



TRANS-

Revue de littérature générale et comparée

12 | 2011

La trace

Beyond the Limits

Lisa Wolfson



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/trans/486>

DOI: 10.4000/trans.486

ISSN: 1778-3887

Publisher

Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle

Electronic reference

Lisa Wolfson, « Beyond the Limits », *TRANS- [Online]*, 12 | 2011, Online since 08 July 2011, connection on 13 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/trans/486> ; DOI : 10.4000/trans.486

This text was automatically generated on 13 May 2019.

Tous droits réservés

Beyond the Limits

Lisa Wolfson

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My very special thanks go to Björn Sonnenberg-Schrank and Sidona Bauer.

Für einen Gestaltwandler

Als das Kind Kind war,
war es die Zeit der folgenden Fragen:
Warum bin ich ich und warum nicht du?
Warum bin ich hier und warum nicht dort?
Wann begann die Zeit und wo endet der Raum?
Ist das Leben unter der Sonne nicht bloß ein Traum?
Ist was ich sehe und höre und rieche nicht bloß der Schein einer Welt vor der Welt?
Gibt es tatsächlich das Böse und Leute, die wirklich die Bösen sind?
Wie kann es sein, daß ich, der ich bin, bevor ich wurde, nicht war, und daß einmal ich, der ich bin, nicht mehr der ich bin, sein werde?¹

When the child was a child,
It was the time for these questions:
Why am I me, and why not you?
Why am I here, and why not there?
When did time begin, and where does space end?
Is life under the sun not just a dream?
Is what I see and hear and smell not just an illusion of a world before the world?
Given the facts of evil and people. [sic!]
] does evil really exist?
How can it be that I, who I am, didn't exist before I came to be, and that, someday, I, who I am, will no longer be who I am?²

- 1 When investigating the origins of the contemporary theoretic enthusiasm for the dissolution of boundaries, we find an age-old fascination with the hybrid we know well from old myths and phantasms. The ambiguous or even polysemous mythical composite creatures and heterogenic trickster-like shapeshifters are often related to the realm of the divine and possess supernatural talents of which ordinary mortals can only dream. Mythical hybrids refer to the heterogenic polysemy of human beings; they reflect our

desire to breach the limits of categories and classifications (once) needed to arrange reality and to transcend the experience of distance and difference. Like fish exploring the depths of the oceans or birds flying freely in the open skies, humans have always longed for unattainable spheres, and searched for access to other spaces and even ways to overcome space and time altogether – in other words, ways to transcend their limitation and mortality.

- 2 The old myths which deal with various relations (mediation, metamorphosis, merging) between humans, animals and technology reveal our physical involvement in the environments, landscapes and cultures which in turn are the subject matter of contemporary theories and models such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of *flesh*,³ Donna Haraway's *cyborg model*,⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *rhizome model*,⁵ as well as Bruno Latour's *actor-network theory*.⁶ Without other beings there would be no humanity at all, for we do not exist as "absolutely"⁷ autonomous subjects and individuals, but – according to the ethnologist Janet Carsten – as "joined-up", "partible" or "relational persons"⁸ living in relations, connected to and interwoven with other human and "nonhuman"⁹ beings such as animals, plants and things. By shaping and creating each other, all these actors reveal the insurmountable nature of the subject/object divide and the nature/culture dichotomy, yet despite this, traditional ontological and ethic questions about humanity, identity and power stay unanswered. However, these questions need to be asked because threatening new forms of discrimination are emerging – the dissolution and the establishment of boundaries being dialectically interwoven – in the course of recent developments in cybernetics, genetic engineering, and prosthetic and plastic surgery.
- 3 The negotiation of the array of conflicts between "real" and artificial humans (as well as other "nonhuman"¹⁰ beings and new forms of life) that is now being discussed in the humanities and social sciences started *avant la lettre* in the so-called "science fiction" genre with robots, androids, replicants, cyborgs, self-conscious computers and aliens. What connections do we find between fiction and non-fiction, between different cultures' archaic myths, theory, literature (e.g. the works of Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick, Brian Aldiss), and especially motion pictures (such as *Blade runner*; *artificial intelligence: AI; I, robot*; *Ghost in the shell*; *I'm a cyborg, but that's ok*) with their outstanding potential to visualize theoretical models and to simulate alternative scenarios?

Composite Creatures

There's the famous Wittgenstein image, the rabbit or the duck? And his thesis is that you can only experience one at a time. But supposing you experience both of them as a single image, and I think this is what native people did. They recognized rabbit-duck, not as alternatives, but as a single form, so that the rabbit was always in the duck and the duck was always in the rabbit.¹¹

- 4 Quite often, metamorphoses from ancient Greek mythology deal not only with transformations (e.g. the various manifestations of Zeus, the transfigurations of Io and Daphne),¹² but also with mergings in the realm of nature. Both animal figures and human and animal bodies merge to become new animal forms such as the monster Chimera or the winged horse Pegasus, or human-animal hybrid beings including centaurs, satyrs and sirens. Other mythologies provide well-known human-animal or human-bird hybrids, such as the Egyptian deities Horus and Anubis or the Hindu deity Ganesha.

- 5 The merging of the natural with the artificial is not restricted to modernity; it appears in Ancient mythology, as the legend of Daedalus and Icarus illustrates. Daedalus (who is said to have built self-moving statues – ancient automatons, so to say)¹³ constructs two pairs of artificial wings out of bird feathers, wax and wood to carry him and his son Icarus out of their captivity.¹⁴ Although made from natural components, these wings are a fabrication – something artificially made.
- 6 There is certainly a difference between such a merging and a centaur (a hybrid of human and horse), since the artificial wings do not enter the human body to grow together with its *inside*. But it is quite possible that the mythical centaur was modeled after strange steppe-dwellers who rode on horses. The interior symbiosis of man and horse in the mythical centaur would therefore be an intensification of their actual symbiosis.
- 7 Humans have wrapped (or enclosed)¹⁵ themselves with artificially-made things seemingly forever, be they clothes made from animal skins and furs, floral wreaths, metal suits of armour, Daedalus' wings, or housings of all kinds – and even wooden horses in which they could secretly enter a city under siege.
- 8 An animal skin is also transformed into something artificial as soon as it is used by a human as a piece of clothing for protection from the cold or as a ritual or symbolic costume. This is also true of the animal skull used as a ritualistic mask. Especially if their use is no longer “natural” – skin and skull become the media of a transformation which merges the human with animal or supernatural beings. The *artificiality* of the ritual, after all, is what makes such fusion of the human with nature or the supernatural possible.
- 9 In modernity, the idea of the cyborg is the model for the merging of the natural with the artificial: a hybrid of human and machine. By now, cyborgs are beginning to transcend the realm of fiction due to advancements and developments in the fields of prosthetics, cybernetics, genetic engineering and plastic surgery. However, humans have manipulated and altered their bodies since primeval times. Aside from the clothing, jewellery and hairstyles devised for their bodies, humans have applied modifications to their skulls, feet, necks or skin; ever since ancient times they have carried out complex surgical interventions and constructed rather primitive prostheses.
- 10 In his actor-network-theory Bruno Latour points out that our human culture contains symbiotic relations of humans and artifacts.¹⁶ But when do they become a single organism? Is the connection of man and technology that Marshall McLuhan terms the “extensions of man”¹⁷ already enough to generate a cyborg? Is a merging necessary that can be seen as a parallel to the human-animal-merging known to us as the ancient centaur? Where does the cyborg begin? The answers to these questions could not be more diverse. Decades before the term “cyborg” had even been invented by the space scientist Manfred E. Clynes and the psychiatrist Nathan S. Kline,¹⁸ the alleged founder of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (who also dreamt of creating immortal mechanical humans who would come to displace organic lifeforms),¹⁹ dubbed man in his automobile modernity's “Centaur.”²⁰ In this case, the connection between man and machine was actually perceived and celebrated as the merging of the two into a hybrid being.
- 11 “Real” cyborgs – like “female” special agent Motoko Kusanagi, a character in the Japanese anime feature film *Ghost in the shell* – display a much stronger fusion of human and machine than current medical science is able to accomplish, and have yet to leave their native realm of science fiction literature and film genres. In the meantime though, reality

has become familiar with a completely different range of developments that far surpass the ancient dental prosthesis or artificial limb.

- 12 Beyond the question of the degree of the merging's internal-ness, we must raise that of the ratio of what is natural and artificial within the cyborg. Donna Haraway's abstract cyborg model does not specify this ratio. Still, her genderless cyborg has a tendency towards the technological. Ultimately, Haraway does not merely try to illustrate the hybridity of human life or social structures; rather, she emphasizes the formerly-overlooked aspects of what is *made* and *constructed* compared with what is allegedly "natural."

Cyborg Girl

Yes, we live in a hybrid world made up at once of gods, people, stars, electrons, nuclear plants, and markets [...]²¹

- 13 Young-goon, the heroine of the South-Korean film *I'm a cyborg, but that's ok* (dir. Park Chan-wook, 2006) believes that she is a cyborg being. We are never told the ratio of her supposed human and machine parts, but Young-goon obviously leans towards the artificial in her attempt to strip herself of her *conditio humana*: the young girl ceases to ingest organic food and tries to overcome her empathy. But why does Young-goon long for technology?
- 14 Unlike Charlie Chaplin's tramp character in *Modern times* (1936) who works on an assembly line and unintentionally gets caught in its enormous and overpowering machinery, factory worker Young-goon yearns for an even more intense connection with technology: she cuts her wrists, inserts wires into the wounds and plugs them into a power outlet. Perhaps Young-goon's longing to be connected or even merged with technology is rooted in her lack of relationships to other human beings. Her bond with her mother is weak and loveless. Her grandmother, who is the only important figure in Young-goon's life, is sent to a mental clinic by her own children. Another reason for Young-goon's attraction to technological devices is their unambiguous *raison d'être*. Unlike humans, they do not trouble themselves with the meaning of life. Young-goon's lack of meaningful interpersonal relations with her fellow humans and the painful absence of meaning define her cyborg-ness, since only as a cyborg she can be close to her beloved, unambiguous devices. Still, there is another reason why Young-goon insists that she is a cyborg.
- 15 Both ancient body modifications and manipulations (mythological and real) as well as modernity's fictional and actual transformations have specific purposes. For instance, the metamorphoses in Australian Aboriginal myths provide an explanation for the origin and differentiation of creation itself.²² The metamorphoses in ancient Greek mythology are also a means of seduction, camouflage or punishment (as in the case of the bull-headed Minotaur). Modern robots and cyborgs are superior to humans of "flesh and blood" in their sheer physical strength. Therefore, fragile Young-goon could achieve superhuman strength and defend herself, if only she charged herself with enough electricity.
- 16 Young-goon feels an almost magnetic attraction to technical devices. To her, it is definitely not true that "man is the measure of all things" and that humanity is an invaluable property. We might find ourselves alienated by such a world-view at the beginning of *I'm a cyborg, but that's ok*. But the more we learn about Young-goon and her circumstances, the more comprehensible her rejection of human-ness becomes. Besides,

why should cyborg Young-goon yield to her human part? After all, Haraway's cyborg has a tendency towards artificiality.

- 17 Even though she holds low esteem for what is human within herself, Young-goon is in danger of starving in a mental institution because she ultimately is "flesh and blood", to whatever degree. Despite her efforts to escape the world and its human inhabitants, she falls in love with a young man (a human). Young-goon's family is distant and unloving with the exception of her mentally ill grandmother who is sent off to an institution when her granddaughter is no longer in need of her fostering. The young girl struggles to catch up with the ambulance on her bike so she can at least give her grandmother her dentures, but her legs are too weak and her bicycle is too slow. This engenders Young-goon's wishes for superhuman powers. And if her grandmother thinks she herself is a mouse, why should Young-goon not be a cyborg? All the granddaughter has left of her beloved grandmother are her false teeth, an inorganic piece of her. Is Young-goon's love for objects or "nonhumans"²³ not clearly rooted in this?
- 18 In Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the shell* (Japan 1995), cyborgs are omnipresent. In this science fiction anime film it is suggested that most humans are cyborgs, though the degrees of their respective fusion can vary. The film's protagonist, "female" special agent Motoko Kusanagi, is completely artificial except for her organic brain which sits in a biological casing called "Shell", both for its protection and its *intended* cross-linking with her artificial body. This organic remainder is also *intended* to contain the precious human identity "Ghost" although this identity is understood neither as purely immaterial nor as something that can be exactly located. But how can Motoko be certain of her "Ghost" and the human identity that comes with it in a society which explicitly distinguishes between such an identity and a synthetic personality? No human has ever seen his or her own brain, as she explains to her colleague and fellow cyborg Batou, and maybe Motoko's human existence is only constituted by the affirmation of her environment. "On what basis then do I believe in myself?", asks Motoko, troubled by doubts regarding her identity.
- 19 The film does not make it clear whether Motoko is a cyborg or a completely artificial being. She is chosen by a new lifeform that emerged from the computer virus Project 2051, which subsequently developed self-awareness and now wants to merge with her because Project 2051 deems itself and Motoko kindred spirits – although it gives no explicit reasons for this perceived similarity. Is this new lifeform attracted to Motoko because of her humanity – in the sense of her being "natural" – or her artificiality? I believe Project 2051 chooses Motoko because of her search for identity, considering that it is on a mission similar to her own, being a new lifeform that emerged from information and has become aware of itself and its existence.
- 20 Accordingly, Motoko too has an unconscious wish to merge. This is hard for her to articulate and finds its expression in her extensive sea dives. So, if Motoko really is a cyborg, she enters yet another conflation with Project 2051 – as a hybrid being who becomes a further hybrid being. The "partnership" of her choice involves neither any other human, nor a robot-like artificial being, nor a cyborg (as for instance Batou who obviously is fond of her), and instead she enters a second-degree merger with Project 2051 who is by no means immaterial but barely perceivable for the quite "limited" Motoko.
- 21 Is the merging of these two dialectical in Hegel's sense? Is the cyborg's fusion dialectical at all? Whilst we can assume two contradictory extremes that merge in equal parts in an

abstract cyborg model, it is hardly possible to measure these parts in an actual cyborg; thus, how should natural-ness and artificiality be measured, and what kind of criteria could be applied? Furthermore, it is highly doubtful whether the alleged contradictions that merge in a cyborg really disappear to become an absolute entity/unity in which everything is still contained like it used to be, and yet loses its own characteristic features in terms of Hegel's famous polysemous "Aufhebung",²⁵ usually translated as "sublation." After all, the components can merge in a "polar integration" in which the entirety of the parts involved (not necessarily two) form some sort of unity which does not eradicate those parts' respective features but instead amplifies them in this union.²⁶ Especially in the case of a merger between different self-aware beings, the possibility of a "polar integration" is imaginable.

- 22 Motoko's and Project 2051's fusion takes place in a different manner though: by merging with this being, or rather, entity, she is absorbed into a web, a fabric made of information, and is transformed. Out of this merging of Motoko and Project 2051, a new being comes into existence as from the sexual union of humans. Batou manages to prevent Motoko's altered 'shell' from being destroyed by the government and inserts it into an artificial girl's body after his attempt to find a more adequate woman body on the black market fails. Yet the new being is by no means an immature and needy child. Since it is an advanced and upgraded version of Motoko, this being is embedded in the network to a degree both similar to Project 2051 and much deeper than Motoko had ever been on account of her limited cyborgian net access. The new life form is in turn an advanced and upgraded version of Project 2051 whose goal in this transformation was to create its own progeny as well as preventing its possible destruction by a virus, and at the same time to become mortal through the union and thus achieve the status of a genuine lifeform.
- 23 So, did Motoko and Project 2051 succeed and achieve mortality? Or have they been dialectically *neutralized/negated* as well as *preserved* and *raised to a higher level*²⁷ in this new life form? It is characteristic that the new being chooses a negative phrasing to describe what exactly it is, namely *neither* Motoko *nor* Project 2051. In my opinion, such a phrasing with its double negation puts this new transboundary lifeform in proximity to Nagarjuna's negative Buddhist dialectics (even though there might be no merging) according to which all distinctions are inane.²⁸ Within the framework of these dialectics, in being living and, so to speak, animate information, Motoko and Project 2051 were never even contradictory to begin with, and the new life form would consequently be the embodiment of the neither-nor principle.

With Eskimo masks, everything is there together; it's a pun in which all elements co-exist. So it's not something becoming another thing, it's being, it is, all at once, simultaneously, it is both things together or maybe three or four things.²⁹

Als das Kind Kind war,
wußte es nicht, daß es Kind war,
alles war ihm beseelt,
und alle Seelen waren eins.³⁰

When the child was a child,
it didn't know that it was a child,
everything was soulful,
and all souls were one.³¹

Artificial Humans

Un corps humain est là quand, entre voyant et visible, entre touchant et touché,
entre un œil et l'autre, entre la main et la main se fait une sorte de recroisement,
quand s'allume l'étincelle du sentant-sensible, quand prend ce feu qui ne cessera

pas de brûler, jusqu'à ce que tel accident du corps défasse ce que nul accident
n'aurait suffi à faire...³²

- 24 What exactly happens when artificial humans such as robots, human-like androids or replicants (from Ridley Scott's cult film *BLADE RUNNER*),³³ which are indistinguishable from humans due to their organic *corporeality*,³⁴ develop an independent life of their own? Do they not leave the realm of artificiality behind altogether and enter the realm of nature as living beings and new life forms? If only it were that easy... But in a world where *natural* and *artificial* as well as *subject* and *object* are mutually exclusive antipoles, artificial humans will never be more than just artificial. "We're *organic*, you're *mechanical*",³⁵ explains one of the "real" boys in Steven Spielberg's *AI* to the android child David (who had no knowledge of his origin until his first confrontation with his human "brother" Martin), doing so in a complacent, almost smug manner, repeating "*orga, mecha*"³⁶ and savouring the predominance that lies in such a dichotomy: dichotomies are arranged hierarchically and create an unambiguous power dynamic.
- 25 After his human mother Monica abandons David in a forest along with his artificial companion, a so-called "super-toy" bear Teddy, he goes on a quest for the "Blue Fairy" because she alone is able to miraculously transform David into "a real boy"³⁷ of "flesh and blood" by means of her magic powers – after all, she already successfully performed this wondrous feat on the famous wooden marionette Pinocchio.³⁸
- 26 Such a metamorphosis from artificial to organic/natural is usually performed with the use of innate magic powers and magic rituals, as for instance in the activation or rather animation of the clay giant Golem, or in many cases also by the intervention of supernatural beings, as in the case of Pygmalion's statue coming to life – for in the Pygmalion myth, mere artistic talent and skills alone are not sufficient for the miracle of animation, although these gifts are the premise for Venus' pivotal intervention.³⁹ The Prague Golem's legendary creator, Rabbi Löw, is a god-fearing man and does not bring the fictile figure to life out of self-interest – he seems to be entitled to create the Golem,⁴⁰ since the Jewish stricture against the making of idols or any kind of manlike ("graven") image apparently does not apply to him.
- 27 Due to divine intervention, Pygmalion's creation is in fact not completely an artificially-made human, since in numerous myths, gods and deities are the creators of all men. Taken the other way round, we could say that in such myths *all* first men are created *artificially* by deities or ancestors – not only Hephaistos' creations, Pandora, a maiden he made out of clay,⁴¹ or Talos, a giant whom he forged out of bronze.⁴²
- 28 Unlike Pinocchio, Pygmalion's statue is not alive before her transformation into an organic being, even though she sometimes seems animate to him. The life she had before her metamorphosis is the life-of-its-own which was immanent to her as a beautiful work of art instead of an artificial human.
- 29 In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (both in the novel as well as its film adaptation by James Whale),⁴³ an organic body assembled from different parts of dead bodies is transformed into an animate human; this body undergoes a metamorphosis similar to the animation of the artificial. There is an evident relationship between the absence of life in dead organic matter and inanimate, artificial creation (such as Pygmalion's beloved statue). Yet there is a significant difference here with the artificiality of Pygmalion's creation, the "artificial" life of Pinocchio, and *AI*'s David. The transformation of *Frankenstein*'s so-called "Monster"⁴⁴ is realized through the agency of science and technology, not that of

divine intervention or magic rituals. Since Frankenstein's creature is organic but has to be (re)animated, it is an artificially made human, but not an actual artificial human in the strictest sense.

Android Child

David was staring out of the window. "Teddy, you know what I was thinking? How do you tell what are real things from what aren't real things?" The bear shuffled its alternatives. "Real things are good." [...] David started to draw a jumbo jet on the back of his letter. "You and I are real, Teddy, aren't we?" The bear's eyes regarded the boy unflinchingly. "You and I are real, David." It specialized in comfort.⁴⁵

- 30 While the youthful heroine Young-goon yearns for artificiality and, as a man-machine, feels the desire to merge with other machines in the above-mentioned film *I'm a cyborg, but that's ok*, AI's boy-robot David shares the wooden puppet Pinocchio's longing to become "a real boy."⁴⁶ Steven Spielberg's film *AI* (2001) is based on British science fiction writer Brian Aldiss' short story *Super-Toys Last All Summer Long* (1969), which Stanley Kubrick already had in mind for film treatment in the 1970s after he had introduced viewers to the mischievous computer HAL 9000 in his legendary *2001: A space odyssey* (1968). Nearly 30 years later, Kubrick handed over his notes on *AI* to Spielberg, who realized the film project after Kubrick's death and dedicated it to the great director.
- 31 David's desire to become human reflects a familiar Western trope: humanity (or being human) is the most valuable property in this world and therefore becoming human is the single most desirable goal for an artificial being; after all, man is and will always be "the pride of creation." This view combines the appreciation of one's own existence as a human (a perfectly legitimate notion) with the hubris of man's presumptuous disregard for other forms of life and modes of existence. Max Horkheimer criticizes the belief "that to man everything in this world is nothing but an instrument", noting that "this contributes to the world being merely administered and humanism becoming a mere phrase – contradictory to any good intention."⁴⁷
- 32 In a way it makes sense that there should be a significant twist on the traditional trope of the quest to becoming human in *AI*: David is by no means a machine aware of its own inadequacy and which, therefore, wants to become human. Early in his "life" David neither knows of his artificial origin, nor does he feel inferior in any way. In *AI*, we are not presented with a robot child which eventually learns that it cannot grow up and no longer wants to be that way (even though there certainly are comparisons to others, it is more or less a self-realization). On closer examination, an artificial being's desire to become human might at first seem noble; consequently this is unmasked as *self-denial*. It seems evident that David has no intrinsic motive that would make him want to become "a real boy", because "L'enfer, c'est les autres."⁴⁸ Indeed, it is *the others* to whom David suddenly (though actually, from the start) does not belong; the others who bring him to denying himself.
- 33 Like the beautiful replicant Rachael in *Blade runner*, the android boy David does not perceive himself as different, so as long as his origins remains unknown to him. This lack of knowledge of his robotic self would have had severe consequences for David, even if he had been taken on by the world's most caring human family. The tragedy of his eternal childhood is hinted at in a sequence where he asks Monica whether she will die some day

and how long it might be until then.⁴⁹ Upon her answer, he utters the frightened realization: “I’ll be alone.”⁵⁰

- 34 The “adult” android is lacking a childhood, whereas David is deprived of his growing-up, his adulthood. Perhaps he will not have to stay a childlike being in this world for all eternity, yet for such a long time that it goes far beyond human imagination. As a member of a human family David would not only lose all his family members during childhood, he would also realize that the humans around him change: adults grow older and children become adults. A robot child such as David would naturally compare itself to other children and thereupon question everything that is *natural* and self-evident to him, such as not having to eat or sleep. Inevitably, an android child will realize his origin and otherness, but most likely it will not be able to handle this knowledge: “You are not what you thought you are and you are not what you are.” The well-documented pains of deceived adopted children are proof of how necessary “truth from the start” is.

Realness & love

– I propose that we build a robot-child who can love.⁵¹

“Teddy, I can’t think what to say!”

Climbing off the bed, the bear walked stiffly over to cling to the boy’s leg. David lifted him and set him on the desk.

“What have you said so far?”

“I’ve said –” He picked up his letter and stared hard at it. “I’ve said, “Dear Mummy, I hope you’re well just now. I love you....””

There was a long silence, until the bear said, “That sounds fine. Go downstairs and give it to her.” Another long silence.

“It isn’t quite right. She won’t understand.”⁵²

- 35 David’s creator Professor Hobby endows him with a basic, neutral childlike personality, but it really unfolds only after the *imprint* provided by his human mother Monica, which emulates an “upbringing.” The imprinting process is short but decisive: by using specific imprinting protocols with certain passwords David’s neutral state is transformed and Monica (or according to the psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, the *relationship* with her)⁵³ becomes David’s personality. In accordance with the ethnologist Janet Carsten, such a relationship or, put differently, such an *ability for relationships* as a precondition makes each and every one of us a “joined-up”, “partible” (in that we consist of relationships) or ultimately “relational person.”⁵⁴ The intensity of the imprinting process simulates the *time* which is usually necessary to gain experience and build relationships together, because as Horkheimer puts it “the thing which I give my time to, I give my love to” or even “time [...] stands for love.”⁵⁵ Unlike for Monica, for David the missing time is counterbalanced by the imprinting process’ intensity.
- 36 In AI, David’s designed basic personality and his imprint refer to the interaction of what is *given* and what is *made*, genes and circumstances or, more simply, nature and culture in “real” humans. The intensity of the explicit imprinting process emphasizes the great significance of circumstantial and environmental influences in a child’s socialization.
- 37 So if there are no “natural” children,⁵⁶ what about David’s artificiality? Like every human child, the little android is ambiguous. He looks like “a real child” and acts like one as well. Only a destructive intervention or the screening process of the robot scanner can reveal his inner life, which may very well differ from that of a human being, but which, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is of a *corporeal* nature due to its utmost complexity.

“L’énigme tient en ceci”, writes Merleau-Ponty “que mon corps est à la fois voyant et visible.” And he continues :

Lui qui regarde toutes choses, il peut aussi se regarder, et reconnaître dans ce qu’il voit alors l’ “autre côté” de sa puissance voyante. Il se voit voyant, il se touche touchant, il est visible et sensible pour soi-même. C’est un soi, non par transparence, comme la pensée, qui ne pense quoi que ce soit qu’en l’assimilant, en le constituant, en le transformant en pensée – mais un soi par confusion, narcissisme, inhérence de celui qui voit à ce qu’il voit, de celui qui touche à ce qu’il touche, du sentant au senti – un soi donc qui est pris entre des choses, qui a une face et un dos, un passé et un avenir...⁵⁷

- 38 The robot scanner’s explicit purpose is the revealing of what is inside, of the inner life, and therein the discovery of an unambiguous definition. Eventually, the film insinuates that during the so-called “Flesh Fair” (a spectacular show of rowdy, mass entertainment where disused robots are destroyed) a “real” human was once accidentally killed.
- 39 On David’s first evening spent with his new “family” Monica hardly dares to approach him and her husband Henry has to put him to bed. Through the blinds of the door to David’s room Monica watches how David *mechanically* lifts his arms while being dressed – an *automatic* gesture which is typical of children. Suddenly, David turns his head and *looks* at Monica through a milk glass. It is only by escaping that Monica can evade this *human gaze*.⁵⁸ In fact, David’s behaviour is a constant demand, almost as if he were saying: “Play with me. Look after me. Love me.” The demanding character we already find in a human-like doll is strongly heightened by every child’s interaction with us. Upon meeting David for the first time, Monica is surprised at his verisimilitude. “He’s so real.”,⁵⁹ Monica says to her husband Henry. However, he will constantly remind her that David “is” just “a toy.”⁶⁰
- 40 Although David does not expect to attain special abilities from his longed-for transformation into a real boy, Young-goon has these exact expectations from her desired cyborg existence. To David, being human simply equals being *real*. And only being real, he believes, enables him to be *loved*. Contrary to David, Sonny, the self-conscious and self-confident robot from Alex Proyas’ 2004 hit movie *I, ROBOT*⁶¹ has no desire to transform into a human. He is not even an android that could be mistaken for a human due to his appearance, Sonny wants to be accepted by human society along with his unique characteristics, *as the robot* that he is. David on the other hand wants to become human so that his human (but quite inhuman) mother might love him after all.
- 41 At her painful parting with David, during their supposedly shared trip, Monica cries: his despair when he tries to hang on to her, his tears and his pleas not to leave him make David indistinguishable from a “real” child. Ultimately, Monica cries because she is parting with *a real child*.
- “Teddy – I suppose Mummy and Daddy are real, aren’t they?”
Teddy said, “You ask such silly questions, David. Nobody knows what “real” really means. Let’s go indoors.”
“First I’m going to have another rose!” Plucking a bright pink flower, he carried it with him into the house. It could lie on the pillow as he went to sleep. Its beauty and softness reminded him of Mummy.⁶²
– If a robot could genuinely love a person, what responsibility does that person hold toward that Mecha in return?⁶³
- 42 The fundamental dichotomies in Western philosophy – the separation of body and soul as well as the subject/object division – are decisive, especially for the definition of humanness. This philosophy contrasts humans (as subjects) with things (as objects). And

it is exactly this contrast that forms the basis for the exposition of the problems between “real” and artificial humans in various narratives. Regarding our cultural artifacts, without which humanity would not exist,⁶⁴ the clear division into subjects and objects or nature and culture can no longer be applied, especially once there are man-made artificial beings which show human characteristics – like complex holistic *corporeality*,⁶⁵ emotions, memories, dreams – and are equal or even superior to men not only physically, but also ethically. Our holding on to the dichotomies that shaped our outlook on the world inevitably leads to conflicts like those in *BLADE RUNNER*; *I, ROBOT* and *AI* since neither the equality nor the superiority nor the indistinguishableness of artificial beings can ever overcome the divide between men and objects that has emerged from such dichotomic thinking and living. In a dichotomic world, neither replicant Rachael nor robot Sonny nor android child David will ever be good enough and thus will always be condemned to be mere objects, because such a world is an empire under the absolutist rule of the (transcendental) subject. It alone has the power to determine who and what will be called subject and object – the latter preferably everything which according to its definition is not a subject, or in other words everything which is different in any way. Therefore the artificial human’s tragedy is always also the *tragedy of the Other* – that which is different, that which distorts our own reflection.

- 43 The realm of the subject is “absolutely”⁶⁶ autonomous and completely unambiguous, just as is the machine’s dual system. The fear of the physical superiority of artificial humans is in reality secondary: the actual threat is their *hybrid ambiguity*, which reminds us – as *corporeal rhizomatic networks* composed of natural and artificial components, of nature and culture – of our own (and surely no lesser) hybrid ambiguity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aldiss, Brian, *Super-Toys Last All Summer Long*, URL: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.01/ffsupertoys.html>

Apollodorus, *The Library*, translated by Sir James George Frazer, Loeb Classical Library Volumes 121 & 122, London, Harvard University Press, 1961, URL: <http://www.theoi.com/Text/Apollodorus1.html>

Apollonius Rhodius, *The Argonautica*, translated into English prose from the text of R. Merkel by Edward P. Coleridge, George Bell, London, 1889, p. 204 ff., URL: <http://www.archive.org/details/theargonauticaof00apoliala>

Bredekamp, Horst, “Überlegungen zur Unausweichlichkeit der Automaten”, *Puppen, Körper, Automaten – Phantasmen der Moderne*, Ed. Pia Müller-Tamm/Katharina Sykora, Cologne, Oktagon, 1999, pp. 94-105.

Carsten, Janet, *After Kinship*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Clynes, Manfred E. / Kline, Natan S., “Cyborgs and Space”, *The Cyborg Handbook*, Ed. Chris Hables Gray, New York/London, Routledge 1995, pp. 29-33.

- Collodi, Carlo, *Le avventure di Pinocchio :Storia di un burattino* [1881], Stuttgart, Reclam, 2009.
- Deleuze, Gilles/Guattari, Félix, "Rhizome", *Capitalisme et schizophrénie II. Mille plateaux*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, pp. 9-37.
- Ellrich, Lutz, "Kindheitsmuster – Musterkindheit", *Lebensbilder. Streifzüge in Kunst und Pädagogik*, Ed. Eckart Liebau, Oberhausen, Athena-Verlag, 2009, pp. 27-42.
- Giesen, Rolf, "Künstliche Menschen. Ein Glossar", *Künstliche Menschen. Manische Maschinen. Kontrollierte Körper*, Ed. Rolf Aurich et al., Berlin, Jovis, 2000.
- Groebe, Norbert, "Zielideen einer utopisch-moralischen Psychologie", *Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie* (1981), n 12, pp. 104-133.
- Handke, Peter, *Lied Vom Kindsein*, URL: http://www.wim-wenders.com/movies/movies_spec/wingsofdesire/wod-song-of-childhood-german.htm
- Haraway, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, New York, Routledge, 1991, pp.149-181.
- Hesiod, *Theogony; Works and Days*; Shield, translation, introduction, and notes by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.
- Horkheimer, Max, "Begriff der Bildung", *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VIII, Frankfurt/M, Fischer, 1985, pp. 409-419.
- Keifenheim, Barbara, *Wege der Sinne. Wahrnehmung und Kunst bei den Kashinawa-Indianern Amazoniens*, Frankfurt/M, Campus Verlag, 2000.
- Latour, Bruno, *La clef de Berlin et autres leçons d'un amateur de sciences*, Paris, La Découverte, 1993.
- Latour, Bruno, *Pandora's Hope*, London, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Latour, Bruno, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man* [1964], London, Routledge, 2001.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *L'œil et l'Esprit*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.
- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Arthur Golding, William Seres, London, 1567. URL: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0074%3Abook%3D8%3Acard%3D183>
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Huis clos* [1947]; *Texte et documents*, Ed. Monika Beutter et al., Stuttgart, Klett, 2000.
- Simmel, Georg, "Soziologie der Sinne", id., *Soziologische Ästhetik*, Ed. Klaus Lichtblau, Wiesbaden, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009, pp. 115-127.
- Störig, Hans Joachim, *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie* [1950], Frankfurt/M, Fischer, 1996.
- Strang, Veronica, *Uncommon Ground : Landscape, Values and the Environment*, Oxford and New York, Berg Publishers, 1997.
- Sullivan, Harry Stack, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1973.

FILMOGRAPHY

2001 : *A space odyssey*, UK, USA 1968, D: Stanley Kubrick.

Artificial intelligence : AI, USA 2001, D: Steven Spielberg.

Blade runner, USA 1982, D: Ridley Scott.

Der golem, wie er in die welt kam [the golem : how he came into the world], D 1920, D: Paul Wegener/
Carl Boese.

Frankenstein, USA 1931, D : James Whale.

Ghost in the shell [Anime-Film], Japan 1995, D: Mamoru Oshii.

I, robot, USA, D 2004, D: Alex Proyas.

I'm a cyborg, but that's ok, South Korea 2006, D: Park Chan-wook.

Modern times, USA 1936, D: Charlie Chaplin.

Oh, what a blow that phantom gave me! Edmund Carpenter, USA 2004, D: John Bishop/Harald Prins.

NOTES

1. Peter Handke, *Lied Vom Kindsein*, URL:
http://www.wim-wenders.com/movies/movies_spec/wingsofdesire/wod-song-of-childhood-german.htm
2. Peter Handke, *Song of Childhood*, URL:
http://www.wim-wenders.com/movies/movies_spec/wingsofdesire/wod-song-of-childhood.htm
3. Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'œil et l'Esprit*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.
4. Cf. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, New York, Routledge, 1991, pp. 149-181.
5. Cf. Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari, "Rhizome", *Capitalisme et schizophrénie II. Mille plateaux*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, pp. 9-37.
6. Cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005.
7. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, pp. 4 and 12.
8. Janet Carsten, *After Kinship*, Cambridge University Press, 2004: ethnographic examples from Western and non-Western societies in chapter 4, *Person*, pp. 83-108.
9. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, London, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 308; see also pp. 174 ff.
10. *Ibid.*
11. The American ethnologist Edmund Carpenter on the perception of the Inuit in *Oh, what a blow that phantom gave me! Edmund Carpenter*, USA 2004, D: John Bishop/Harald Prins.
12. Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Arthur Golding, William Seres, London, 1567, URL :
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0074%3Abook%3D8%3Acard%3D183>
13. Cf. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera*, Hildesheim, G. Olms, 1970, vol. I, p. 153, translated from *Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's von Nettesheim Magische Werke* [1510], Berlin, Hermannn Barsdorf Verlag, 1924, vol. II, p. 8, cited in Horst Bredekamp, "Überlegungen zur Unausweichlichkeit der Automaten", in: *Puppen, Körper, Automaten - Phantasmen der Moderne*, Ed. Pia Müller-Tamm/Katharina Sykora, Cologne, Oktagon, 1999, pp. 96 f.
14. Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book 8, vv. 183 ff.

15. The German expression for “to enclose oneself” is “sich umhüllen” which is semantically related to “Hülle”, “shell.” It refers to the act of putting a shell around oneself in a very literal fashion.
16. Cf. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; cf. further *Pandora’s Hope*; see also *La clef de Berlinet autres leçons d’un amateur de sciences*, Paris, La Découverte, 1993 by the same other.
17. Cf. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man* [1964], London, Routledge, 2001.
18. Cf. Clynes, Manfred E. / Kline, Natan S., “Cyborgs and Space”, *The Cyborg Handbook*, Ed. Chris Hables Gray, New York/London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 29-33.
19. Cf. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Technisches Manifest der futuristischen Literatur”, Christa Baumgarth, *Geschichte des Futurismus*, Reinbeck near Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1966, pp. 170 f., cited in Bredekamp, “Überlegungen zur Unausweichlichkeit der Automaten”, p. 101.
20. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Gründung und Manifest des Futurismus”, Baumgarth, *Geschichte des Futurismus*, p. 24, *ibid.*, p. 99.
21. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, p.17.
22. Cf. Veronica Strang, *Uncommon Ground : Landscape, Values and the Environment*, Oxford/New York, Berg Publishers, 1997.
23. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, p. 308; see also pp. 174 ff.
24. Motoko and Project 2051 in *Ghost in the shell*.
25. Cf. Hans Joachim Störig, *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie* [1950], Frankfurt/M, Fischer, 1996, pp. 460 f.
26. For the concept of “polar integration” cf. Norbert Groeben, “Zielideen einer utopisch-moralischen Psychologie”, *Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie* (1981), n 12, pp. 104-133.
27. For the various meanings and English translations of Hegel’s “aufheben” see also *hegel.net*, URL: <http://www.hegel.net/en/sublation.htm>
28. Störig, *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 65 f.
29. Carpenter in *Oh, what a blow that phantom gave me!* This co-existence in the cultic masks of the Inuit people can be seen as a parallel to the Australian Aboriginal notion of the simultaneity and transformability of everything in existence (cf. Strang, *Uncommon Ground*). Referring to the myths, ideas and beliefs of the Amazonian Kashinawa Indians, Barbara Keifenheim introduces in her ethnography *Wege der Sinne. Wahrnehmung und Kunst bei den Kashinawa-Indianern Amazoniens* (Frankfurt/M, Campus Verlag, 2000) “the concept of multiple and interfering realities” (cf. pp. 69 f. and p. 199) as well as “the principle of a generalized transformativity.” (cf. pp. 69 -71) Both can also be found in other Amazonian cultures.
30. Handke, *Lied Vom Kindsein*.
31. Handke, *Song of Childhood*.
32. Merleau-Ponty, *L’œil et l’Esprit*, p. 21.
33. *Blade runner* from 1982 is the film adaptation of the 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by the American author Philip K. Dick. It must be noted though that the film deviates from the novel in significant ways and variations.
34. Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *L’œil et l’Esprit*.
35. *AI* (0:41:16)
36. *AI* (0:41:21)
37. *AI* (0:34:14); See also Collodi, *Le avventure di Pinocchio : Storia di un burattino* [1881], Stuttgart, Reclam, 2009. The film explicitly mentions and cites *The Adventures of Pinocchio*.
38. Cf. Collodi, *Le avventure di Pinocchio*.
39. Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book 10, vv. 243 ff.
40. Cf. Rolf Giesen, “Künstliche Menschen. Ein Glossar”, in: *Künstliche Menschen. Manische Maschinen. Kontrollierte Körper*, Ed. Rolf Aurich et al., Berlin, Jovis, 2000. See also the film *der golem, wie er in die welt kam* [*the golem : how he came into the world*], D 1920, D: Paul Wegener/Carl Boese.

41. Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*; Works and days; Shield, translation, introduction, and notes by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1983, pp. 66 f.
42. Cf. Apollodorus, *The Library*, translated by Sir James George Frazer, Loeb Classical Library Volumes 121 & 122, London, Harvard University Press, 1961, URL: <http://www.theoi.com/Text/Apollodorus1.html>; See also Apollonius Rhodius who does not mention Hephaistos as Talos' creator in *The Argonautica*, translated into English prose from the text of R. Merkel by Edward P. Coleridge, George Bell, London, 1889, pp. 204 ff., URL: <http://www.archive.org/details/theargonauticaof00apoliala>
43. Cf. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, London, Penguin Books, 2003 and James Whale's film *Frankenstein*, USA 1931.
44. Is this being really a monster?
45. Brian Aldiss, *Super-Toys Last All Summer Long*, URL: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.01/ffsupertoys.html>
46. Cf. AI and Collodi, *Le avventure di Pinocchio*.
47. Max Horkheimer, "Begriff der Bildung", *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VIII, Frankfurt/M, Fischer, 1985, p. 417 : "Daß den Menschen alles in der Welt außer dem Menschen zum bloßen Instrument wird, trägt mit dazu bei, daß schließlich – im Widerspruch zur guten Absicht – die Welt bloß verwaltet, die Humanität zu Phrase wird."
48. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos* [1947]; *Texte et documents*, Ed. Monika Beutter et al., Stuttgart, Klett, 2000, p. 64.
49. Cf. AI (0:24:58)
50. AI (0:25:13)
51. Professor Hobby in AI.
52. Aldiss, *Super-Toys Last All Summer Long*.
53. To Sullivan, a human's personality is the outcome of the interaction between humans. As a result, human contact is what builds that famous thing we call *individuality*. Cf. Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1973.
54. Carsten, *After Kinship*, pp. 83-108.
55. Horkheimer, "Begriff der Bildung", p. 411: "Zeit aber steht für Liebe; der Sache, der ich Zeit schenke, schenke ich Liebe [...]"
56. See also Lutz Ellrich, "Kindheitsmuster – Musterkindheit", *Lebensbilder. Streifzüge in Kunst und Pädagogik*, Ed. Eckart Liebau, Oberhausen, Athena-Verlag, 2009, p. 32.
57. Merleau-Ponty, *L'œil et l'Esprit*, pp. 18 f.
58. Cf. Simmel, "Soziologie der Sinne", id., *Soziologische Ästhetik*, Ed. Klaus Lichtblau, Wiesbaden, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009, pp. 117 f.
59. I.A. (0:11:29)
60. I.A. (0:24:23)
61. Once again, this film is not the direct adaptation of a book, but still draws from a literary source of inspiration: the short story collection *I, Robot* (New York, Gnome Press, 1950) by the American science fiction writer Isaac Asimov.
62. Aldiss, *Super-Toys Last All Summer Long*.
63. I.A.: One of Professor Hobby's female colleagues asks him about the consequences of his proposal to build robots capable of love.
64. Cf. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 214.
65. Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *L'œil et l'Esprit*.
66. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, pp. 4 and 12.

ABSTRACTS

How do synthetic humans like robots and androids as well as cyborgs – the composite creatures of the modern age – challenge the basic dichotomies of Western philosophy, such as the subject/object divide? How can they help us investigate the ambiguity of being human? What connections do we find between fiction and non-fiction, between different cultures' archaic myths, theory, literature, and especially motion pictures, with their outstanding potential to visualize theoretical models and to simulate alternative scenarios?

Comment les humains artificiels tels que les robots, les androïdes et les cyborgs, en tant qu'êtres bâtards de la modernité, mettent-ils au défi les dichotomies fondamentales de la philosophie occidentale, comme celle entre sujet et objet ? Comment peuvent-ils nous aider à comprendre l'ambiguïté de l'être humain ? Avec quelles théories et méthodes, ces êtres se laissent-ils saisir de façon adéquate ? Quels liens pouvons-nous découvrir entre fiction et non-fiction, entre les mythes archaïques de différentes cultures, la théorie, la littérature et surtout les images en mouvement qui ont ceci d'extraordinaire qu'elles permettent de visualiser des pensées théoriques et de simuler des scénarios alternatifs ?