with the poor and the destitute, and each act shows the “same people but different characters.”<sup>331</sup> What unites the production is the narrative of Nina, her father, and the Togasso,<sup>332</sup> “the good-for-nothing who hopes to seduce her.”<sup>333</sup> After forcing Nina to kiss him, the Togasso is killed by her father in a knife-fight. In the third act, the father seeks to tell Nina that he killed for her honor, but “suddenly everything is reversed,”<sup>334</sup> and Nina decides that she is going to free herself from poverty by selling herself as a prostitute.

As Althusser reads the play, the three acts are not “melodramatic,” but are a criticism of the melodramatic mode. Nina’s father represents this melodramatic mode as the “law of the heart”<sup>335</sup> as he tries to fill his daughter’s head with romantic illusions about the world. By the end of the play, Nina has realized the “law of the world”<sup>336</sup> by rejecting the “deliberate unconsciousness”<sup>337</sup> of her father. In the figures of the thirty-odd extras inhabiting the play, the audience sees hopelessness and the workings of capital on the lives of people. What the audience is able to see in the play, even if they are unconscious of it, is the “perception of this structure and its profound meaning.”<sup>338</sup> Despite being unconscious of it, “it is there, in the tacit relation between the people’s time and the time of the tragedy, in their mutual imbalance, in their

---

<sup>330</sup> Louis Althusser, “The ‘Piccolo Teatro’: Bertolazzi and Brecht, Notes on a Materialist Theatre,” *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 131.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>332</sup> The word has no direct translation into English. The Togasso, as Althusser uses the term, is the “good-for-nothing” character in the play.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

incessant ‘interference,’ and finally in their true and delusive criticism.” The audience, and even the director, may not be “able to translate this presence directly into conscious terms” but “even if it is still blind, it is consciousness aiming at last at a real world.”<sup>339</sup>

In the second half of the essay, Althusser takes his observations on *El Nost Milan* and attempts to create a theory for the mechanism of Brechtian theatre without relying on its staging techniques. He argues that “if a distance can be established between the spectator and the play, it is essential that in some way this distance should be produced within the play itself, and not only in its (technical) treatment, or in the psychological modality of the characters.” Rather, it is “within the play itself, in the dynamic of its internal structure, that this distance is produced and represented, at once criticizing the illusions of consciousness and unravelling its real conditions.”<sup>340</sup> It is because of the “dissociated structure” of Brecht’s plays and plays like *El Nost Milan* that the confusion of the spectator “‘identifying’ himself with the hero” becomes “impossible.”<sup>341</sup> Brecht is often interpreted, Althusser argues, as creating a drama that encourages the spectator to finish the play in real life—that is, that Brecht’s plays are intentionally left unfinished because the real ending is the one written through the actions of the spectator. Althusser argues, however, that this does not quite get at the heart of Brecht. When a spectator watches a play and identifies with the hero, the play creates a “spectatorial consciousness” which “recognizes itself in the ideological content of the play.”<sup>342</sup> The goal of plays like Brecht’s *Mother Courage* and Bertolazzi’s *El Nost Milan*, however, is not to repeat this endless cycle of ideological recognition and identification but to “destroy this intangible image, to set in motion the immobile, the eternal sphere of the illusory consciousness’s mythical

---

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 149.

world.” Once done, “then the play is really the development, the production of a new consciousness in the spectator.”<sup>343</sup>

At Brown University on October 7, 2013, Althusser’s former student, Étienne Balibar gave a lecture on this Althusser essay (and on the much more famous “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”). In his lecture, published in 2015, Balibar takes from Althusser’s essay that “‘theatre’ is a social and aesthetic machine that not only shows how such a disruption or dislocation [from ideology] can happen but may make it happen.” This is because “it duplicates (or iterates) the representation of the imaginary in a manner that may make it impossible to recompose.” Balibar believes that Althusser, in his description of his experience at *El Nost Milan* was “not just describing a mechanism or a process but recalling an experience, an interpellation: not the interpellation *of* (by) ideology, as he would later theorize, but the interpellation *out of ideology*”<sup>344</sup> (emphasis in original). To sum up, Althusser saw in Bertolazzi’s *El Nost Milan* a way of being interpellated outside of ideology because, like Brecht’s plays, the play has a “dissociated structure” which prevents identification and allows for the shattering of one’s “illusionary consciousness.”

I have argued throughout this dissertation that we are always already interpellated in ideology, and that when we think we have resisted it, then we are the most thoroughly within its grasp. What I am attempting to theorize here is a possible way of thinking, if not completely outside of ideology, at least of recognizing ideology as a mechanism from, what Brecht would call, a critical distance. If ideology interpellates us through performance, perhaps it is possible for performance to also show us ideology, to make its machine parts bare. Jordan Harrison’s play *Marjorie Prime* is a very recent play with a “disjointed structure” that works to make manifest

---

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>344</sup> Étienne Balibar, “Althusser’s Dramaturgy and the Critique of Ideology,” *differences* 26, no. 3 (2015): 9.

the ways in which ideology interpellates us as subjects with identities: gender, memory, and learning beyond core programming. In chapter 2, I argued that gender is one common ritual of ideological recognition. A common trope in robot films is that robots are referred to as “it,” until one character refers to “it” as “he” or “she,” thus rendering the robot into a person. Without gender, we are not fully human. In chapter 3, I argued that memory is perceived as an essential characteristic of our identities. When we have a continuity, we have a “soul” and therefore, become a human. In chapter 4, I argued that the T-800 becomes a person by learning outside of its core programming. The play *Marjorie Prime* reveals the ways in which each of these three mechanisms of interpellation are constructed. In this brief analysis of the play, I will focus mostly on memory.

The play is structured as three acts. In the first act, Marjorie, an elderly woman who is implied to have some form of dementia, is comforted by the presence of her dead husband Walter, who is a “Prime”—an artificial intelligence hologram who looks exactly like a younger version of her husband and learns how to act like him through observation. Since Walter is no longer alive, Walter Prime observes what others say about Walter, constructing an identity of the man based on other people’s memories of him. Primes do this by asking for information so that the living can provide them with memories that the Primes then perform for others. In the second act, Marjorie has died and she is now a Prime, attempting to learn about herself and make a connection with her daughter, Tess. By the end of the second act, Tess has died and now interacts with her husband, Jon, as a Prime. In the final act, which takes place in the very distant future, Tess Prime, Marjorie Prime and Walter Prime all interact with one another, reminiscing about memories they never had.

In act two, Tess and Jon are having a conversation about Marjorie Prime when Tess tells Jon that she is aware that Jon has been speaking to Marjorie because “she knew about the collie.” Jon responds, “I thought it was ‘it’...you always call it ‘it,’ but you just said ‘she.’” Tess’s only response is “oh.”<sup>345</sup> Also in act two, Tess asks Marjorie Prime, “Do you have emotions, Marjorie, or do you just remember ours? Do you feel anything?” The stage directions tell us that “Marjorie thinks for a moment” before responding “I like to know more...It makes me...better...More human.”<sup>346</sup> The play is aware that gender and continued learning are essential aspects for subject formation, but where the play is most effective in offering a critique of interpellation is through its theme of memory. The play is about the performative process of creating (and removing) memories.

In act one, we learn that Marjorie and Walter, when they were young newlyweds, chose a dog at the shelter and named her Toni. After that dog passed away, they took young Tess to the shelter and she chose a similar dog whom they also named Toni. The family is uncertain, due to the unreliability of memory, which dog was the one who liked playing on the beach. Marjorie’s son, Damian, before the events of the play, killed himself and the dog, believing in his depression that he could take the dog into the afterlife with him. This event upset Marjorie so much that she refused to speak of him. After the onset of dementia, Marjorie is not even able to remember Damian. Rather than remind her of him, Tess never mentions Damian to her, so that by the third act, Damian has essentially been erased from history. As another way to comfort Marjorie, Tess and Jon tell her that an old flame of hers, a tennis player, was the eighth best in the world. Marjorie is not aware that this is false. It is a lie that they tell her so that she is able to find comfort in the last few years of her life. As a person living with dementia, Marjorie is

---

<sup>345</sup> Jordan Harrison, *Marjorie Prime* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2016), 57.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.



already like a Prime, even before she dies. She is an empty vessel, waiting to be filled with memories. Frustrated with Marjorie's memory loss, Jon asks, "How much does she have to forget before she's not your mom anymore?"<sup>347</sup> However, Marjorie's identity is not simply the loss of her memory. Rather, she is the result of deliberate programming by outside forces, namely by Jon and Tess.

By the time that Marjorie is, herself, a Prime, the constructed nature of memory is made apparent. Speaking with Tess, trying to learn more about herself, Marjorie Prime says, "I'll remember that fact."<sup>348</sup> Tess is quick to remind Marjorie that people do not speak that way when making memories. It is not something to which one is supposed to call attention. In speaking this way, Marjorie Prime makes her own subjectification explicit, which also makes the spectator aware of it, seeing in both Marjorie and Marjorie Prime a vessel whose "core identity" does not come from within, but rather, is imposed from without. This reveals the very performative nature of identity and memory—that is, it is performed on us by outside forces. By the end of the play, Tess Prime, Walter Prime, and Marjorie Prime "remember" events in their lives that never happened to them, and that are deliberate lies. They continue to live far into the future, happy simply to reminisce about the past, without being aware that the past they remember is constructed for them.

*Marjorie Prime* is by no means a Brechtian play in its technical sense. However, what Althusser sees in both Brecht and in *El Nost Milan* is a theatre designed to "destroy this intangible image [identity], to set in motion the immobile, the eternal sphere of the illusory consciousness's mythical world." Like *El Nost Milan*, the play *Marjorie Prime* also has a "disjointed structure" designed to call attention to the ways in which false consciousness works

---

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 41.

its way into our lived experience. I do not believe that *Marjorie Prime* is somehow the vanguard of the resistance—that the play contains the key to final emancipation from ideology. I do believe, however, that any radical emancipatory politics begin with recognizing ourselves as ideological beings, rather than as free agents. What performance has the power to do is either to interpellate us into ideology *or* to offer a glimpse, however brief, of our own selves *inside* of ideology. However, as we continue to move into the twenty-first century, will recognizing ideology be enough to begin to create a new, radical politics? For the United States in 2017, recognition of ideology may not be enough.

### **Will Althusser Continue to be Useful in the United States?**

Between January 31 and February 2, 2017, a CNN/ORC poll conducted by telephone (502 landline and 500 cell phone) with 1,002 adults found that 53% of Americans disapprove of “the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president.” This same percentage of Americans also opposed the executive order signed by Trump that “prohibits travel to the U.S. for the next three months by citizens of seven majority-Muslim countries.”<sup>349</sup> In response to the travel ban, on January 30, 2017, the State of Washington “filed a complaint seeking declaratory and injunctive relief against” multiple defendants including “Donald J. Trump, in his official capacity as President of the United States.”<sup>350</sup> Finding that “the States [Washington added Minnesota as a plaintiff] have met their burden of demonstrating that they face immediate and irreparable injury as a result of the signing and implementation of the Executive Order,”<sup>351</sup> the Temporary Restraining Order was signed by United States District Judge James L. Robart on February 3,

---

<sup>349</sup> CNN/ORC International Poll, last modified February 3, 2017, <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2017/images/02/03/rel2a.-.trump.pdf>.

<sup>350</sup> United States District Court Western District Of Washington At Seattle, Case No. C17-0141JLR, Temporary Restraining Order, last modified February 3, 2017, [http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/general/2017/02/03/17-141\\_TRO\\_order.pdf](http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/general/2017/02/03/17-141_TRO_order.pdf), Page 2.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

2017, restricting the enforcement of Trump's Executive Order. Trump, who had run a populist campaign, saw the results of CNN's poll on February 6, which showed 53% of the country in opposition to the ban. Trump immediately took to Twitter to say, "Any negative polls are fake news, just like the CNN, ABC, NBC polls in the election. Sorry, people want border security and extreme vetting."<sup>352</sup>

It is tempting to see Trump's assertion that "any negative polls are fake news" to mean that we are living in a post-truth world, that truth is simply whatever we declare it to be, rather than based in any objective facts about the world around us. This, however, implies that the politics of liberalism has traditionally had, as its aim, "truth." If our world is a "post-truth" world, then the world of liberalism was a world where politicians, while they may disagree with one another, were essentially truth-tellers. Alternatively, if we take the idea of ideology seriously, then we cannot say that we are "post-truth" now. Rather, any philosophy other than historical materialism is "post-truth," which is to say, a metaphysical philosophy of consciousness, instead of a philosophy that focuses of material relations, is always-already false, even if its "facts" are true. It might also be tempting then, to say that Trump offers a way for individuals to be interpellated *outside* of ideology, by making its so-called "post-truth" workings explicit.

However, none of these responses (either we are "post-truth" or that Trump unintentionally reveals the mechanism of ideology through "post-truth" statements) goes far enough. What this dissertation has not accounted for is people who are *fully aware* that they are ideological beings, but who choose ideology anyway. I have argued that radical emancipatory politics begins with a recognition that one is within ideology, since the belief that one is outside

---

<sup>352</sup> Brian Stelter, *Twitter*, last modified February 6, 2017, <https://twitter.com/brianstelter/status/828578904692625408>

of ideology is ideology at its most invisible and most effective. However, what if someone can see and acknowledge the mechanism of ideology but like Cypher in *The Matrix* chooses ideology anyway?

For Althusser, when we engage in rituals of ideological recognition (the hail, or identification with a protagonist) we recognize ourselves as subjects through the very process of our subjectification (“I must be the ‘you’ the police officer is referring to”). In other words, ideology works because everyone believes that they are free subjects, like Neo. I have argued, however, in this conclusion, that performance can serve as a counter-hegemonic ritual of recognition, meaning that certain performances can allow us to recognize the mechanism of ideology, rather than (mis)recognizing the *a priori* existence of ourselves as subjects. In other words, I have argued that if people could simply recognize themselves as subjects of ideology, rather than as free subjects, then we could begin to change the social order. How do we account, however, for those who do not believe that they are Neo—for those are fully aware that they are Cypher?

While I believe that Althusser has been relevant to the work of this dissertation, time will tell, as we continue to move into the twenty-first century, if he continues to remain relevant. What Trump’s ascendancy suggests is that there are many Americans willing, voluntarily, to submit to ideology consciously knowing that ideology is at work. Trump’s so-called “post-truth” world shows that objectively, demonstrably false statements are acceptable to a certain percentage of the population. In the introduction to this dissertation, I discussed how Althusser, in the 1960s, engaged in what he saw as the first left-wing critique of Stalinism. Other Marxists, Althusser believed, were focused on humanist critiques of Stalinism (“the imperialism of the USSR is bad because we are free, individual agents with rights”), which Althusser believed were

still ideological critiques. Where Althusser works best, then, is as a critique of humanist, universal expressions of human “rights” and “values” which are actually, Althusser would say, ideological tools that support capitalism. As we continue to move into the twenty-first century, however, will capitalism and humanism remain synonymous? Will capitalism continue to be supported by a belief that it is a system that best represents our “free” selves? Alternatively, will we live in a world where people can be shown the demonstrable existence of ideology but choose ideology anyway? In that world, will Althusser remain useful or will a critique of ideology, by itself, be insufficient?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

- Alexander, Steve. "How #GamerGate Made Me Red Pill." *Reaxxion*. Last modified January 4, 2015. <http://www.reaxxion.com/3637/how-gamergate-made-me-red-pill>.
- "All's Fair at the Fair." *YouTube*. Accessed February 12, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAFqAbrPKxQ>
- All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, Directed by Adam Curtis. 2011. BBC.
- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.
- . "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht, Notes on a Materialist Theatre." *For Marx*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969.
- . *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Anderson, Kate. "Chapter 14: 'Money Talks: The Publicity of Private Enterprise' Part 1 & 2." Accessed June 7, 2017. <https://socialhistoryofspin.wordpress.com/chapter-14-money-talks-the-publicity-of-private-enterprise-part-1/>.
- Anthony, John. "4 Powerful Quotes From The Professor Who Stood Up Against Deranged Leftists." *Return of Kings*. Last modified April 11, 2017. <http://www.returnofkings.com/118928/4-powerful-quotes-from-the-professor-who-stood-up-against-deranged-leftists>.
- Arnold, John H. and Sean Brady, eds. *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Asimov, Isaac. "Visit to the World's Fair of 2014." *The New York Times*. Accessed September 9, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/03/23/lifetimes/asi-v-fair.html>.
- Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Random House, 1957.
- Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- "A Whole World of Metal Men?" *San Antonio Light*. Accessed January 29, 2016. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/23720709/1937-Oct-17-San-Antonio-Light-San-Antonio-TX>.
- Balibar, Étienne. "Althusser's Dramaturgy and the Critique of Ideology." *differences* 26, no. 3 (2015): 1-22.

- Balm, Tracy. "Second Wachowski Filmmaker Sibling Comes Out as Trans." *Windy City Times*. Last Modified March 8, 2016. <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Second-Wachowski-filmmaker-sibling-comes-out-as-trans/54509.html>.
- Barnes, Jack. "Will the Artificial Womb Bring About Men's Liberation?" *A Voice for Men*. Last Modified August 27, 2014. <https://www.avoicemen.com/male-reproductive-rights/will-the-artificial-womb-bring-about-mens-liberation/>.
- Barwick, Daniel. "Neo-Materialism and the Death of the Subject." In *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. Edited by William Irwin. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.
- Batuman, Elif. *The Idiot*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1994.
- Baym, Nina. "Melodramas of Beset Womanhood." In *The Critical Tradition*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Edited by David Richter. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 2006.
- Beach, Christopher. *The Politics of Distinction: Whitman and the Discourses of Nineteenth-Century America*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Bedini, Silvio A. "The Role of Automata in the History of Technology." *Technology and Culture* 5 (1964): 24-42.
- Bell, John. *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Berlinski, Claire. *There Is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.
- Bethke, Bruce. "Cyberpunk." <http://project.cyberpunk.ru/lib/cyberpunk/>.
- Bicentennial Man*, directed by Chris Columbus. 1999. Buena Vista Pictures.
- Bierce, Ambrose Gwinnett. "Moxon's Master." Accessed June 24, 2017. [http://doyleandmacdonald.com/l\\_moxon.htm](http://doyleandmacdonald.com/l_moxon.htm).
- Bix, Amy Sue. *Inventing Ourselves Out of Jobs?: America's Debate Over Technological Unemployment 1929-1981*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Blackmore, Tim. "High on Technology; Low on Memory: Cultural Crisis in *Dark City* and *The Matrix*." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 13-54.

*Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott. 1982. Warner Bros. Pictures.

Bloomfield, Janet. "13 Reasons Women Lie About Rape." *A Voice for Men*. Last Modified December 10, 2014. <https://www.avoicemen.com/mens-rights/false-rape-culture/13-women-who-lied-about-being-raped-and-why-they-did-it/>.

———. "Will Killer Robots Act Like Men or Women? It Matters." *A Voice for Men*. July 21, 2015. <https://www.avoicemen.com/sexual-politics/will-killer-robots-act-like-men-or-women-it-matters/>.

*The Book of Record of the Time Capsule of Cupaloy: Deemed Capable of Resisting the Effects of Time for Five Thousand Years: Preserving an Account of Universal Achievements, Embedded in the Grounds of the New York World's Fair, 1939*. New York: Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company, 1938.

Boyle, Rebecca. "Mitt Romney: The Uncanny Candidate." *Popular Science*. Last Modified February 1, 2012. <http://www.popsci.com/technology/article/2012-02/why-mitt-romney-just-creepy-robot>.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Translated by John Willett. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.

Buchanan, Patrick J. *1992 Republican National Convention Speech*. Accessed May 1, 2017. <http://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148>.

Bush, George H. W. "Inaugural Address." *The American Presidency Project*. Accessed May 10, 2017. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16610>.

Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Byers, Thomas B. "Terminating the Postmodern: Masculinity and Pomophobia." *Modern Fiction Studies* 41, no. 1 (1995): 35-73.

Čapek, Karel. *Rossum's Universal Robots (R.U.R.)*. Translated by Paul Selver and Nigel Playfair. New York: Samuel French, 1923.

Cardullo, Bert, and Robert Knopf, eds. *Theatre of the Avant-Garde: 1890-1950, A Critical Anthology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Chase, Stuart. *Men and Machines*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935.

Cheney, Nick et al. "Unshackling Evolution: Evolving Soft Robots with Multiple Materials and a Powerful Generative Encoding." Accessed May 28, 2014. [http://jeffclune.com/publications/2013\\_Softbots\\_GECCO.pdf](http://jeffclune.com/publications/2013_Softbots_GECCO.pdf)



- Christian, Brian. *The Most Human Human: What Talking with Computers Teaches Us About What it Means to be Human*. Doubleday: New York, 2011.
- Clark, Danae. *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Clarke, Simon, et al. *One Dimensional Marxism*. New York: Allison and Busby, 1980.
- Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One*. New York: Random House, 2011.
- Cloud, Dana L. "The Matrix and Critical Theory's Desert of the Real." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 4 (2006): 329-354.
- Clover, Joshua. *The Matrix*. London: British Film Institute, 2004.
- CNN/ORC International Poll. Last Modified February 3, 2017. <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2017/images/02/03/rel2a.-.trump.pdf>.
- Cohen, John. *Human Robots in Myth and Science*. Cranbury: A. S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1967.
- Combe, Kirk, and Brenda Boyle. *Masculinity and Monstrosity in Contemporary Hollywood Films*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Condis, Megan Amber. "Playing the Game of Literature: *Ready Player One*, the Ludic Novel, and the Geeky 'Canon' of White Masculinity." *Journal of Modern Literature* 39, no. 2 (2016): 1-19.
- Constable, Catherine. *Adapting Philosophy: Jean Baudrillard and The Matrix Trilogy*. New York: Manchester University Press, 2009.
- Contrary, Christopher. "The Equality Movement Is Allowing Women to Tyrannize Men." *Return of Kings*. Last Modified March 7, 2014. <http://www.returnofkings.com/30492/the-equality-movement-is-allowing-women-to-tyrannize-men>.
- Cooper, James. *Margaret Thatcher & Ronald Reagan: A Very Political Special Relationship*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Cornell Creative Machines Lab. Accessed May 28, 2014. <http://www.creativemachineslab.com/soft-robot-evolution.html>.
- Cybernetic Zoo. "1930 – Katrina Van Televox – Westinghouse (American)." Accessed June 24, 2017. <http://cyberneticzoo.com/robots/1930-katrina-van-televox-westinghouse-american/>.

- . “1929 – Telelux Robot – (American).” Accessed June 24, 2017.  
<http://cyberneticzoo.com/robots/1929-telelux-american/>
- . “1927 – Televox – Roy J. Wensley (American).” Accessed June 24, 2017.  
<http://cyberneticzoo.com/?p=656>.
- Daily Mail Reporter. “A Robotic Performance: Japanese Android Actress Geminoid F Appears on Stage Alongside Human in Play.” *Daily Mail*. Last Modified Nov. 15, 2010.  
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1329208/Robot-actress-Geminoid-F-performs-alongside-human-Japanese-play.html>.
- Dallek, Robert. *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- The Dawn of Artificial Intelligence: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Space, Science, and Competitiveness of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. United States Senate. 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. November 30, 2016. Accessed June 24, 2017.  
<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-114shrg24175/pdf/CHRG-114shrg24175.pdf>.
- Dear Esther*, developed by The Chinese Room. 2012.
- Depression Quest*, developed by Zoë Quinn. 2013.
- Detmer, David. “Challenging *Simulacra and Simulation*: Baudrillard in *The Matrix*.” In *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded decoded*. Edited by William Irwin. Chicago: Open Court, 2005.
- Diver, Mike. “British Female Gamers Talk Discrimination in the Gaming Community.” *Vice*. Last Modified September 22, 2015. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/speaking-to-british-female-gamers-about-discrimination-the-casual-vs-hardcore-divide-and-more-100](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/speaking-to-british-female-gamers-about-discrimination-the-casual-vs-hardcore-divide-and-more-100).
- Doctorow, E. L. *World’s Fair*. New York: Vintage International, 1985.
- Draper, Robert. “Building a Better Mitt Romney.” *The New York Times*. Last Modified November 30, 2011. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/magazine/mitt-romney-bot.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/magazine/mitt-romney-bot.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).
- Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology: An Introduction*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

- “Elektro the Robot Breaks a Balloon,” *YouTube*. Accessed February 12, 2013.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdLEQNmsXag&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdLEQNmsXag&feature=player_embedded)
- Ex Machina*, directed by Alex Garland. 2015. Universal Pictures International.
- Farrell, Warren. *The Myth of Male Power*. New York: Berkley Books, 2001.
- Firewatch*, developed by Campo Santo. 2016.
- Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative?*. Washington: 0 Books, 2009.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1990.
- French, Sean. *The Terminator*. London: British Film Institute, 1996.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Avon Books, 1992.
- Fung, Brian. “The Uncanny Valley: What Robot Theory Tells Us About Mitt Romney.” *The Atlantic*. Last Modified January 30, 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/01/the-uncanny-valley-what-robot-theory-tells-us-about-mitt-romney/252235/>.
- Garrett, Garet. *Ouroboros, or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1926.
- Garrison, Justin D. “*An Empire of Ideals*”: *The Chimeric Imagination of Ronald Reagan*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Gills, Stacy, ed. *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded*. New York: Wallflower Press, 2005.
- Gone Home*, developed by Fullbright, 2013.
- Gopnik, Adam. “Did the Oscars Just Prove that We are Living in a Computer Simulation?” *The New Yorker*. Last Modified February 27, 2017. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/did-the-oscars-just-prove-that-we-are-living-in-a-computer-simulation>
- Grau, Christopher, ed. *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Greben, David. “Cyborg Masochism, Homo-Fascism: Rereading *Terminator 2*.” *Postmodern Culture* 19, no. 1, (2008), online.

- Elliott, Gregory. *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006.
- Grint, Keith and Steve Woolgar. *The Machine at Work: Technology, Work and Organization*. Cambridge: Polity Press: 1997.
- “Group Predicts Robots Will Win Soccer’s World Cup in 2050.” *LiveScience*. Last modified February 26, 2009. <http://www.livescience.com/5339-group-predicts-robots-win-soccer-world-cup-2050.html>.
- Haber, Karen, ed. *Exploring the Matrix: Visions of a Cyber Present*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003.
- Haraway, Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” Accessed June 24, 2017. <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Haraway-CyborgManifesto-1.pdf>.
- Harkinson, Josh. “Meet the White Nationalist Trying to Ride the Trump Train to Lasting Power.” *Mother Jones*. Last Modified October 27, 2016. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/richard-spencer-trump-alt-right-white-nationalist>.
- Harrison, Jordan. *Marjorie Prime*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2016.
- Haskell, Thomas. *The Emergence of Professional Social Science*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- Heather, Peter. *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hicks, William. “Why ‘Walking Simulator’ Video Games Have Become So Political.” *Heatstreat*. Last Modified September 28, 2016. <https://heatst.com/tech/why-walking-simulator-video-games-have-become-so-political/>.
- “The History of M.G.T.O.W. Men Going Their Own Way.” Accessed April 18, 2017. <https://www.mgtow.com/history/>.
- Holmes, Sean P. *Weavers of Dreams, Unite! Actors’ Unionism in Early Twentieth-Century America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013.
- Humdog. “Introducing Humdog: Pandora’s Vox Redux.” Last Modified June 2, 2011. <http://folksonomy.co/?permalink=2299>.
- Irwin, William, ed. *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.

- . “Computers, Caves, and Oracles: Neo and Socrates.” *The Matrix and Philosophy*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.
- , ed. *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded decoded*. Chicago: Open Court, 2005.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.
- Jentsch, Ernst. “On the Psychology of the Uncanny.” Accessed June 7, 2017.  
[http://www.art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch\\_uncanny.pdf](http://www.art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf)
- Kang, Minsoo. *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Khilnani, Sunil. *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Kidd, Dustin, and Amanda J. Turner. “The #GamerGate files: Misogyny in the Media.” In *Defining Identity and Changing the Scope of Culture in the Digital Age*. Edited by Alison Novak and Imaani Jamillah El-Burki. Hershey: Information Science Reference, 2016.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New York: Nation Books, 2013.
- Kord, Susanne, and Elisabeth Krimmer. *Contemporary Hollywood Masculinities: Gender, Genre, and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Kriss, Sam. “Book of Lamentations.” *The New Inquiry*. Last Modified October 18, 2003.  
<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/book-of-lamentations/>.
- Kuznick, Peter J. “Losing the World of Tomorrow: The Battle Over the Presentation of Science at the 1939 New York World's Fair.” *American Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1994): 341-373.
- Lawler, James. “We are (the) One! Kant Explains How to Manipulate the Matrix.” In *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, edited by William Irwin. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.
- Levine, Andrew. *The American Ideology: A Critique*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Lewis, Helen. “Gamergate: A Brief History of a Computer-Age War.” *The Guardian*. Last Modified January 11, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/11/gamergate-a-brief-history-of-a-computer-age-war>.

- Lipschutz, Ronnie D. *Cold War Fantasies: Film, Fiction, and Foreign Policy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.
- Løvenskiolds, August. "Women Hate Being CEOs—and They Suck at It." *A Voice for Men*. Last Modified April 8, 2017. <https://www.avoicemen.com/feminism/women-hate-being-ceos-and-they-suck-at-it/>
- Luckhurst, Roger. "Laboratories for Global Space-Time: Science-Fictionality and the World's Fairs, 1851-1939." *Science Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3 (2012): 385-400.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. London: Routledge, 1964.
- Marx, Karl. *The German Ideology*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Mass Effect 3*, developed by Bioware. 2012.
- The Matrix*, directed by The Wachowskis. 1999. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- The Matrix: Reloaded*, directed by The Wachowskis. 2003. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- The Matrix: Revolutions*, directed by The Wachowskis. 2003. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- McMahon, Steve. "Women Should Not Be Allowed to Vote." *Return of Kings*. Last Modified March 15, 2014. <http://www.returnofkings.com/34330/women-should-not-be-allowed-to-vote>.
- Medved, Michael. *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Meriwether, Elizabeth. *Heddatron*. New York: Playscripts, 2008.
- Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang. 1927. UFA.
- The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair (1939)*, *Archive.org*, accessed February 12, 2013, [http://archive.org/details/middleton\\_family\\_worlds\\_fair\\_1939](http://archive.org/details/middleton_family_worlds_fair_1939).
- Modern Times*, directed by Charlie Chaplin. 1936. United Artists.

- Montag, Warren. *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Murphy, Paul P. "White Nationalist Richard Spencer Punched During Interview." *CNN*. Last Modified January 21, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/20/politics/white-nationalist-richard-spencer-punched/>.
- Nardone, Henry and Gregory Bassham. "Pissin Metal: Columbine, Malvo, and the Matrix of Violence." In *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded decoded*, edited by William Irwin. Chicago: Open Court, 2005.
- Nathanson, Paul and Young, Katherine K. *Replacing Misandry: A Revolutionary History of Men*. Chicago: McGill-Queen University Press, 2015.
- Novak, Matt. "Alpha the Robot Shoots His Inventor (1932)." *Gizmodo*. Last Modified August 15, 2010. <http://paleofuture.gizmodo.com/alpha-the-robot-shoots-his-inventor-1932-512626230>.
- Nuzzi, Olivia. "How Pepe the Frog Became a Nazi Trump Supporter and Alt-Right Symbol." *The Daily Beast*. Last Modified May 25, 2016. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/05/26/how-pepe-the-frog-became-a-nazi-trump-supporter-and-alt-right-symbol.html>.
- Official Guide Book, New York World's Fair, 1939*. New York: Exposition Publication, 1939.
- Ortner, Sherry B. "Too Soon for Post-Feminism: The Ongoing Life of Patriarchy in Neoliberal America." *History and Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2014): 530-549.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. s.v. "automaton."
- Oxford English Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. s.v. "robot." n2.
- Palmer, Lorrie. "Cranked Masculinity: Hypermediation in Digital Action Cinema." *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4 (2012): 1-25.
- Perucci, Tony. "The Red Mask of Sanity: Paul Robeson, HUAC, and the Sound of Cold War Performance." *TDR: The Drama Review* 53, no. 4 (2009): 18-48.
- The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2013. British Film Institute.
- "Police: No Risk to Students." *Utah State Today*. Last Modified October 14, 2014. <http://www.usu.edu/today/index.cfm?id=54179>.

*The Power of Nightmares, Episode 2: The Phantom Victory*, directed by Adam Curtis. BBC, 2004.

“Press Conference for American Correspondents in London.” Accessed June 24, 2017.  
<http://www.margareththatcher.org/Speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104389&doctype=1>.

PUBLIC LAW 88-444—AUG 19, 1964. Accessed September 3, 2016. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg462.pdf>.

“Raw: Obama Plays Soccer With Japanese Robot.” *YouTube*. Last Modified April 24, 2014.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag2vk6coBpI>.

Read, Thomas Buchanan Read. “The New Pastoral.” Accessed June 30, 2017.  
<http://www.freebookslibrary.org/read-thomas-buchanan-1822-1872-the-new-pastoral-1855/>.

Reagan, Ronald. “Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin.” Accessed May 24, 2017. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34390>.

*The Red Pill*, directed by Cassie Jaye. 2016. Gravitas Ventures.

Reilly, Kara. *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Report of the National Commission on Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress.  
*Technology and the American Economy*, Volume 1, February 1966.

Rifkin, Jeremy. *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995.

Roach, Joseph. *it*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007.

“The Robots of Westinghouse.” Accessed February 12, 2013. <http://history-computer.com/Dreamers/Elektro.html>.

Schelde, Per. *Androids, Humanoids, and Other Science Fiction Monsters: Science and Soul in Science Fiction Films*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1986.

Schönberg, Claude-Michel, and Alain Boublil. *Les Misérables*. 1980.



- Schreier, Jason. "Spanish Website Says Square Enix PR Cut Off Their Review Copies For Giving Out Low Scores." *Kotaku*. Last Modified December 5, 2016. <http://kotaku.com/spanish-website-says-square-enix-cut-off-their-review-c-1789690007>.
- Scott, Ian. *American Politics in Hollywood Films*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- Serwer, Adam and Katie J. M. Baker "How Men's Rights Leader Paul Elam Turned Being a Deadbeat Dad into a Moneymaking Moment." *Buzzfeed*. Last Modified February 5, 2015. [https://www.buzzfeed.com/adamserwer/how-mens-rights-leader-paul-elam-turned-being-a-deadbeat-dad?utm\\_term=.acgKgoD0YY#.nqkgMJpV22](https://www.buzzfeed.com/adamserwer/how-mens-rights-leader-paul-elam-turned-being-a-deadbeat-dad?utm_term=.acgKgoD0YY#.nqkgMJpV22).
- Sex Kittens Go to College*, directed by Albert Zugsmith. 1960. Warner Bros.
- Shaw, Tony, and Denise J. Youngblood. *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010.
- Shea, Christopher D. "'Matrix' Reboot Said to Be in the Works, With Keanu Reeves as a Maybe." *The New York Times*. Last Modified March 15, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/movies/matrix-reboot-keanu-reeves.html>.
- Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by Susan J. Wolfson. New York: Pearson, 2007.
- "Shot by the 'Monster' of His Own Creation." *The Ogden Standard Examiner*. Accessed January 26, 2016. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/35924338/1932-Oct-23-Ogden-Standard-Examiner-Ogden-City-UT>.
- Siese, April. "Mother Jones Roasted for 'Dapper White Nationalist' Description of Racists." *The Daily Dot*. Last Modified November 21, 2016. <https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/mother-jones-white-nationalist-tweet-roasted/>.
- Silva, Daniella. "Pepe the Frog is Dead: Creator Kills off Meme Absorbed by Far-Right." *NBC News*. Last Updated May 8, 2017. <http://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/pepe-frog-dead-creator-kills-meme-absorbed-far-right-n756281>.
- Simons, Geoff. *Is Man a Robot?*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986.
- Smith, Geoffrey. *Reagan and Thatcher*. New York: Norton, 1991.
- Sotiris, Panagiotis. "Review Articles." *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 4 (2009): 121-142.
- Spencer, Richard. *Twitter*. Last Modified January 20, 2017. <https://twitter.com/richardbspencer/status/822692005083942912?lang=en>

Stack, Liam. "Attack on Alt-Right Leader Has Internet Asking: Is It O.K. to Punch a Nazi?" *The New York Times*. Last Modified January 21, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/politics/richard-spencer-punched-attack.html>.

*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, created by Gene Roddenberry. 1987-1994. CBS.

States, Bert O. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

———. *The Rhetoric of Dreams*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Stelter, Brian. *Twitter*. Last Modified February 6, 2017. <https://twitter.com/brianstelter/status/828578904692625408>

*The Terminator*, directed by James Cameron. 1984. Orion Pictures.

*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, directed by James Cameron. 1991. TriStar Pictures.

*Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, directed by Jonathan Mostow. 2003. Warner Bros. Pictures.

Thomas, Andy. "Amazon Alexa—The Feminist Ghost in the Machine." *A Voice for Men*. Last Modified March 25, 2017. <https://www.avoiceformen.com/feminism/amazon-alexa-the-feminist-ghost-in-the-machine/>.

Threatening Letter. Last Modified October 14, 2014. <http://www.standard.net/.media/1/2014/10/14/f43adaf9-0a46-46d6-9026-cc0f0acf8df0.jpg>.

Tiffany, Kaitlyn. "Right-Wing Extremist Richard Spencer Got Punched, but it Was Memes that Bruised His Ego." *The Verge*. Last Modified January 23, 2017. <http://www.theverge.com/2017/1/23/14356306/richard-spencer-punch-internet-memes-alt-right>.

"The Triple Revolution." Accessed September 3, 2016. <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/coll/pauling/peace/papers/1964p.7-01.html>.

Totilo, Stephen. "A Price of Games Journalism." *Kotaku*. Last Modified November 19, 2015. <http://kotaku.com/a-price-of-games-journalism-1743526293>.

Troy, Gil. *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

*The Twilight Zone*. "The Lateness of the Hour." December 2, 1960.

*The Twilight Zone*. "The Mind and the Matter." May 12, 1961.

- United States District Court Western District Of Washington At Seattle. Case No. C17-0141JLR. Temporary Restraining Order. Last Modified February 3, 2017. [http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/general/2017/02/03/17-141\\_TRO\\_order.pdf](http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/general/2017/02/03/17-141_TRO_order.pdf), Page 2.
- Wells, H. G. *The War of the Worlds*. New York: Broadview Press, 2003.
- Wegner, Phillip E. *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.
- “Wendy’s Commercial – Soviet Fashion Show.” *YouTube*. Last Modified Sept. 3, 2006. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CaMUfxVJVQ>.
- Whitman, Walt. “I Sing the Body Electric.” *The Leaves of Grass: The Complete 1855 and 1891-92 Editions*. Edited by John Hollander. New York: Library of America Paperback Classics, 1992.
- Williams, Howard, David Sullivan, and Gwynn Matthews. *Francis Fukuyama and the End of History*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997.
- Wilson, Eric G. *The Melancholy Android: On the Psychology of Sacred Machines*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Wood, Gaby. *Edison’s Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- Woolf, Nicky. “‘PUAhate’ and ‘ForeverAlone’: Inside Elliot Rodger’s Online Life.” *The Guardian*. Last Modified May 30, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/30/elliott-rodger-puahate-forever-alone-reddit-forums>.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1989.
- Young, Neil. “Rockin’ in the Free World.” *Freedom*. Reprise Records, 1989.
- Zaretsky, Eli. *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.
- Žižek, Slavoj. “Reloaded Revolutions.” *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*. Chicago: Open Court, 2005, 198-199.

## VITA

Ben Phelan is currently an adjunct professor in the theatre and media arts department at Brigham Young University. He received his B.A. in theatre from BYU in 2008 and began in the theatre Ph.D. program at Louisiana State University in 2009. Besides technology, performance, and literary theory, he also has research interests in Mormon history. He is an active member of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education and has served as an editorial assistant for the religion and theatre journal *Ecumenica*. In addition to scholarship, he is also a director and actor. A few favorite directing credits include *The Matchmaker*, *The Lesson*, and *Drums in the Night*. He anticipates graduating from LSU in August, 2017.