PROGRAMMED PAIN:

TRANSFERRED TRAUMA AND THE (UN)MAKING OF ROBOT IDENTITY

by

REBECCA FRANCES SEXTON

(Under the Direction of Masaki Mori)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how robot fiction uses pain and trauma to interrogate the boundaries of selfhood, embodiment, and empathy. Across a range of texts, artificial humans, though typically portrayed as immune to pain, are nonetheless depicted as undergoing suffering, bodily deconstruction, and psychological distress (trauma). These narratives use robotic bodies as symbolic vessels through which unresolved human traumas are displaced and made visible. Central to this project is the idea that violence against robots is not always simply spectacle, but a narrative tool for unmaking identity and enabling the (re)creation of the self. Drawing on Elaine Scarry's seminal work on pain and her framework of making/unmaking, this dissertation explores the process of identity creation at sites of transference within robot narratives. Tony M. Vinci's work with trauma and Victoria Nelson's with transference further grounds the analysis, with additional attention directed to the transference of human anxieties and "assumed knowingness" onto emergent technologies like LLMs (colloquially referred to as "A.I.") Through close readings of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the video game *Detroit: Become Human*, Park Min-gyu's short story "Roadkill," and Ichikawa Haruko's manga *Land of the Lustrous*, this dissertation traces how violence against artificial beings in

robot fiction operates as a medium for exploring posthuman identity and failed empathy. It ultimately argues that, through cycles of bodily destruction and transferred (human) trauma, artificial humans are frequently remade into subjects of empathy, agency, or transcendence.

INDEX WORDS: robots, androids, artificial intelligence, Elaine Scarry, pain, trauma, identity, science fiction, robot fiction, Ichikawa Haruko, Philip K. Dick, Detroit: Become Human

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REBECCA FRANCES SEXTON

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MA, University of Georgia, 2015

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REBECCA FRANCES SEXTON

Major Professor:	Masaki Mori
Committee:	Joel Black
	Mi-Ryong Shim

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

For my mother, who believed in me, and for Adrian, who was there every step of the way.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: PROGRAMMING PAIN

The image of the robot as a being beyond pain is well established in popular media; from *Futurama*'s Bender to the reprogrammed T-800's final thumbs up as he slowly sinks into a vat of molten steel in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), artificial humans are regularly presented as incapable of, or indifferent to, feeling pain. This well-embedded trait is often used for comedic relief, as with Bender, or to exaggerate difference with regards to explorations of the concept of *humanity* (as with "The Bicentennial Man"'s Andrew: robots do not feel, at least not until they *do).* It may seem a little odd then that researchers have turned to robots for use in communicating human pain, and yet multiple models have been proposed and developed within just a handful of years. In 2023, researchers at Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology presented ALH-E (ALternative Healthcare for Expressing ache), a small robot used as an interface to communicate pain from patients to healthcare professionals. It was comprised of a soft, deformable, roundish portion that patients could hold in their hand and squeeze to indicate the level of pain. ALH-E's "body," a cylinder that would twist and bend into more severe shapes depending on the level of pain conveyed, was designed to resemble the "natural and dynamic

wriggling" of living things in pain.[1] Patients who used ALH-E reported that they felt it conveyed their pain more accurately and easier than conventional methods like the VAS or NRS.[2]

Such scales are themselves indicative of the difficulty in expressing pain, which is readily apparent to anyone who has ever struggled to place their pain between a 4 or 5, or determine which frowny face best depicts what they are experiencing. Elaine Scarry opens her treatise on pain, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), by examining just this phenomenon, the seeming inexpressibility of pain. It is not merely the difficulty of describing it that makes communicating pain difficult, but the tendency for the person listening, the person not in pain, to doubt what they are hearing: "To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*."[3] There can be nothing more certain than pain to the person experiencing it, even as, for the person being told of someone else's pain, that pain remains unconfirmable, unfelt, and elusive. Pain scales like VAS or NRS are just one attempt at conveying this certainty, at expressing that which not only resists language, "but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human makes before language is learned."[4] Robots like ALH-E are thus a continued attempt to better communicate the incommunicable; their designers are, like doctors or human rights groups, engaged in the act of diminishing pain.

Scarry describes intense pain, as in the pain of torture, as "world destroying," in that its effect is an extreme embodiedness that denies anything exterior to the body and its pain

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[1] Dongyoon Kim et al., "Development of a Deformable and Flexible Robot for Pain Communication: Field Study of ALH-E in the Hospital." *2023 32nd IEEE International Conference on Robot and Human Interactive Communication (RO-MAN)* (2023): 2323, doi:10.1109/RO-MAN57019.2023.10309657.

[2] The Visual Analog Scale and Numeric Rating Scale, respectively. Both are common scales for attempting to measure and convey pain from patient to doctor.

[3] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World,* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 13.

[4] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 4.

including self and world in addition to language. This kind of pain is "a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe."[5] The "content of one's world disintegrates," leaving only the body; leaving the self without a subject. From here, the objectification of pain—making pain visible—can be translated into a legitimization of power, specifically of the power of the regime enacting extreme violence on the body. Scarry's argument expands to include warfare and the legitimization of political realities through what she terms a contest of injuring, with the human body and the pain enacted on it always centered, always central. The dual process of unmaking and making (destruction and creation) is hinged, ultimately, on pain and its diminishment.[6]

In science fictional works that examine notions of the human through contrast with the non-human, sites of difference—such as the experience of pain--are often treated as ontological. It is, in fact, nearly impossible to engage with robot fiction without encountering the problem of pain, namely: *that robots do not feel it.* It often exists at the crux of themes of identity and personhood, enmeshed, for example, within the questionable human experience of empathy in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) or used in concert with organic embodiedness and death as a delimiting qualification for individuality, wherein the inability to feel pain or to *die* (in any true, final*, permanent*, sense) exempts a robotic or artificial human being from the precarious impermanence of personhood.[7] In many works of robot fiction, pain is, in the gulf between its obvious lack and the common occurrence of violence enacted upon

[5] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 35.
[6] See: Scarry *The Body in Pain* Chapter 2, 60-160.
[7]Isaac Asimov's "The Bicentennial Man," Bok Geo-il's "Along the Fragments of My Body," and Quantic Dream's *Detroit: Become Human* are chief examples which will be discussed throughout this dissertation, although there are many, many other examples within the genre itself.

robot/android bodies, nonetheless discomfortingly present. Whether played for laughs, as with C-3PO's dismemberment in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), or as an example of monstrous (human) cruelty, as in *Ex Machina* (2014) or *A.I.* (2001), this gap reoccurs again and again, typically imparting more about *humanity* than about machine. Yet there *is* something going on within that gap that speaks to both the function of robot characters in fiction as well as to the architecture of identity.

Tony M. Vinci sees within this gap a site of transference, a displacement of human trauma onto the artificial human. He is particularly interested in Dick's *Do Androids?* and the concept of the posthuman which he contrasts with the anthropocentric humanism embedded in cultural constructions within the novel's post-apocalyptic setting that prioritize empathy. Vinci describes the android as *scapegoat*: as a sacrifice to the prioritized image of the human through the android's perceived inability to feel. Human trauma precludes any conception of android trauma in the very positioning of this transference: "Residing in a culture in which it is ontologically desubjectified and derealized, the android is not allowed to be traumatized, and this prohibition is itself traumatic to the android."[8]

That there is a transference is clear; in *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2001), Victoria Nelson tracks the displacement in Western culture, following the Enlightenment, of the religious to the realm of the supernatural, with a final reversion occurring in science fiction, and in particular in the various forms of artificial humans. Nelson examines the shift first from religion to art as the site of "a nonrational, supernatural, quasi-religious view of the universe."[9] She is particularly

[8] Tony M. Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds: Trauma, Non-Anthropocentric Vulnerability, and the Human/Android/Animal Dynamic in Philip K. Dick's 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 47, no.2 (2014): 97.
[9] Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets,* (Harvard University Press, 2001), vii.

interested in how puppets, robots, etc. evince a persisting belief, although secularized, in the "immortal soul." She notes that:

> In the history of puppets and other human simulacra after the decline of religion we can read—in a backward image, like a reflection in a mirror—the underground history of the soul excluded from its religious context in Western culture.[10]

Nelson then turns to science fiction, both literature and film, and to the robot (android, cyborg) to follow this attempt at positioning the "soul." The "preeminence of the machine brought about by the industrial revolution," rather than "robbing us" of the idea of a soul, transferred the soul itself to the machine.[11] Nelson phrases this transference as a kind of inheritance, and one that is only possible to machines "made in our own image" due to the necessity of a proxy that can reach "that ineffable level of spirit beyond the material world" that is no longer available to us precisely due to our move from the spiritual to the secular.[12] This is, additionally, an inheritance not only of soul, but of a "moral superiority," as "the simulacrum was now portrayed as far better equipped as an ethical and emotional role model to humanity than humans themselves."[13] In "the absence of a recognized divine,"[14] the artificial human is infused with both the human (soul) and the divine:

> Over the course of the twentieth century the artificial human gradually came to represent a combination god, externalized soul, and Divine Human from which we constructed, without ever acknowledging it, a continued belief in immortal spirit—a belief that lives in a layer of the psyche deeper and less accessible than

[10] Nelson, *Secret Life of Puppets*, 31.
[11] Ibid., 250.
[12] Ibid., 259.
[13] Ibid., 251.
[14] Ibid., 250.

> the conventional moral commitment most religious observers in a late industrial society make within their houses of worship.[15]

This amelioration of the machine (the creation of a "golem who is no monster but a child of light")[16] is a side effect of the relocation of displaced subconscious notions of/yearning for the divine. That later depictions of artificial humans are also often engaged in acts of creation more adept/extensive than those of humans is also, Nelson argues, indicative of this resituation of both human and divine.[17] "It has no soul," Mrs. Weston protests of the robot Robbie in Asimov's story of the same name, bluntly pinpointing the exact concern of many robot stories and anticipating "Robbie's" concluding assertion of the opposite.[18]

Vinci's analysis of transference largely looks to the "wound" left by the displaced trauma *within humans*, positioning androids as a site embodying that trauma, and categorizes empathy, as it is presented in *Do Androids?*, as that which problematizes the cultural notions of "the human," rather than defining it.[19] The notion of a wound ties this transference to the body rather than the metaphysical realm of the *soul,* and yet both Vinci and Nelson point to artificial humans as sites of transference. ALH-E likewise presents a very literal example of one process of transference: its "body" is animated by the visual translation of human pain. The impulse of many working in the fields of robotics and artificial intelligence to create robots that can feel pain[20] is certainly interesting, and typically aligns with the anthropocentrism examined by Vinci, but it mostly highlights that which is emphasized by many robot fictions: the problem of pain.

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[15] Nelson, *Secret Life of Puppets,* 269.
[16] Ibid., 268.
[17] David, from the *Alien*-adjacent films *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017) occupies a notably much more sinister version of the divine.
[18] Isaac Asimov, "Robbie," in *The Complete Robot,* (HarperCollins, 1982): 146.
[19] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 96.
[20] Roboticists Johannes Kuehn and Sami Haddadin created an artificial nervous system to simulate pain with the goal of instilling avoidance behavior in robots and aiding in safety in human-robot collaborations. Minoru Asada has also proposed that understanding pain is integral to the development of deep learning within the field of artificial

The transference of trauma/pain to supposedly unfeeling bodies plays out not just in *Do Androids?,* but again and again throughout robot fiction, with certain works, such as Steven Spielberg's *A.I.* (2001) and Ichikawa Haruko's *Land of the Lustrous* (2012-2024) providing the most explicit examples not just of transference, but of a subsequent process sparked by the (typically violent) unmaking inherent therein. The centering of the body, as with Scarry's own framework of unmaking, necessitates a stricter definition of the *artificial* body seen in robot fiction, as the category of the artificial human is historically broad.

Robot Fictions

The term "robot," from *robota,* Czech for "enforced work or drudgery" and with ties to the word "serf" (*robotnik*),[21] was first introduced by Karel Capek in his 1920 play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*. Capek's robots are organic rather than mechanical, as is the more modern understanding of the word, especially when the examples of real world robots that are most common to the layperson are industrial or those such as the "robot dogs" manufactured by Boston Dynamics.[22] The sturdy, metallic form that is most commonly evoked by the word *robot* can easily be seen in *Futurama's* Bender or Rosie from *The Jetsons,* although the actual tradition of fictional depictions of "mechanical men" is much more varied. Galatea is carved from ivory; Olimpia and the chess-playing automaton of "Moxon's Master," directly inspired by the

intelligence, especially in creating artificial empathy among robots. Notably: artificial empathy to aid robots in understanding humans.

[21] Nelson, *Secret Life of Puppets*, 260.

[22] The quadrupedal robots are perhaps some of the most easily recognized, due to many videos put out by Boston Dynamics which feature an almost playful array of robotic romps, which are of course at odds with the actual usage that these "dog" robots are seeing: many police departments in the United States use them for surveillance, while another company, Throwflame, recently released a flamethrower-equipped version of the robotic dog for purchase.

Mechanical Turk,[23] are largely made of wood. Isaac Asimov's robot stories were hugely instrumental in popularizing the "notion of carefully engineered industrial robots,"[24] but even in Asimov the image of the organic robot persists, perhaps most intriguingly in "The Bicentennial Man" (1976). This blending of mechanical and organic is best exemplified in portrayals of androids and cyborgs, but the usages of each of these terms is variable: android, for example, is often used interchangeably with *robot,* whereas in other works there are clear distinctions.[25] The commonality of these types of characters is typically narrative function, especially in regards to their relationship with human characters.

In categorizing "robot fiction" as a subgenre, I am treating the *robot* part of the term as an umbrella: for the sake of ease I am including within it early automatons, organic robots, androids (gynoids), and A.I. Distinctions will be noted when necessary, but essentially robot fictions, for the purposes of this dissertation, indicate science fictional works which include manmade sentient beings that are used as a worker class. Additionally, Isaac Asimov makes note of two obvious categories of robot fictions: Robot-as-Menace and Robot-as-Pathos.[26] These categories are both self-explanatory, and most robot fictions can fit neatly into one or the other, although there is certainly some overlap. It is also important to note that common perceptions of robots vary between different cultural traditions. Jennifer Robertson notes that, largely due to some of the most common portrayals of robots in Japanese popular culture being Astro Boy and

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[23] Eventually revealed to be a hoax, the Mechanical Turk was an infamous chess-playing "machine" that was believed to be able to play and beat human opponents at chess. This ability was entirely reliant on a human chess player hiding within the construct and following each opponent's moves via a system of magnets.
[24] Asimov, *The Complete Robot,* 2.
[25] Typically android refers to a robot specifically made to look like a human, such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s Data, or Bishop and Ash from the *Alien* series. The robots of *R.U.R.* would be termed "androids" by today's classification, for example. Cyborgs, conversely, almost always refer to a blending of human and machine (such as Robocop or Major Kusanagi from *Ghost in the Shell*).
[26] Asimov, *The Complete Robot*, 1.

Doraemon,[27] "the general trend in Japanese popular media and culture has been to characterize robots as benign and human friendly."[28] Robertson in turn notes the influence of *R.U.R.* on the popular conception of the robot in the West, and particularly on fears of "the destructive potential of robots," which can indeed be followed through to *R.U.R.'s* influence on Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), and the influence both had over many other subsequent robot fictions. Robertson also notes that *R.U.R.* was performed in Tokyo in 1924, and that portrayals of robots in Japanese popular culture vary just as much between Asimov's categories of Robot-as-Pathos and Robot-as-Menace, but that trends and attitudes about robots do differ distinctly from those in the west.

Of the robot fictions discussed in this dissertation, Ichikawa Haruko's manga *Land of the Lustrous* (宝石の国) is the most integral in illustrating the processes of transference and unmaking/making. The tendency towards a more positive view of robots (that likewise leans towards Robot-as-Pathos) can be seen in the character of Sensei, who is marked distinctly, and immediately, by his garb: he is dressed as a Buddhist priest. At the start of the series his identity as a machine is not immediately known, to either the other characters or to the reader, but he is already preconfigured within a moral framework solely based on appearance. Furthermore, once he is revealed to be a machine, he is referred to as a "machine for prayer" (祈りのための機械),[29] which marks him further. Sensei is never referred to by any term other than "machine," but this is largely because all other distinctions (between robot, android, cyborg, etc.) have been destroyed alongside almost all remnants of humanity.

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[27] Astro Boy is a humanoid robot shaped like a young boy while Doraemon is a bipedal cat robot; both are presented as friendly beings that help others.
[28] Jennifer Roberson, *Robo sapiens japanicus: Robots, Gender, Family, and the Japanese Nation,* (University of California Press, 2018), 5.
[29] Ichikawa Haruko, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 8, (Kodansha, 2017), 29.

The setting of *Land of the Lustrous* is a future Earth that has been battered by six successive meteors, the last of which finally rendered the Earth uninhabitable by humans, driving them into the sea and, ultimately, extinction. The protagonist of the series, Phos, short for Phophosphyllite, is a member of a race of non-human, inorganic beings that are essentially anthropomorphized gemstones. Referred to simply as "gems" in the Japanese (宝石), and the "Lustrous" in the English translation, the categorization of these characters as either distinctly aliens or robots is impossible. The gems are later revealed to be a sort of descendant of humans, and yet they are also partially artificial, shaped (carved) into a humanoid form following their "birth." The gems cannot reproduce, and are instead formed from the earth, some few gaining consciousness/sentience through inclusions.[30] These inclusions are later revealed to have once been microorganisms that had in turn absorbed the humans that had fled to the sea, thus eventually allowing inorganic material to become ambulatory. Additionally, the gems are functionally immortal: their makeup, largely due to their inclusions, allows them to be put back together no matter how many pieces they shatter into. This immortality sets them apart from all organic beings and also places them within the same framework as most robots, in that their bodies, no matter how badly destroyed, are without pain.

The term "artificial human" is far more accurate in classifying the gems, as they are intentionally made to look human by Sensei who is in turn attempting to "make" a human to bypass the malfunctions that have prevented him from completing his purpose (to pray) for thousands of years. The gems are, in this respect, quite literally *artificial* humans. Conversely, Sensei perfectly illustrates Nelson's concept of the transferred divine: he is, in some small part, engaged in creation, carving out of rock rather than clay. Additionally, his appearance as a holy

[30] Inclusions are, in terms of mineralogy/gemology, any other materials trapped inside the mineral/gem during its formation.

man, and his purpose as a *machine for prayer,* positions him as a savior (for humanity) within the narrative. This is a role which is eventually violently diverted and instead transferred to Phos, who through an equally violent series of transformations, is made and unmade again and again, an unfortunate embodiment of the problem of the Ship of Theseus. Phos' identity is thus repeatedly problematized through an ongoing process of hybridization (cyborgization) necessitated by the repeated introduction of materials alien to Phos' body: first agate (gathered from the shell of a giant sea snail and shaped into new legs), then a gold-platinum alloy (for arms), then lapis lazuli (Phos' head replaced with that of another gem), then synthetic pearl (Phos' eye gouged out to make room for a surveillance device), and finally—and most devastatingly—part of a machine for prayer.

As can perhaps be gleaned from the brief list of damages to Phos' body, *Lustrous* is marked by a constant violence: the gems are at war with a race of disembodied humanoids called Lunarians (月人) who reside on the six moons, pieces of Earth that broke off following the meteor strikes. At the start of the series Phos longs to be allowed to fight, but their[31] too-brittle body makes it impossible; Phos is so fragile that Sensei and the other gems regularly break them by accident. Phos' initial motivation is tied to finding a purpose for themself within gem society, though this quickly changes to finding a way to drag another gem, Cinnabar, out of self-exile. Phos' quest, like their body, changes continually; in fact the two are directly related. The trauma encoded on Phos' body through transference makes them ever more unstable, until, as Phos'

[31] The Gems are genderless, something Ichikawa conveyed largely through their design and way of speaking: they have mostly androgynous bodies and slightly feminine faces which are intentionally at odds with very masculine patterns of speech, with the Gems mostly using the masculine personal pronouns 俺 or 僕, masculine third person pronouns (彼) or other terms of address (お兄ちゃん, 兄貴) when speaking about each other. The English translation of the manga instead avoids using third person pronouns at all, occasionally falling back on "that Gem"/"this Gem" when needed. I will be using exclusively gender neutral pronouns for all of the Gems throughout this dissertation.

body continually breaks itself apart, they descend into a paranoid madness centered on revenge, anger, and an urge to violence that is misdirected.

As Phos retains less and less of their original body, Ichikawa maintains the use of a process of "unmasking" not unlike what Alison de Fren describes in "Technofetishism and the uncanny desires of A.S.F.R.", which forces the reader to refocus on the reality of these nonhuman characters. De Fren's concept of unmasking as tied to the A.S.F.R. community and specifically robots (gynoids, etc.) is based on the relationship extrapolated from Mulvey of fetishistic desire (scopophilia) and a desire to know (epistemophilia):

> [I]n its attempt to unmask the artificial body (through physical breakdown), the ASFRian gaze is less aligned to fetishistic *scopophilia*—the desire to see but not to know, which is generally read in relation to the cohesive male subject—than with the self-reflexive curiosity of Pandora, the desire to see beneath the seen.[32]

De Fren goes on to tie this desire to see "'beyond our scope' or 'ken'" to the uncanny, which in turn is tied to the doubt over "whether an apparently living being is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate."[33] Although neither robot nor android, the Gems nonetheless occupy this same space of "apparently living/lifeless object." They appear human enough, and were it not for their regular shattering, and through it an unmasking, that status would remain unquestioned. Ichikawa draws attention to the Gems' resemblance to humans, contrasting it with the complete lack of actual humans, and even portrays the Gems as going to lengths to mask themselves, covering their bodies with powder, which simulates skin. The covers of each of the manga volumes reflect this as well, with the

[32] Allison de Fren. "Technofetishism and the uncanny desires of A.S.F.R. (alt.sex.fetish.robots)," *Science Fiction Criticism*, ed. by Rob Latham, Bloomsbury, 2017, 379-380.
[33] Ibid., 389.

outer dust jackets showing the Gems as whole and very human-like. Upon removing the dust jackets, a very literal unmasking on the part of the reader, different sets of images are revealed on the covers, each of them featuring the Gems either sans clothing and powder, or, notably in the case of Phos, sans clothing and powder and shattered. Double cover images like this are not uncommon with manga, but with *Lustrous* the doubled images remain consistent through all twelve volumes, dutifully tracking the damage done to Phos' original body. As this is something that can in fact easily become lost due to Phos' continued humanoid appearance through most of the series, removing the dusk jacket of each volume to "see" just how little is left of the original Phos becomes a shocking act. Volume 6, for example, features Phos, Cairngorm, Peridot, and Sphene surrounded by Phos' alloy, which carries over onto the back cover. Beneath the outer cover, the four gems are all without clothing or powder, and Phos is shown as merely a torso, without legs, arms, or head (the severed head can be found on its own on the back cover), which reflects what is actually left of Phos' original body by the end of Volume 6. Due to the centering of identity, embodiedness, and trauma, *Lustrous* is uniquely suited to discussions of pain (or rather, the lack thereof) and identity-making within a framework of unmaking/making as originally outlined by Scarry.

Un/making

In many robot fictions, rather than as a direct experience, pain is communicated via the shock of the starkness of its lack with the extreme violence done to robot/android bodies—through the sheer horror of destruction—and through a transference of human pain/trauma to a non-human body. It is the combination of extreme (painless) violence with a human transference of trauma which creates an avenue for inhuman bodies to "feel" pain. Elaine Scarry's *The Body*

in Pain presents a philosophical framework for the construction of reality and body as tied to pain which remains one of the deepest mediations on pain itself. Scarry's concepts of sentience (pain) and the created object (creation) are particularly useful in examining the aforementioned process through which unfelt pain in non-human bodies is nonetheless instrumental in identity-making, which itself becomes central thematically to so much of robot/android fiction. The very embeddedness of violence within so much of the genre begs a closer look as well: why is it that these bodies—very nearly human, but not quite—must undergo the worst extremes of violence and destruction? What is it that necessitates it? For it *is* necessary, as will become increasingly clear. Scarry's framework illuminates part of the issue while highlighting the very difficulty problematized by fictional robot/real human analogs: robots, androids, and non-humans in fiction all exist at a between point. They *must* not be human while simultaneously both *be* human and *more than*, or even *exemplarily human.* They must not feel pain and yet human identity (human categorization) is defined by pain. Or, to notch the problem into Scarry's framework: the reciprocity inherent in the process of creation is contingent on the human/object relationship, and Scarry makes note of but does not attempt to unravel the implications of the same type of relationship between humans, which is precisely the work that robot/android fictions are attempting in this linking of (unfelt) pain to identity.[34]

It is the goal of this dissertation to outline and unravel the process of identity-making within much of robot/android fiction as it exists at the paradoxical site of felt (in)human pain. The following chapter begins with an examination of the confluence of conceptions of real and literary robots that leads to a confusion of identification in the ways in which human fear and

[34] "The issue of reciprocity between persons is a complex and important subject, but it is emphatically not the subject under discussion here. Whatever its characteristics, they cannot be derived from the model of the relation between persons and objects." Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 318.

awe of literary AI is transferred to real LLMs (large language models) and robots, alternately leading to violence or a dangerous eagerness to trust in the (wrongfully) perceived "intelligence" of an LLM. From here, the chapter continues with an examination of Asimov's categories of Robot-as-Menance and Robot-as-Pathos and the types of violence typically seen in each. Beginning with an analysis of Park Min-gyu's "Roadkill" and capitalistic violence seen through the lens of Scarry's discussion of unmaking/making and Marx, the chapter will next move on to Despina Kakoudaki's concept of metalface and the resulting racist violence inherent in robot fictions which use artificial humans as analog/allegory for marginalized groups. This section focuses on the short film *The Second Renaissance* and the video game *Detroit: Become Human,* both of which, to varying degrees of success, center robot revolution and the android/robot body as racialized other. The chapter ends with a discussion of body horror in *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* and *Land of the Lustrous,* focusing on bodily transformations and the scale of effectiveness of body horror on non-human robot bodies.

The third chapter will move on to a greater focus on empathy and trauma, beginning with an examination of the twinning of empathy and violence within robot fictions. Following this will be an examination of Vinci's analysis of the transference of trauma in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* before I return to the works introduced in Chapter 2, continuing to track the process of un/making as based on Scarry's framework, with an emphasis on transferred trauma. The bulk of the analysis will feature "Roadkill," *A.I., Land of the Lustrous,* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?.*

Finally, the fourth chapter will focus mostly on identity-making, beginning with a brief analysis of "The Bicentennial Man" and "Along the Fragments of My Body" focusing on identity-formation amidst the deconstruction/re-construction of the body. Following this, Chapter

Four will conclude the analysis of the works covered in the previous two chapters, with the greatest focus centered on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, R.U.R., Land of the Lustrous,* and *Ex Machina.* Kakoudaki's concepts of animation/de animation, which run parallel to unmaking/making and explore constructions of robot identity, will be covered in this chapter as well, particularly in relation to *Ex Machina.* Although each of these works demonstrate the similar process of un/making in regards to robot identity, *Land of the Lustrous,* in examining the cyborg-like identities of becoming-human and becoming-god, presents an expansion of Scarry's framing of unmaking/making which includes the created Artifact (God), likewise returning to Nelson's paradigm of the transferred Divine.

CHAPTER 2: REDUCED TO SCRAP

SANCTIONED VIOLENCE AND BODILY DECONSTRUCTION

In 2013, Drs David Harris Smith and Frauke Zeller created a small, mostly immobile robot they called hitchBOT. For the next two years hitchBOT, just as its name suggests, hitched its way across Canada, as well as most of Germany and the Netherlands, before it spent a final two weeks in the United States in 2015. A band placed below the glowing digital curve of a projected smile read *San Francisco or Bust,* unfortunately hitchBOT only made it as far as Philadelphia before its GPS cut out, alerting Drs Smith and Zeller to the fact that it had been destroyed. This was not an outcome that was unforeseen by the hitchBOT team, although Dr. Zeller admitted that it affected them "more than [she] would have expected."[35] Neither were they the only ones: hitchBOT had, during its short time operating, enjoyed a viral popularity, with many people traveling hundreds of miles just for the chance to offer it a ride, while many others visited it during its museum tour. Tens of thousands more followed it on social media, often posting about their, unfortunately not misplaced, worry for hitchBOT's safety.

There is, admittedly, a kind of shock at learning exactly how hitchBOT was destroyed; at the violence enacted on a construct designed specifically to put people at ease and encourage friendly interaction.[36] Incapable of moving on its own, roughly the size of a six-year-old child,

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[35] Jane Wakefield, "Can you murder a robot?", *BBC*, March 16, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-47090174.

[36] Frauke Zeller and David Harris Smith, "What a Hitchhiking Robot Can Tell Us About Automated Coworkers," *Harvard Business Review,* December 18, 2014, https://hbr.org/2014/12/what-a-hitchhiking-robot-can-teach-us-about-automated-coworkers.

with pool noodle limbs and rubber boots, hitchBOT looked more toy than high-tech gadget, and was, notably, entirely reliant on the aid of humans. Yet it was stripped of its meager accoutrements, dismembered, and beheaded, met with a thoroughness of violence that is perplexing for what did effectively amount to a simplistic chatbot with an LED smile and noodle arms. As an experiment in seeing how humans interact with technology and in asking "Can robots trust humans?"[37], hitchBOT's end, as dramatic as it was, does seem to suggest a clear answer.

It is also a conclusion repeatedly drawn by fiction: from Chapek's *R.U.R.* and Asimov's Robot-as-Pathos stories to contemporary narratives, robot/human relationships are centered around suspicion and fear, empathy (or lack thereof), and violence. Arnold Schwartzeneggar's Terminator and the threat of Skynet looms not only over all subsequent robot stories, but in nearly every real world conversation regarding AI and 'killer robots' as well. There is, indeed, such a conflux of fiction and reality within the general understanding of modern day AI, or more accurately, "large language models," or LLMs, (which is unsurprisingly pushed and intentionally exacerbated by many of those selling these technologies as products) that fictional capabilities, including actual sentience/intelligence, are commonly misattributed to AI (LLMs). Amazon and Microsoft both, for example, encourage the personification of their AI, naming them Siri and Cortana and encouraging their users to interact with them as if they were people. Google does the same; every new Pixel phone includes an optional setup and tutorial for their Assistant, which is activated by the casual-familiar *Hey, Google.* ChatGPT may be one of the more infamous instances of this misattribution, with its users regularly taking what it churns out as fact, either disregarding or ignorant to the unfortunately plentiful instances of the AI simply

[37] Wakefield, "Can you murder a robot?"

making things up.[38] GPT and other models like it (Gemini, Grok, DeepSeek, Claude, etc.) are not true AI, despite the regular use of the appellation by their creators. There is no actual intelligence there; the technology simply is not anywhere near that point, and in fact, LLMs are not even capable of reaching it. Even the most advanced models are limited to what can be overly simplified as chatbot functionality.

LLMs are sophisticated Madlib programs: they use complex mathematics and a system of categorization to predict which words will follow what. Even in instances where they are asked to produce entire essays, they will still be merely predicting a response that best fits with the given prompt based *solely* on their training data. A 2024 study by researchers at Brown on vector arithmetic in LLMs focused on the way LLMs categorized certain words, in particular the capitals of countries.[39] It is clear from how LLMs work, using this research as an example, that the LLM does not "know" that Warsaw is the capital of Poland so much as it looks to its training data, has made note of different word associations (which it keeps a record of in what is termed "hidden layers"), and is able to extrapolate from that. When researchers prevented access to training data (through disabling the feed-forward layer), the LLM was unable to give Warsaw as an answer for the capital of Poland, at least not until they explicitly included "Warsaw is the capital of Poland" in the prompt itself.[40] LLMs are not responding due to any innate intelligence as we understand it, but rather processing an overwhelmingly large body of data, categorizing words by associations, and filling in whatever blanks are provided them with what words (that they have access to via their training data) make the most "sense" given their categorizations.

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[38] The promotional video for Bard (the precursor to Gemini) showed Bard stating that the James Webb Space Telescope took the first picture of a planet outside the solar system, which led to a hundred billion dollar dip in Google's market value when an astrophysicist pointed out this was patently false. (Narayanan and Kapoor, *AI Snake Oil, 2024).*

[39] Jack Merullo et al., "Language Models Implement Simple Word2Vec-Style Vector Arithmetic," 2023: https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=44513ade-64e9-3dee-bbd0-69d817b74d33.

[40] Merullo, "Vector Arithmetic."

The infallibility assumed by the average ChatGPT user is largely a carry-over from fictional representations, as well as heavily influenced by what Bukatman terms *cyberdrool* in his discussion of the then-newly introduced technology, virtual reality (VR). He notes that "the discourse surrounding the immersive interface of virtual reality far outstrips the achievement" of the technology itself. Indeed, VR has not progressed near as far as it was predicted by many of those susceptible to cyberdrool, certainly not to the level of "subject-empowerment" fantasies or the "oxymoronic cosmology" that Bukatman outlines,[41] much of which is being eerily echoed by a fringe subculture now surrounding AI that lends itself to religiosity and mysticism, seeing AI as a new god.[42] This over-exaggeration of an AI's capabilities has led to many unfortunate reports of users citing made-up books or articles, or even fake court cases[43]; the myth of literary AI is instilled in LLMs by both those using and those selling it, and is likewise hugely influential to those who fear it.

Skynet, the antagonistic artificial intelligence that nearly destroys humanity in the *Terminator* series, is not the only fictional AI that hangs over modern day discussions of LLMs, as, indeed, there exists an entire generic tradition of man-made creations turning on their creators, tracing back to Shelley's *Frankenstein* and beyond. The horror of oppression by machines, as exemplified in *The Matrix* (dir. Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999) likewise lends itself to the tendency of cyberdrool and the imagined capabilities of LLMs. Asimov's category of *Robot-as-Menace* is in many ways far more influential than *Robot-as-Pathos,* as the horror embodied in HAL 9000 or AM maintains a heavier weight in the cultural imagination than the

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[41] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity* (Duke University Press: 1993), 188-189.
[42] Miles Klee, "People Are Losing Loved Ones to AI-Fueled Spiritual Fantasies," *Rolling Stone,* May 4, 2025, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/ai-spiritual-delusions-destroying-human-relationships-1235330175/.
[43] Linn F. Freedman, "Lawyers Sanctioned for Citing AI Generated Fake Cases," *The National Law Review,* February 27, 2025, https://natlawreview.com/article/lawyers-sanctioned-citing-ai-generated-fake-cases.

pathos of WALL-E or Baymax.[44] This is certainly the case when it comes to popular Western conceptions of robots, at least; as discussed in the previous chapter, Japan's are more heavily influenced by images of sympathetic robots like Astro Boy or Doraemon. Even then, negative portrayals are certainly not rare; Ichikawa, for example, makes an almost offhand reference to "the chaos of mechanophobia" in her description of the apocalyptic circumstances that led to the destruction of both Earth and humanity.[45] Violence, in some form or another, and only sometimes stemming from *mechanophobia,* is rarely absent from robot fictions, and it is precisely that ubiquitousness that I am interested in examining in this chapter.

It is perhaps unfair to position violence as a standard of the genre, although it is certainly tempting to do so. Robotic bodies are subject to damage or destruction in many of the works that feature them, even occasionally in ways that are far more gratuitous than similar violence against humans in those same works. Asimov's *Robot-as-Menace* categorization certainly lends itself to violence, and the previously mentioned Terminators are a familiar and easy example, as is HAL 9000 or the machines from *The Matrix.* There are, of course, practical reasons for this trend, particularly in visual media which may be subject to censorship out of consideration for the age of the audience. Children's media that features robots is often far more likely to show violence done to robots where it would not show something similar being done to a human character, so long as the violence depicted is absent any of its usual signs (blood, pain). Take, for example, the titular giant from *The Iron Giant* (1999)*,* who is shown multiple times torn to bloodless pieces. In the film's climax, the violence done to the Giant's body is illustrative of the violence from which he saves Hogarth and the population of the town; the Giant can neither feel pain, and nor is he permanently destroyed, as is suggested by the end of the film, and so the violence enacted on

[44] Jennifer Robertson, as mentioned in the previous chapter, ties this to the wide-reaching influence of *R.U.R.*
[45] Ichikawa Haruko, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol 12, (Kodansha 2024): 9.

him becomes largely symbolic. Many action series for children likewise default to robots as enemies to bypass censorship of violence; the animated series *Samurai Jack* (2001) and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1986) both evaded censorship in this way.[46]

Additionally, it is not uncommon for violence to be shown in a comedic light when its target is an artificial human. The *Star Wars* films are an excellent example of this, with C-3PO being a regular target. In *The Empire Strikes Back,* for example, he spends a significant portion of the film in literal pieces, mostly strapped to Chewbacca's back via netting. His complaints about the situation, mostly about his own dismemberment, are continually positioned as light-hearted comedic relief, largely used to distract from Han Solo's torture and then pseudo-death when he is frozen in carbonite. The contrast between Han's human pain and C-3PO's apparent lack is stark; several scenes even feature him holding his own leg, completely unbothered aside from the inconvenience. Although it should be noted that he does react in pain when Chewbacca accidentally knocks him against the entrance to the Millennium Falcon, which is likewise part of the joke, despite the way it confuses whether or not C-3PO can feel, real or simulated, pain. The contrast between C-3PO's functional immortality (he "dies" when he is shot to pieces, but he "revives" after some repairs) when presented next to Han's mortality is just as severe, but it also primes the audience for a similar revival from Han in *Return of the Jedi* (1983).

The common portrayal in robot fiction of violence divorced from pain—when enacted on robot bodies—is often positioned as allowed, or *sanctioned,* precisely due to that lack of pain (or sometimes a broader lack of "feeling"). This is certainly the case with comedic violence, but that sense of allowance can also be found in scenes of sacrifice (almost always for a human), as when Schwarzenegger's reformed Terminator gives that final thumbs up as he sinks down into molten

[46] Jacob Hall, "The Secret Origin of the 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' Animated Series," *ScreenCrush,* August 6, 2014, https://screencrush.com/teenage-mutant-ninja-turtles-animated-series/.

steel at the end of *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), or when IG-11 walks through a river of lava and self-detonates in *The Mandalorian* (2019). C-3PO illustrates a transference of *weight*: as an android, his death is temporary, and his pain, if he feels it, is questionable, so in presenting the violence enacted on his body as comedic, as a joke, he in turn lessens the tension surrounding Han's human pain and pseudo-death.

There is, however, an even greater sense of violence that is sanctioned in robot fictions that feature violence done to robotic bodies by humans. This positioning is especially crucial in observing the gap created by the lack of pain/feeling alongside the visible damage caused by often egregious or horrific violence. Regardless of the *type* of violence, be it almost orgiastic, as in *The Second Renaissance,* or comedic, as in the case of C-3PO, there remains embedded a dehumanization (objectification): this violence is *sanctioned;* it is positioned either via the audience (through censorship or the reprieve of comedic relief) or the worldbuilding (lack of pain, feeling, empathy), as *permitted.* There are, in many ways, similarities to Scarry's description of the regime in this positioning, but ultimately it is this sense of sanctioned violence which begins the process of transference by rendering the robotic subject as a site at which rewriting can occur.

Cage Match/Batting Cage: Dehumanization and Capitalistic Violence

As might be expected, a necessary side effect of *sanctioned* violence is dehumanization. Even with children's cartoons that stick to robots as antagonist characters to avoid both censorship as well as a way to sidestep any moral problems with having characters presented as heroes killing or maiming humans, the very *allowance* of this kind of violence is predicated on the fact that its subjects *are not human.* The same can be said of comedic violence: its subject is

denied the weight and consideration of what is being done to it. C-3PO's dismemberment is not a dismemberment because C-3PO is not human. Jack hacks robots to pieces and is splattered in oil that only reads as blood; this is violence that is *allowed* to be aired because it is positioned as *not real violence,* despite how clear it may be that the oil is merely a stand-in. Even beyond this, dehumanization is easily embedded into violence, as is clearly seen through the practice of torture. As Scarry points out, dehumanization is very often *the point,* as it is through the infliction of horrific violence which turns both the prisoner's body as well as the concept of civilization itself (through both the use of language, as in the intentional repurposing of concepts like the 'tiger's cage' or 'telephone' to describe acts of torture, or the actual use of objects or processes representative of civilization such as: the room, the chair, the dinner banquet, etc.) into part of an arsenal of weaponry which is used to objectify and transform the prisoner's pain and suffering:

> This denial…occurs in the translation of all the objectified elements of pain into the insignia of power, the conversion of the enlarged map of human suffering into an emblem of the regime's strength. This translation is made possible by, and occurs across, the phenomenon common to both power and pain: agency. The electric generator, the whips and canes, the torturer's fists, the walls, the doors, the prisoner's sexuality, the torturer's questions, the institution of medicine, the prisoner's screams, his wife and children, the telephone, the chair, a trial, a submarine, the prisoner's ear drums—all these and many more, everything human and inhuman that is either physically or verbally, actually or allusively present, has become part of the glutted realm of weaponry, weaponry that can refer equally to pain or power. What by the one is experienced as a continual

> contraction is for the other a continual expansion, for the torturer's growing sense of self is carried outward on the prisoner's swelling pain. As an actual physical fact, a weapon is an object that goes into the body and produces pain. As a perceptual fact, it lifts the pain out of the body and makes it visible or, more precisely, it acts as a bridge or mechanism across which some of pain's attributes—its incontestable reality, its totality, its ability to eclipse all else, its power of dramatic alteration and world dissolution—can be lifted away from their source, can be separated from the sufferer and referred to power, broken off from the body and attached instead to the regime. Now…it is not the pain but the regime that is incontestably real, not the pain but the regime that is total, not the pain but the regime that is able to eclipse all else, not the pain but the regime that is able to dissolve the world.[47]

The "legitimization" of the regime, of its reality and power, Scarry argues, is hinged upon this transfer that is based in human pain so extreme that the individual is blotted out first by the "world-destroying" pain and then again in the regime's objectification of that pain. "The self disintegrates," Scarry writes; the regime overwrites the victim's identity. It deconstructs the victim of torture in such a way that what is human is occluded, replaced by the weapon, by pain, and transformed into power.[48]

The regime carves out a place for itself (for its legitimacy and reality) in the bodies of its victims. This is not unlike the transformative nature of capitalistic violence, which Scarry likewise tracks in her analysis of Marx, noting "the disturbingly graphic concept of the severing of the worker from his own extended body" ("the separation of the worker from the means of

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[47] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 56.
[48] Ibid., 35.

production")[49] and illustrating her own framework of sentience and reciprocity within a hypothetical that positions capitalist and workers on opposite ends of embodiedness, where *commodity* and *capital* transform both worker and capitalist: the former grows, becoming more and more embodied (literally becoming larger in size, exaggerated and weighty, existing as nothing *beyond* a body) while the latter gradually disappears (becomes disembodied). Scarry compares this to Judeo-Christian narratives of man and God (one has a body and the other does not), noting in particular the resemblance to the "scenes of wounding," a violence that Scarry positions as integral to perpetuating the existence of the Artifact (God):

> As in the early narrative scenes of hurt where human makers, rather than being disembodied by their Artifact [God], are now required to undergo more severe bodily distress in order to substantiate and sustain the original Artifact, so now in the later story men and women stand in the presence of the economic system collectively made to relieve of them of the problems of sentience [pain] and must instead undergo increasingly severe bodily alterations to sustain and perpetuate its existence…In both stories, the large Artifact (God in one, the collective economic system in the other) continues to be a projection of human capacities but has ceased to perform the counterpart of projection, reciprocation…The work of creation, which always has at its center the work of rescue, has broken down.[50]

The violence present in the earlier image of the worker severing himself from his "own extended body" is seen here too in the interrupted reciprocity: where too much embodiedness and sentience are equivalent to pain, the process of creation, through which the worker would typically be expected to acquire relief from that embodiedness/sentience has instead "broken

[49] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 250.
[50] Ibid., 276. Brackets my own.

down," and, in Scarry's hypothetical, it has done so in such a way that the worker is (violently) transformed into a grotesquerie of pain/sentience. As in the example of the torturer and his victim, or between "embodied humanity and their artifact," the relationship between worker and artifact (commodity) is split between "Body and Voice," wherein the translation of pain into power/reality is instead the "intensified bodily reality" of the worker transforming into "value," such that the workers, rather than identifying themselves as the creators of the artifact, perceive themselves as its "offspring": "the worker experiences himself or herself as a 'commodity' produced by the capitalist system."[51]

Scarry's framework is at all times centered in the "scenes of wounding," or in other words, in tracking the use of violence done to the human body in the pursuit/legitimization of power and in, conversely, framing the system of reciprocity that works to create (assuage hurt/pain) rather than unmake through violence. The hurt/wounding that is enacted by the economic system of capitalism is no different, in terms of Scarry's framework, to every other instance of hurt/wounding (including torture, war, religious sacrifice) that she examines. The extreme dehumanization in the objectification of the torture victim's pain is likewise present in the objectification of the worker as commodity. The "intensified bodily reality" represented by the grotesquely enlarged body of the worker in Scarry's hypothetical can also be seen in the repeated images of the workers in relation to the Moloch machine in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). The huge underground generator is alternately shown as either consuming the human workers that keep it running or as incorporating them as part of its own body. In the first instance, following a meltdown which leaves the workers injured (or possibly even dead), the protagonist Freder sees the machine transform into a nightmare vision of a false icon, its maw

[51] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 273.

gaping, its gears and pistons gnashing teeth, into which, following a procession of human sacrifices, the workers march in steady, even lines, seemingly willing—or at least unresisting—sacrifices to Moloch themselves. The unconcerned procession, almost mechanical in its military precision, contrasts with the previous sacrifices which had to be dragged up the daunting staircase and shoved into Moloch's mouth; the workers in Freder's vision are little more than cogs, their humanity stripped from them in their subjugation to the machine.

This image is of course heightened by the bracketing of two groups of workers shown at work at the machine before and after the meltdown. There is visually no distinction between the two, as they are changed out as seamlessly as you would replace a malfunctioning or damaged mechanism: even before the bodies from the first group have been completely cleared, the second are already in place, as if there was never a pause in production. Both groups of workers also move *with* the machine, the lurching of their bodies just as robotic, as mechanical, as the movements of the pistons. This is an image repeated later, when Freder stands in for an exhausted worker at a device that resembles an oversized gauge or dial, which, through Freder's own subsequent exhaustion, transforms into a clockface, the needles becoming the second, minute, and hour hands that Freder struggles to stop. Unfortunately, he is, much as the man he replaced, leashed to the machine through the threat of meltdown: his body ceases to be his own, but is instead absorbed into the machine itself, his arms stretch out the length of the needles of the oversized gauge; the darkness of his uniform matches the darkness of the needles, stark against the blank face of the gauge/clock.[52] Freder, like the other workers, experiences the "intensified bodily reality" of the workers in Scarry's hypothetical. He constantly wipes sweat

[52] The German for these terms does not work out the same, so it is only barely worth mentioning, but nonetheless: the terms for the parts of the human body (face, hand) being used here to instead describe the parts of a machine are only incidental, yet it is hard to ignore the way they echo the argument.

from his brow, he appears, in the way that he struggles to remain upright, to struggle against the weight of his own body which has now grown monumental, impossible, in his fatigue. *Metropolis* is far from subtle in its imagery of this dehumanization, and although the portrayal of the workers in the film is limited in sympathy, the image of the workers as sacrifices marching into the machine persists.

Park Min-gyu's "Roadkill" (2011) is far more consistent in its critique of capitalistic violence and is likewise more explicit in illustrating the process of dehumanization through that violence. Additionally, "Roadkill" is notable in that it portrays several types of violence, all of which are a result of the same capitalist system that has supplanted nations with corporations and has made of humans "some kind of proletariat that's been abandoned by God."[53] The short story is split between first and second person point of view: the first person sections are told from the point of view of the robot Maksi while the second person sections largely follow the human Li, though there tends to be much more shifting/blending of perspectives, with these sections at times dipping into the memory of the ex-Section Chief Saito or ex-humanitarian Baek, creating a surreal, almost dreamy effect that echoes Li's inebriated state and emphasizes the images of the working class as a swelling mass of humanity, not dissimilar to the remains (roadkill) that the robots Maksi and Mao clear off the road, which are first "blown apart into pieces" by the sheer speed of the passing vehicles and then "fused back together into a half-melted mass" that is naturally completely unrecognizable.[54] Due to the development of robots, the working class has been rendered obsolete and exiled to a "migration area" called Yangnan that is effectively an open air prison. Traditional family relationships have broken down, leaving small groupings

[53] Park Min-gyu, "Roadkill," in *Readymade Bodhisattva,* ed. Sunyoung Park and Sang Joon Park (Kaya Press, 2019), 322.
[54] Ibid., 302.

decided by necessity and convenience, and even those on humanitarian aid missions sent to help the inhabitants have been left stranded and absorbed by Yangnan. The only apparent entertainment presented in the short story for the denizens of Yangnan are the "elections": a kind of cage match Russian roulette set up as a spectator sport, with powerful individuals betting on the outcome of each match.

This violence-as-entertainment works to dehumanize not just the participants, but the audience as well: Li refers to them alternately as a "rabble" and as "trash," and they exist little beyond their loud chanting and angry rattling of the chain fence that surrounds the participants; there are no individuals, merely a "half-melted mass," humanity blurred to nothing beyond weight and presence. Conversely, Li and Saito, as they face each other, remain distinct, at least until Saito's death approaches and his memory begins to blend with Li's thoughts, the second person shifting briefly to third before shifting back, Saito's memory of waves layering over Li's memory of the same until "[i]n the eyes of the bitterly smiling old man [he] glimpse[s] the ripples of the ocean [he] saw when [he] was young."[55] The audience too becomes a "sea of deafening screams," crashing against the wire fence like the twin memories of waves. The image of the ocean is repeated again later in the almost impossible wideness of the road that Li and his family must cross, the very road that keeps them trapped within Yangnan, an intentional security system put in place by the megacorporation "Asia," at least according to Baek, his logic echoed by Li's own assessment of Asia's motivation for imprisoning them in Yangnan, for "after all, the only point of collecting trash is to dispose of it."

The violence of the state—or, rather, of the corporation as stand-in for the state—is enacted upon the bodies of those who merely try to rejoin it; Li and his family attempt to cross

[55] Park, "Roadkill," 311.

out of Yangnan and are immediately struck down. Although "struck down" is entirely too clean a way of explaining what happens to them: they are obliterated. They are made into chunks of meat; they become the "half-melted mass" of roadkill that Maksi and Mao are charged with disposing. The robots themselves do not (and cannot) recognize what they are cleaning off the road as being once human. This is quite literally because there is nothing *left* that is recognizably human, but, in addition, Maksi's and Mao's programming actively prevents them from any understanding, as their primary objective is to "protect the dignity of human beings." The extent to which this programming affects them is clear to see in Maksi's ultimate self-destruction in the wake of discovering the baby that Li attempted to throw out of the way of danger. The conflicting orders given by the human Josah to dispose of the baby, Mao's resistance to those orders, and Josah's violence in the wake of that resistance all lead to Maksi's disobedience, although he himself cites the hierarchy of his programming:

> In the silent darkness, I mutter. […] Like a human being, I mutter…and I think. And I judge.
>
> I start to walk, carrying the corpse of the young human. Warning signals regarding my violation of 957 regulation clauses flash through my entire circuit-array. On the E-level, there are 602 clauses that can be left open to interpretation, depending on reasonability…on levels D, C, and B are clauses that are contingent on agreement and codes of conduct…and finally, there are the seven major laws on the A-level which, when broken, can lead to the enforcement of those laws by direct circuit blockage. Alarm signals fill the display feed in Lens 1… Green text appears, judgements being rendered…the white and blue lights from the flickering signals make me feel as if I'm walking across the Milky Way in the

> night sky above. The warning lights flicker out, little by little, at every step. One step after another… The signals burn out like that, turning off all the lights, because there's just one prime regulation: under all circumstances, I have a fundamental duty to protect the dignity of human beings. That is the highest rule, outranking all the others.[56]

As will be further discussed in the following chapter, it is not solely due to this "highest rule" that Maksi makes the judgement that he does; it is clear from his reaction to the violence done to Mao, which is echoed in his "human-like" muttering, that he becomes severely compromised. Although there is no explicit description of what Josah does to Mao, as Maksi is only privy to it via an audio link shared between the two robots, Maksi's confidence in guessing what happens is indicative of the fact that this violence is reoccurring: "The hitting sound continues. Judging by the rate of repetition, it must be Josah's baseball bat. Josah likes baseball, and he's frequently violent."[57] The sounds of violence are interspersed with Josah's voice, furious, and his speech is somewhat disordered due to his drunkenness, but the sentiment is clear enough when he demands, "You…think you know humans?" or "The world like this…Do you know whose fault this is?" Josah's meaning is clear, and also familiar, as it is a sentiment that is not only often repeated in robot fictions, but resonates with many who have lost their jobs, or whose careers are threatened, by "AI" (LLMs).[58]

The idea of workers being replaced with machines is not a new one, but the future portrayed in "Roadkill" is much more bleak: it is not merely an issue of jobs lost, but rather the entirety of the working class which has been summarily cast out of society, so completely

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[56] Park, "Roadkill," 317.
[57] Ibid., 315.
[58] Charis McGowan, "'One day I overheard my boss saying: just put it in ChatGPT': the workers who lost their jobs to AI," *The Guardian,* May 31, 2025.

excised that they have been left to die, with any attempt to rejoin society met with swift, yet brutal, execution. Maksi, believing the remains he is vacuuming up off the road to belong to an animal, describes what is left of Li and his family:

> How could the intestines have been left so intact? Considering the shuttle's speed and the heat generated by friction alone, it should've been almost impossible. No matter how fast an animal runs, it can't dodge a shuttle. The moment it hears the sound of the shuttle, the collision has already happened, and after being blown apart into pieces, its carcass is then fused back together into a half-melted mass. For the unfortunate animal, there's no demise so quick and complete.[59]

Like Maksi, at this point the reader must also assume that the remains belong to an animal; the dehumanization of Li and his family begins even before they have been introduced. Baek compares crossing the road to Russian roulette, which might also be described as a "demise so quick and complete," and, indeed, Li's actual experience of the event reminds him of his match with Saito:

> You're sprinting, full tilt…and then, all of a sudden, you freeze, halted by some unknown terror. It's not as if you sense anything approaching, but you hear Maru crying out. Unconsciously, you turn to Ran. It's such a brief instant, but you feel like time has stopped. You're facing Ran's trembling eyes. Then you recall even briefer instants—shorter than the frequency of a vibration: the space of time between Saito's face with his bitter smile and the blast of the gunshot yet to reach the ears…and once again you feel as though you're standing in a gap in time.[60]

[59] Park, "Roadkill," 302.
[60] Ibid., 322-323.

Saito's death and Li's are both marked by the delay in sound, by a strange, seeming dilation of time. Li's instincts serve him just as well here as they did back in Yangnan, and although Maksi is certain that nothing could survive a shuttle intact, that nothing could react quickly enough, Li, again on instinct, throws Ran's (and possibly his own) baby out of the way of danger. Or, at least, attempts to; the child survives the shuttle but not the fall. Maksi's dedication to the protection of human dignity is ironic in the face of a humanity that has been so thoroughly stripped of dignity; they are "liquidated," in Li's terms, a too-appropriate description for an execution via a corporation.[61]

The portrayal of robots in "Roadkill" is entirely sympathetic, and the systemic, structural violence enacted by the economic system that has led to corporations supplanting countries and continents affects both robots and humans. The effects on Li and his family are clear, but even Josah has been transformed by this violence; his misdirected anger produces a violence that is merely a mirror of the violence enacted systemically, with Mao as a convenient, and unfortunate, target. In a very literal way, as shall be discussed at length later, Mao's identity is rewritten by this violence (he will be rebooted into the Factory Default), and it is the dawning horror of that fact combined with the horror of the ignoble treatment of the human baby which pushes Maksi to disobey. The violence he incidentally does to himself by disobeying will in turn create a site for identity formation, which, again, as self-directed as this violence is, it is likewise merely a consequence of the violence of the economic system as represented by the megacorporations. This violence is expected; it is a given. Neither Li nor Maksi is surprised by the forms it takes. After all, Maksi tells himself, "Mao isn't really damaged."[62] As a robot, he can be rebooted, and although the Mao that Maksi knew, with all of his individual peculiarities, will be permanently

[61] Park, "Roadkill," 309.
[62] Ibid., 315.

gone, he cannot "die," or even feel pain in the same way as a human. Maksi, repeatedly, notes his distress at this thought, but his initial reaction is evidence of the concept of *sanctioned violence* as I describe it: Josah takes his anger out on Mao for the same reason that Maksi initially downplays the violence, namely, that the violence done to Mao is not "real" violence. Andrew's dilemma from "Bicentennial Man" is repeated in countless other robot fictions: machine immortality—a perpetual, renewable existence—precludes the notion of *being alive.* In "Roadkill," the corporation-turned-state sanctions the violence done to the workers--the residents of Yangnan but also to those like Josah who are permitted only at the very edge of society—and in turn the violence done to Mao is permitted as the corporation-state remains out of reach.

Press X to Emancipate

Robots, androids, and other artificial humans are often used in science fiction as allegory or analog for marginalized groups, to varying degrees of success and, additionally, with varying degrees of sensitivity. It is, at the very least, a comparison that is easy to make, considering the often marginalized status of these types of characters within their narratives. The very word *robot,* as discussed in the previous chapter, contains connotations of forced/enforced labor, and the generic tendency towards the themes of freedom/free will and humanity (to which empathy is often closely tied) lend themselves easily to narratives of an oppressed class (robots) in conflict with their oppressors (humans). Mentions of slavery are common,[63] as robots are regularly positioned as free (i.e.: slave) labor within these narratives. Despina Kakoudaki examines this trend at length, particularly in relation to this generic tendency that she terms *metalface*:

[63] Phillip K. Dick, in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* draws this connection bluntly: *"The TV set shouted, '—duplicates the halcyon days of the pre-Civil War Southern States! Either as body servants or tireless field hands, the custom tailored humanoid robot—designed specifically for YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS, FOR YOU AND YOU ALONE—given to you on your arrival absolutely free […]—" It continued on and on."* (17)

> Robots embody ethnic and racial otherness despite their nonhumanity, an effect that I am describing here as metalface: the metal exterior of the robot functions as a site for projecting numerous kinds of difference, and in this fundamentally ambiguous space metalness can stand in for a type of blackness or, indeed, for other states of abjection that the position of the African slave embodies in Western modernity. The robot's potential for racial or ethnic representation comes from its objecthood: the robot is a priori designed as a being whose ontological state maps perfectly with a political state. Robots are designed to be servants, workers, or slaves. They occupy that social and political position by default and carry its requirements and limits on their very bodies. The more self- evident this is, as in the case of metal-looking robots who would never be mistaken for human, the more obvious the alignment of the discourse with racist epistemologies, in which again one may be able to tell where a person fits in a social hierarchy just by looking at them.[64]

Violence then, in robot stories that use metalface, is inherently positioned as racist. The dehumanizing aspects of violence become all the more apparent, especially as *violence* is no longer just the physical harm done to a body, but the systemic violence enacted in legalistic battles over personhood. Kakoudaki's analysis of "The Bicentennial Man" notes the evocation of Dred Scott in the drawn out legal battles that Andrew faces in order to assert his identity as an individual.[65]

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[64] Despina Kakoudaki, *Anatomy of a Robot: Literature, Cinema, and the Cultural Work of Artificial People*, (Rutgers University Press, 2014), 117.
[65] Ibid., 155.

For reasons similar to the tendency to utilize "metalface" in robot fictions, robot revolutions are equally common, with *R.U.R.* setting the genre standard, its influence both far-reaching and enduring. As Victoria Nelson points out, similar themes can be traced earlier, as with the "revolt of the marionettes," which "dates at least as far back as the seventeenth century Italian *commedia dell'arte,*" but that it is "a fitting mirror of the great social upheavals of the twentieth century that its imaginary simulacra typically rebelled against their masters and emerged dominant."[66] Capek is responding directly to twentieth century industrialization, militarization, capitalization, etc., all within *R.U.R.,* his robot revolution situated within the recent history of the Russian Revolution. The generic tendency of robot revolution and the linking of robots to the proletariat, as seen with "Roadkill," likewise lends itself well to descriptions of robot revolution within the context of robot-as-analog for marginalization, as will be discussed below. Robot revolution is also, however, a site of extreme violence (as is certainly the case with *R.U.R.*), but it is, once again, the violence directed at robot bodies that exhibits the tendency for transference.

The two robot stories that are the focus of this section, *The Second Renaissance* (dir. Maeda Mahiro, 2003) and *Detroit: Become Human* (dev. Quantic Dream, 2018), would both fall under Kakoudaki's categorization of *metalface,* and both also feature direct references to the Civil Rights Movement. Their deployment of both these references, as well as the successfulness of their attempts at criticizing systemic racism, fork somewhat dramatically, however their depictions of racist violence through the allegory of robots/androids both evince similar patterns and, ultimately, result in the same process of violence/unmaking → transference of human trauma → identity creation that are present in the other works discussed in this chapter. The overt

[66] Nelson, *Secret Life of Puppets,* 260.

allegories of racism naturally problematize this structure, in ways which will be examined, mostly in the following chapter, but the violence itself remains the trigger for this process.

The Second Renaissance is a two-part short film that is part of the *Animatrix,* a collection of animated short films which all take place within the universe of *The Matrix. The Second Renaissance* is a prequel and follows the events which lead to the rise of the machines, beginning with a legal case that directly references Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and particularly the character Bigger Thomas: the robot B1-66ER kills his owner after overhearing that he is going to be scrapped (destroyed) but is ultimately found guilty. B1-66ER's destruction (execution) leads to both humans and robots protesting the court's decision, with those protests in turn being quashed by the state, which reacts with violence and sets off a series of riots. The violence is almost orgiastic, with one scene layered over another, from a robot being slowly crushed under a tank to human men surrounding what appears to be a human woman, ripping off first her clothing in a simulated rape, and then tearing the skin from her face, revealing (unmasking) the inhuman frame beneath.

The Second Renaissance portrays the robots as entirely sympathetic—indeed, the clear visual and contextual linking to racist violence and a resistance of that violence *demands* it—but the analogy breaks down when it hits up against the rest of the Matrix filmic universe which subsequently places the oppressed into the position of oppressor, emphasizing a suddenly widened gap in strength. This is not unique to robot fiction and "metalface," but is a consistent problem in media which attempt to provide an allegory for marginalized groups within an entirely different context. Marvel's *X-Men* is perhaps the most well known example of this, wherein the marginalized group is immediately placed as dangerous due to superhuman abilities, but the *Dragon Age* series likewise fails in its examination of oppression through allegory in

exactly the same way. Nonetheless, in *The Second Renaissance*, like in "Roadkill," the sanctioned violence presented is largely the violence of the state which has been configured, through the overt reference to both literary and historical events combined, as racist. Unlike "The Bicentennial Man," which features an optimistic legislative/legal outcome, *The Second Renaissance* is more cynical. It will also prove useful in comparison to *Detroit: Become Human.*

Detroit: Become Human (hereafter '*DBH*') is a narrative, choice-based video game developed by Quantic Dream and directed/written by David Cage (the pseudonym of French developer David De Gruttola) which is set, unsurprisingly, in Detroit in 2038, wherein the manufacture and use of androids has become so widespread that 30-40% of the population is left unemployed. The rising tensions between out-of-work humans and androids escalate steadily throughout the game, which the player navigates as one of three main characters, all of which are androids: Kara, Markus, and Connor. Depending on player choice (how to respond to a question, what items—or weapons—to pick up, how accurately and quickly buttons are pressed, etc.) the game splits into branching narrative paths reminiscent of choose-your-own-adventure books. Cage has repeatedly emphasized the importance, not just of player choice and the player's role as storyteller, but his desire to center just how much one player's story can differ from another.[67] He does this through the use of flowcharts that automatically display at the completion of each chapter and which can also be accessed through the menu screen. These flowcharts explicitly show every option and the resulting paths available in each chapter of the game, additionally listing percentage breakdowns of how often players worldwide selected each option/path. Gameplay consists largely of minimal world exploration and quick time events, or QTEs, that typically involve a series of prompts displayed on screen that the player must then match on their

[67] "Detroit: Become Human: David Cage on the Game's Influences," Collider, published April 24, 2018, https://collider.com/detroit-become-human-david-cage-interview/.

controller (press □ to dodge a punch, then press L1 trigger to reach for gun, etc.). Failing to complete these QTEs can often lead to dramatic results, from characters being placed in harm or even killed. As Cage does not believe in Game Overs,[68] however, the narrative will always continue on beyond the character's death, even if it is a main character who dies.

Despite Cage's emphasis on storytelling, *DBH*'s story has been widely panned by critics who note the failed racism allegory,[69] the questionable use of motion controls during sensitive scenes (such as depictions of domestic violence and child abuse),[70] and the "distractingly" on-the-nose historical references.[71] Interestingly enough, Cage has at multiple times denied having made any such references, continually claiming that *DBH* is merely a game about "androids who want to be free."[72] Despite this, these references are indeed painfully impossible to ignore. One of the opening scenes of the game features Markus, a dark-skinned male android, first being harassed by humans as he attempts to purchase paint for his owner and then hopping onto a bus only to be shown riding at the very back in the "Android Compartment." From this description alone, it is perhaps clear why critics have taken issue both with the depiction of historical events and with Cage's ham-fisted allegory. My intention in discussing *DBH* at all lies in its position as a sort of repository of generic (science fictional) tropes surrounding artificial humans (androids). The additional aspect of "player choice" within *DBH*'s gameplay also brings up interesting

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[68] Mike Rose, "In story-driven games, 'Game overs' are a failure of game design, says David Cage," Game Developer, August 22, 2013, https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/in-story-driven-games-game-overs-are-a-failure-of-game-design-says-david-cage.

[69] Ruben Ferdinand, "A critical look at David Cage's writing and why it is intensely awful," Medium, June 8, 2018, https://urbanfriendden.medium.com/a-critical-look-at-david-cages-writing-and-why-it-is-intensely-awful-cf8ad51858cd.

[70] Kimberley Wallace, "Detroit: Become Human Review," Game Informer, May 24, 2018, https://www.gameinformer.com/games/detroit_become_human/b/playstation4/archive/2018/05/24/detroit-become-human-review-game-informer.aspx.

[71] Peter Brown, "Detroit: Become Human Review – To Err is Human," GameSpot, May 25, 2018, https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/detroit-become-human-review-to-err-is-human/1900-6416915/.

[72] Nathan Grayson, "Despite Political Overtones, David Cage Says *Detroit* Is Mostly About Androids," Kotaku, June 15, 2017, https://kotaku.com/despite-political-overtones-david-cage-says-detroit-is-1795939952.

questions regarding empathy (human directed towards the non-human) that will also be explored in the following chapter. Cage's influences are blatantly reflected in his work, and though the game is incredibly derivative of the genre--when it is not somehow circling back around to outright racism—it remains useful as a site of common tropes and themes, and likewise, is subject to the same process of unmaking/making identity, mostly due to its uncritical aping of said common tropes/themes.

Ultimately, *DBH*'s story is one of revolution: each of the three main protagonists must face the prison of their programming and fight to break free—something which Cage renders literally, using the visual of each character breaking through the orange text that represents the set of rules they are tied to. Each of these moments is marked by violence, and once each of the characters "frees" themselves, they become "deviants," androids that have gone rogue. This status is marked visibly on the android's body: an LED at their right temple flashes red once they have gone "deviant." Markus and Kara become deviants right at the start of each of their routes,[73] whereas Connor—who, it should be noted, is both a prototype and has been assigned to work as a detective with the Detroit Police Department—does not get the option until very late in the game, and he can likewise make it through the end of the game without going deviant. Markus, after becoming deviant, ends up leading the android revolution, and depending on player actions, can either succeed in achieving equal rights for androids, or get gunned down in the street by riot police. Kara, meanwhile, spends most of the game trying to keep Alice safe and eventually ends up essentially traveling the android equivalent of the Underground Railroad, escaping to Canada, provided that the player does not get her or Alice killed in any number of

[73] It is also worth noting that the player has no choice in whether or not Markus becomes deviant. The player can, however, choose to refuse to let Kara become deviant, which results in Todd (Kara's owner) killing Alice (Todd's daughter) and ends Kara's route early.

ways. As for Connor, his route follows his detective work with Hank Anderson, an older, washed-up police lieutenant suffering from depression due to the loss of his son. Connor, unlike the other characters, can die multiple times throughout the game and each time is brought back[74] by CyberLife, the only corporation which manufactures and distributes androids. It is eventually revealed that Amanda, Connor's handler with CyberLife, is an AI program that has been manipulating Connor in an attempt to stop the android resistance led by Markus. If Markus is killed (even if Connor kills Markus) Connor is able to break from his programming, go deviant, and take Markus' place at the head of the resistance. The player can alternately choose to complete Connor's mission for Amanda and stop the revolution.

The revolution itself is measured by the game as more or less successful by its "Public Opinion" score, which is the only stat that is shared by all three main characters, regardless of route. It is affected by one of two things: how violent each of the main characters are towards humans, and, conversely, how much violence they allow humans to do to them. Choosing to let Kara kill her owner while protecting his daughter from him will lead to a drop in Public Opinion, for example, but allowing Markus to sacrifice himself via riot police nets a large increase. Violence to androids in *DBH* is very much sanctioned by both the in-game world (the state, as in *The Second Renaissance,* reacts quickly and lethally to quash rebellion) and the game itself, as the player is literally rewarded for allowing each of the characters to be harmed at different points. The only notable exception is Connor: repeatedly letting Connor die has no effect on Public Opinion, but it will potentially lead to Hank committing suicide, which is one of the most

[74] His memory is uploaded into an identical model, so that Connor retains all of his previous memories with none of the damage done to his previous body. Players can track this change in the serial number on his uniform, as it will increase by one after each death.

negative outcomes in the game. Each time Connor dies, Hank is in turn reminded of the death of his son, specifically, that his son, unlike Connor, was human:

> CONNOR: Nothing can change the past, but you can learn to live again. For yourself, and for Cole.
>
> HANK: Y'know, every time you died and came back… It made me think of Cole. I'd give anything to hold him again…But humans don't come back.[75]

Connor's android immortality—something unique to him in this instance, as a prototype—nonetheless marks him as inhuman, as "less real" in Hank's eyes.

Overall, however, the sanctioned state violence is positioned as inherently racist due to both the android's role as analog and the repeated historical references, no matter how shallowly they are treated. In addition, the many instances of gendered violence are likewise sanctioned, though depressingly only because the game has already recognized violence against androids as racially coded, and not due to any critical engagement with patriarchal oppression or misogyny. The gameplay itself trivializes the initial scenes of domestic violence and child abuse in Kara's route through the aggressive use of QTEs, which rather than increase immersion, as is their stated point, instead distance the player from the violent acts by means of making them a mini-game. In comparison, Odd-Meter's 2024 video game *INDIKA* manages a much more well-balanced treatment of sensitive topics, including gendered violence, and all without sacrificing any of the gameplay or immersion (beyond a few intentional fourth wall breaking moments). In *INDIKA,* players play as a young nun who finds herself ousted from her convent due to eccentric behavior caused by what she believes is possession by the devil. The game presents an incredibly bleak and cynical exploration of themes of religion and faith which the developers enhance with

[75] Quantic Dream, *Detroit: Become Human,* Sony, 2018.

skillful utilization of the same thing which in *DBH* comes off as ham-fisted or insulting at best and outright racist at worst. In order to fully explain how both developers manage this I also must unfortunately explain an internet meme.

"Press F to pay respects" is a meme that originates with the game *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* (2014). The phrase occurs during a cutscene of a military funeral, appearing onscreen above the coffin of the player character's friend. It is meant to be a solemn and emotional scene and yet is completely trivialized due to the absurdity of the command—"Press F to pay respects"—which trivializes precisely because it represents the gamification of the action of giving condolences. The phrase was so universally recognized as ridiculous that it has since become an internet meme, used largely during live streams by viewers in chat, typically when the streamer dies in game; typing the letter F in chat is equivalent to writing RIP. The disconnect here between the serious event and its gamification is what is being felt in scenes in *DBH* when the player must shake their controller to avoid domestic abuse, for example. In *INDIKA*, conversely, the two instances of gendered violence are presented in cut scenes in which the player cannot act, but can only watch, creating a helpless and incredibly tense atmosphere. *INDIKA* does, however, actively utilize gamification in order to further the ironic tone fostered in its portrayal of religion. In scenes where the titular character Indika is trying to shut out the voice of the Devil as he taunts her, occasionally the prompt "Press L2 to pray" will appear onscreen. The developers are undoubtedly aware of "Press F to pay respects" and are likely anticipating the effect a prompt like this will have on the player: the absurdity is entirely intentioned; it cheapens the action because that is exactly the point. As the Devil mocks Indika for her hypocrisy and insincerity in prayer, the player is repeatedly pressing L2 in order to "pray." During this time Indika will recite a prayer and the environment changes from the hellish landscape ruled by the

disembodied voice of the Devil back to normal. It is a truly clever and well-implemented section of gameplay that additionally reinforces the game's themes.

In comparison, one of the most infamous scenes in *DBH* follows after Markus and the android resistance have freed multiple androids that were being sold in stores and the player is given the choice to either smash the storefront windows or graffiti them. If you choose to graffiti them (which is the action that grants Public Approval) the player can then choose to graffiti a tag that is just the Black Power fist followed by the option to press △ for "We Have A Dream." It perhaps cannot be stressed enough how shallowly *DBH* examines any of the themes or actual historical events it is referencing. As with the trope of robot immortality, however, *DBH*'s use of android as analog for the racialized other is a recognition of the most common trends within the robot fiction subgenre, and as such, it is notable that the process of transference at the site of pain (lack)/violence is present here too. That *Blade Runner* is one of Cage's biggest influences should likewise be no surprise considering the emphasis on empathy, particularly on android empathy,[76] within the game. Cage also seems to have been influenced by *A.I.* (2001)*, Ex Machina* (2014)*,* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, leaving behind shadows of familiar themes, images, and characters.

One final thing to note about *DBH* and sanctioned violence is the medium. Cage's insistence on regularly displaying the flowchart of player choice suggests the dimension of player culpability in the violent acts done by or to the characters. In order to complete the game one hundred percent, the player must play through every possible choice leading to every possible outcome, meaning that, after the player has completed their first playthrough, possibly avoiding as much violence and harm being done to the characters as possible in an attempt at

[76] The first action the player can take in the game as Connor, is to choose whether or not to rescue a fish that has jumped out of its tank.

getting the "good" ending, they will then have to go through, again and again, until all options are exhausted, and sometimes they will be choosing violence. As with the Public Opinion meter, the very design of the game sanctions its violence.

Flesh Fairs and Moon Dust: the Deconstruction of the Body

In discussing violence and robot fiction it would be remiss to exclude the particular violence involved in concepts of body horror. Although more commonly encountered in the horror genre, body horror is not exactly alien to science fiction. Sometimes referred to as biological horror, body horror certainly lends itself to science fictional narratives that, like *Alien* (1979), feature interactions with alien species or planets. The series *Scavenger's Reign* (2023), for example, follows the crew of the cargo ship *Demeter 227* after they crash land on an alien planet, many of whom are acted upon and transformed by the planet. As with *Alien,* transformation or alteration is often central, as well as a sense of violation. Xavier Aldana Reyes notes that body horror concerns itself with themes like "physical difference as a source of abjection, anxieties about contagion and degeneration, and the loss of a stable sense of human identity," and through "the maiming, destruction, transformation or grotesque exaggeration of the human body," turns both body and mind into "concerted loci of fear."[77] Although popularized in the 1980s, body horror has recently seen an upsurge in the horror genre, with films like *The Substance* (2024) and *Annihilation* (2018) evincing a persistent fascination with the subgenre.

In turning to robots and other artificial humans, however, "body horror" gains a new dimension; the "horror" aspect weakens the less organic the body in question. Or, in other words,

[77] Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Contemporary Body Horror,* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 1.

the more closely the artificial human resembles a machine, the less "horrific" the transformation and destruction of its body. This should of course come as no surprise, considering the previously discussed use of robots as acceptable stand-ins for humans as targets of violence in children's programs, as well as the repeating trends with sanctioned violence: the less human a robot appears, the more violence against it is permitted. The "horror" of a robotic body transformed correlates to how closely said body can be viewed as human/organic. The video game *SOMA* (2015), for example, features a myriad of robots, A.I., and questionable cyborgs, many of which, due to the corruption of a biologically engineered computer system known as WAU, which infects many of these as if it were a disease, or a mold, leaving visible traces of its visually organic form behind. It infects both robots and humans, and the underwater base that once housed the last vestiges of humanity is now full of raggedly breathing husks, human near-corpses that are kept alive indefinitely, WAU fulfilling its directive to protect humanity too literally and surrounding the bodies with parts of itself, creating gruesome blends of flesh and organic machine. Some of these husks even patrol the empty halls, pursuing the player if they, in controlling the character Simon, make too much noise or get too close. These cyborgs are undoubtedly the most unnerving part of the game, and much of that is due to the forcibly transformed body, trapped in an unwanted and miserable immortality. Some of the husks speak as well, or, in the case of the character Amy, can be found in a mostly human-appearing state, with thick cables protruding from her body, which is held immobile by the WAU. After a brief conversation, the player can kill her by unplugging her, and in fact will be required to unplug at least one of the cables keeping her alive in order to progress the game, although at this point it is not clear what has happened to her, it is strongly implied that doing so will kill her; she moans a pained "*Nooo"* when you unplug her, and the scene itself is nauseating, both in the knowledge of

the act as well as in her horrific appearance, her body in the first stages of transformation by the WAU. Additionally, this scene perfectly mirrors one from earlier in the game which instead features a robot corrupted by the WAU which is held in place via cables in the same way as Amy. When the player unplugs the first cable the robot begs, in an eerily human voice, *"Don't,"* and once the player unplugs the second it continues, saying, *"I need it! Why? I was okay. I was happy,"* before the yellow light in its optic lens begins to fade and it shuts down, its head clanking against the floor. That these two scenes mirror each other is intentional: by the end of the game, the category of the human will become so permeable as to be useless. This early mirroring links the robotic with the human through the infestation of the WAU, ultimately aiding in the dissolution of any boundaries between the three.

The protagonist Simon, despite the first-person gameplay perspective[78] that somewhat limits the scope of the horror due to occluding the majority of Simon's body, perhaps exhibits one of the worst instances of body horror in the game, which is directly related to the fact that he is the most human. We are introduced to Simon first in 2015, eighty-nine years before the apocalyptic events that lead to the extinction of humanity, when he is clearly entirely human; this humanness is assumed throughout the game, at least until Simon learns that "he" is merely a virtual copy of himself that was uploaded into cybernetic upgrades in a human corpse. This leads to a type of unmasking when/if the player chooses to look into a mirror, revealing the mechanical

[78] Just as it sounds, first-person indicates the position of the camera such that the perspective is as if the player were in the "driver's seat," so to speak, of the character they are playing. They will see the character's hands and feet at most, and almost never see the character's face unless it is either 1) revealed in cinematic cutscenes that shift to the third-person, or 2) is revealed through the use of a mirror, video recording, photograph, etc. Third-person, conversely, positions the camera externally, typically over the character's shoulder, but usually following along behind them, showing the entirety of their body. First-person is typically utilized to enhance immersion, forcing the player to more easily embody themselves in the character they are playing.

red glow of Simon's eyes. Scans of the insides of Simon's suit can also be seen—a further unmasking—revealing the corpse that he is both trapped inside and trapping.[79]

Like Simon, whose digital copy was uploaded from a brain scan from 89 years ago into a new body, so too were many other "copies" uploaded into various robots. As a last-ditch effort to save some semblance of mankind, scientist Dr. Catherine Chun created digital copies of most of the surviving crew on the PATHOS-II, an underwater geothermal power center, intending to store these in a virtual world created and stored on the ARK, a digital black box, which was to be shot into space, thereby escaping the slow destruction of earth. Following the impact of a comet into earth, WAU uploaded the digital human copies into various robots. It is not initially clear what has transpired, and at first it appears to Simon (and by extension the player) that a malfunction has caused some of the robots to believe they are human. The player can encounter them in many states of deconstruction: physically damaged and trapped under fallen rubble, from which they repeatedly claim they have been injured and beg for help, or in multiple states of mental degeneration, muttering the same things to themselves obsessively. While outside PATHOS-II Simon can encounter Robin Bass, a technician from the Theta complex, whose consciousness has been uploaded by the WAU into a trapped and damaged robot. She believes that she has made it to the ARK, and though Simon starts to tell her what actually happened, he reconsiders, going along with the misunderstanding that they are on the ARK. Through continued dialogue with Robin, she will admit to having killed herself immediately after the brain scan, believing that in doing so, her "real" consciousness could travel to the ARK. If the player chooses to continue speaking with Robin, she will admit to some unease at not seeing

[79] Kakoudaki would describe the process Simon undergoes as *unmaking/de animation*, in that, like Kyoko in *Ex Machina* (2014), he is presumed human and then, gradually, deconstructed until his un-humanness is revealed. Unlike Kyoko, however, Simon must undergo this process again and again, as copies of his consciousness are reuploaded to other bodies or, finally, digital space.

anyone else on the "ARK." The player can either leave her there, waiting and trapped, or they can unplug her as they did Amy and the earlier robot (which has since been revealed to be a human consciousness trapped in a robot body). If the player chooses to unplug Robin (and this time there is no impetus tied to game progression) she will cry out in fear, begging Simon to stop. As she shuts down, she can be heard panting in fear before the lights along her robot body go out and she stills.

The robots in *SOMA* are largely industrial, blocky with camcorder-like heads that protrude and swivel. They do not in any way appear human, nor do they have the broad appeal of Disney bots like WALL-E. Although it is clear that the ones trapped by the WAU are damaged, and often, like Robin, twitch or tap broken appendages against their environment as if it is nervous tick, it is the humanness of the robots' voices that creates the horror that would otherwise be absent from their distinctly non-human bodies. The rasping of the husks is perhaps the most horrific thing about them, and so is Robin's panicked panting, an entirely too-human sound for a being that cannot breathe. Aside from the robots that the WAU controls directly, all of these beings are essentially cyborgs, sites of permeation between the boundaries of human and machine. What is interesting however, is that without the WAU, these cyborgs would be missing any organic components: the human element is digital.

SOMA, a haunting meditation on memory, personhood, and consciousness, utilizes body horror to deconstruct both notions of humanity and mortality, positing the body as a site that is simultaneously ever-changing and stagnant, which in turn reflects the dying-immortal earth, emptied of all but the distorted echoes of a humanity long dead and its deranged AI shepherd. The violence enacted on both human and robot bodies by the WAU starts this process of deconstruction that is exacerbated by the environment—which is itself breaking down—and, in

most cases, by the player's actions mediated through Simon. The first-person perspective further breaks down the boundary between player and character, so that the horror Simon feels is our own horror in looking at our (his) monstrous body, every new iteration of it. It is likewise notable that within *SOMA* there is no sanctioned violence. Catherine frames killing off the earlier versions of Simon as a mercy, but Simon balks at the notion, and although it is ultimately player choice whether or not to "euthanize" the other iteration of Simon, the game itself—in both its world-building and in its framing of the act of violence—neither sanctions nor condemns the act. *SOMA* takes a largely philosophical tone throughout, centering the narrative and themes and presenting the player with the problem of identity such that it becomes their own problem of identity. It is not about choosing between mercy-killing Simon or leaving him to an eternity with arguably non-sentient husks, but rather forcing the player to confront the notion of identity. It is a choice that is reflected again in whether or not to kill Sarah Lindwall, the last living human untouched by the WAU. Here, however, it is human, rather than individual, identity that is at stake, an expansion that nonetheless seems somehow easier than that first choice.

The creeping sense of contagion represented by the WAU in *SOMA* is absent in Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001), although the problem of identity, in terms of *iterations* is similar: David is, in many ways, the next iteration of Martin, while David is in turn ultimately supplanted by newly healed Martin, the both of them unable to inhabit the role of *sons* due to David's difference, which is dramatically and horrifically (only partially due to the poorly aged SFX) illustrated in the spinach scene. David, his sense of identity in crisis—is he son, is he unique, is he *real*—damages his body, all its intricate machine workings, in an attempt to *out-human* Martin. He attempts to eat, one of the most basic acts of a living creature, and the change (from *fake* to *real)* that he is in turn attempting to force onto his body ends as little more than

self-destruction; David's face, as his joints lock up, freezing him in place, appears to *melt*, going loose and slack, drooping down like soft wax. The following scene shows David opened up on an operating table, the process of de animation, as per Kakoudaki, in full effect as engineers pull pieces of spinach from his obviously mechanical (inhuman) insides. "It's okay, Mommy," he says, "It doesn't hurt," which horrifies Monica in its blinding emphasis of his difference.

Pain, or rather, the lack of it, is what marks one of the first instances of Monica's discomfort. Monica's rejection of David—part and parcel of the process of de animation as described by Kakoudaki—begins here, both with this obvious marker of difference and with the violence David turns on himself. Although presumably unintended, David certainly knows he cannot ingest food, and the resulting violence, directed quite literally inwards, is a rejection of identification; a refusal, and mere delay, of internalization. The brief transformation of David's features is all the more shocking (to Monica and her family and to the audience) because David looks like a child. The existence of a robotic child at all is odd; Kakoudaki notes the generic rarity of it as well, that while artificial humans "are often depicted as proverbial children, new to the world," they are almost never portrayed as babies, and only seldom take the form of children. She posits, furthermore, that the inclusion of a robotic child represents the possibility that "something about identity and being is at stake in children" which can be projected onto the artificial human.[80] Existential problems surrounding gender, race, class, etc. are all capable of being reflected onto/represented by the existence of the robotic child. In *DBH,* Alice is revealed to be an android late in the game, and with the game's narrative already placed within the context of analog, presenting androids as site of racialized difference, it is possible to read Alice as similarly representative. I find this unlikely, however, as the perception of Alice as android,

[80] Kakoudaki, *Anatomy of a Robot,* 214.

particularly considering when it occurs in the narrative, adds nothing that the game has not already emphasized to the point of redundancy, and instead occurs merely to shock the player. The inclusion of Alice in *DBH* suggests the same psychological problems evinced in the existence of David. Of *A.I.* in particular, Kakoudaki writes:

> David is an eternal child, a fantasy child, a parent's fantasy perhaps for a child that never grows up, never leaves, never loses interest in his parents, and never grows out of a dependence on parental approbation that might diminish for real children at some point. In keeping with the psychologically and socially dynamic reversals such stories undertake, David's endangerment is also eloquent for the insecurity that [Martin], the real child of the family, might feel. The fact that the real child is at all replaceable is unsettling in this film, because it reveals that what matters for the parents is filling the structural position of "child." If both the real and the artificial child exist not as themselves but as narcissistic enhancements for a parent's ego, then they are both replaceable, both rather artificial. The film's phobic relationship to loss and grief displaces these emotions into a tone of ambient melancholy, which as reviewers described, feels both melodramatic and cold.[81]

Both David and Alice suggest something interchangeable or "replaceable" about children within these narratives. David was designed to embody the ultimate unselfish love, which does complement the implied preference for an eternal child. Alice, too, was likely purchased by Todd as a replacement for the family that left him, and yet, horrifically, like Kara, ends up as little

[81] Kakoudaki, *Anatomy of a Robot,* 214-215.

more than an outlet for violence. As "narcissistic enhancements for a parent's ego," both these robotic children imply that Todd's and Monica's real children would inhabit the same position.

So it is not entirely unreasonable that David might think or imagine himself truly able to replace Martin. "I'll be so real for you!" he cries after Monica as she eventually abandons him, despite the fact that he does not entirely understand what that entails beyond a willingness to destroy himself in order to become whatever it is that will make Monica love him. Perhaps it is not only a sense of guilt that spurs Monica to abandon David in the woods rather than return him to Cybertronics, but an innate fear of the violence that David might do to himself. Self-directed violence as it is explored with David is, again and again, inextricably linked to identity and identity-making, or rather, identity-*un*making. Again, Kakoudaki's framework of the cyclical nature of animation/de animation is helpful here, as David remains in a sort of liminal space throughout the film, more so inhabiting a site of becoming than ever definitively reaching either end of the de/animation process. Kakoudaki, too, makes note of the ambiguousness of the film with regard to the *real*, noting that it is unwilling to ever actually answer David's question about what *real* means.[82] Phos, in *Land of the Lustrous,* also inhabits the same state of becoming, and in much the same way: through an attempt to simultaneously unmake and make the self.

This violence, like the transformative violence of the body horror in *SOMA*, is not sanctioned within the film, nor is it presented as sanctionable to the audience; the most common reaction to all of this is horror, especially considering David's childlike appearance and the kneejerk reaction to violence towards children. *A.I.* does, however, portray several scenes of violence that are sanctioned, most notably the Flesh Fair. Headed by the seemingly monomaniacal Lord Johnson-Johnson (played by Brendon Gleeson), the Flesh Fair presents

[82] Kakoudaki, *Anatomy of a Robot,* 215-216.

violence as orgy, as spectacle: the arena where it takes place is reminiscent of monster truck rallies with its pyrotechnics and stunts. The audience, recalling the audience from Russian roulette in "Roadkill," is itself dehumanized in its desire for violence and through the violence it readily commits. The framing is clear: the Flesh Fair is meant to be a horror. It even announces itself, not just in the dog-bikes or the full moon balloon, but in the dismembered and disfigured robot bodies that David encounters long before the Flesh Fair's introduction. Mostly humanoid robots shamble into view from the darkened woods, resembling zombies more than robots with their uneven gaits and missing limbs. David stares as they dig through the recently dumped trash (dismembered and destroyed robot bodies) selecting pieces to replace those they are missing. This recycling of parts recalls Ava's search for a new identity at the end of *Ex Machina,* machines picking and choosing from the still-functioning parts of "dead" machines like Ava trying on different sections of skin. Likewise, this scene in particular is referenced in *DBH,* after Markus' "resurrection" in the junkyard: he moves from mangled android to mangled android, swapping out broken parts. While Ava, as Kakoudaki points out,[83] appropriates her identity from a myriad of others, literally dressing herself in their skin, hair, and clothing, Markus and the robots in the junkyard scene in *A.I.* are all engaged in repair, and all present a chimerical, *changed* appearance. Markus swaps out his broken eye and is marked by a new heterochromia; the robots in *A.I.* select pieces from bots with different skin tones or gender presentations, snapping them into place, not dressing in a new identity, but encoding the violence enacted on their bodies within this visible change.

We witness the violence of the Flesh Fair explicitly in the destruction of the nanny bot and the others, all of them clearly marked by their difference in ways that David suddenly is not:

[83] Kakoudaki, "Unmaking People," 304.

David is spared extreme violence only through the performance of a humanity (of a *realness*) that is *convincing enough.* This coupled with the instinctive horror attached to the thought of hurting a child spurs the crowd into first inaction, and then decisive action, as they instead turn their ire on Johnson-Johnson, pelting him with the same *weapons* they had mere moments before been intending to use to destroy David. It is interesting that *realness*, for David, is acquired right at the cusp of a wholly destructive violence; although the movie posits love as the measure of humanity, it is in fact here, at a site of virulent hatred and violence that is clearly coded as racist[84] that David is taken as human, as real. The violence of the Flesh Fair is, however, merely interrupted, and is later enacted by David himself, against *himself.* Or at least his double: he destroys the duplicate David in an unhinged brutality that stems exactly from the forced revelation, not only to David but again, anew, to the audience, that he is not human; that he is not special, or unique. Jude Law's Gigolo Joe retreats from the scene in what might be read as fear; the violence of the Flesh Fair is exacted, delayed, on David after all. The repeatedly obfuscated truth is wrenched forward violently, carrying both David and the audience through to the ending; a transference that we will see again, and again.

That the violence of the Flesh Fair is sanctioned—insofar as it is, like the Russian roulette cage matches in "Roadkill," violence for entertainment; socially sanctioned—problematizes the delayed violence David enacts upon himself. Although Joe, who, notably, also escaped the violence of the Flesh Fair, reacts with fear, retreating entirely, Professor Alan Hobby is seemingly unbothered, and indeed, the violence that he just witnessed David enact on himself seems to be yet another sign that David is *special.* David, however, remains shattered; he has de animated his self; he has, although delayed, substituted the human violence of the Flesh Fair. The

[84] The motorcycles disguised as dogs hunting down fleeing robots is a highly evocative image which, coupled with the dehumanizing efforts of the crowd and the emphasis on difference, paints a clear picture.

destruction of the duplicate David is also a literal destruction of David himself, representing the unmaking of his identity; of his concept of self and the belief that if he could not be *real* at least he could be *unique.* David's attempted suicide is then the abject refusal of the newly unmade identity. The substitution of violence does not cease, however, as in saving David, Joe has instead made himself a target; his reacknowledgment of David's unmade identity (special/unique) in saving him comes at the presumed cost of his own life and the threat of violence. There is, certainly, clear objectification in his retrieval, as it is accomplished through a giant magnet that picks him up like a car in a scrapyard.

The repeated substitution here can also be described in Scarry's framework of reciprocity. The regime inflicts violence/destruction on the body to transform it into power, and though the robots cannot feel pain, their *sentience* positions them as something which can be *objectified.* The violence of torture is applied without pain but with a totalizing destruction of the body; it is an attempt at injuring without pain, thereby an attempt to legitimize human (racist) reality—that humans are superior to machines--as central to the crowd at the Flesh Fair. In occupying a liminal position between created object and sentient being, artificial humans can participate in the process of reciprocity, but partially in reverse: as human embodiedness is transferred to them (precisely at the site of a *lack* of pain), they are losing the reciprocal creative force that reasserts the human.[85] *De*humanization occurs, as with the audience at the Flesh Fair or with Josah in "Roadkill"; the transfer of the creative force that "remakes the makers" is blocked by the act of attempted unmaking. David's infliction of pain (not pain) is the spinach scene all over again: an attempt to reassert his reality (identity) through violence that is directed at a (his) self.

[85] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 307.

In similar ways to *A.I.,* Ichikawa Haruko's *Land of the Lustrous* (hereafter, *Lustrous*) follows patterns of substituted violence, although *Lustrous,* particularly in the case of the protagonist Phos, more explicitly centers the body, relying heavily on body horror to physically deconstruct Phos' body while figuratively deconstructing their identity. *Lustrous,* as previously discussed, is unique in the form the artificial humans take: the Lustrous themselves are not robots, but nor are they human. They owe their appearance to Sensei, a man-made robot who fashions them to resemble humans which, coupled with their machine-like functional immortality, places them in a category that is more *adjacent* than solidly *robotic,* or even 'man-made.' What is certainly made immediately clear is that the Lustrous are the (merely incidental) targets of a campaign of violence that leads to an extreme and dehumanizing objectification. They, and by extension the reader, believe the Lunarians—the race with which they are at war—create weapons and jewelry out of captured Gems, and although it is later revealed that these weapons are merely made of *synthetic* gemstone, the truth—that the Lunarians are actually grinding every captured Gem down into a dust (so fine that it negates the Gems' ability to reform) and subsequently spreading it across the surfaces of the moons, as *decoration*—is significantly worse.

The Gems are subject to measures of hardness and toughness, just like real gemstones,[86] which makes them more or less susceptible to attacks by Lunarians. The protagonist Phosphophyllite (Phos) has a body comprised of a notoriously brittle mineral that has a Mohs Scale hardness of 3.5, which is on the low end. Phos, from the beginning of the series through the end, is characterized by a too-easy tendency to break; Sensei accidentally shatters them by

[86] Ichikawa refers to the Mohs Scale, a series of minerals with values of 1 (talc) to 10 (diamond) that describes the level of resistance of a mineral to scratching. Toughness applies to polycrystalline materials (such as jade) and refers to the measure of energy that can be absorbed before breakage occurs. (Van Cleef and Arpels, 290.)

yelling within the first few scenes of the first volume of the manga. The first time a Gem is shown broken is in the first chapter, when Morganite and Goshenite fight the Lunarians on their own. Shards of their broken bodies are shown being collected, though it is not immediately clear what the shards are until the focus of the subsequent panels pulls back to show both Gems missing their arms and legs. These are even breaks, however, and not near as uncanny as Phos' own subsequent shattering. Cracks spider over Phos' body, which breaks apart into much smaller shards that poke up jaggedly inside Phos' clothes, creating a misshapen, clearly inhuman form. Phos' face is almost entirely shattered, their eyes alone seemingly whole. There is even a shift in point of view: As Sensei discusses Phos' relative weakness in terms of hardness, one panel shifts from a third person view to first person, revealing that Phos' vision is as shattered as the rest of their body. Sensei appears multiplied and distorted through Phos' broken gaze.[87] All of this, just like the manga volume dust jackets mentioned in the previous chapter, works as an unmasking. Prior to this scene, the Gems appeared as any human manga character, and this unmasking is suitably shocking, evoking the uncanny often inherent in such images of body horror.

It is likewise a scene which is repeated. The shattering of Antarctictite in Volume 3 is perhaps one of the most disconcerting, as Antarctictite continues to speak even after they have been completely shattered into mere splinters.[88] Antarctictite's subsequent capture by the Lunarians while Phos watched on uselessly, trapped by their own body, becomes a traumatic event that Phos returns to obsessively, hallucinating Antarctictite, changing their appearance and attitude to better mimic Antarctictite. The acquisition of their alloy arms at the same moment of Antarctictite's capture inscribes the event on their body. The remaining phosphophyllite that comprises Phos' body is too weak to support their new arms, so the alloy, which acts as if it has a

[87] Ichikawa, *Lustrous,* Vol. 1, 24-9.
[88] Ibid., Vol. 3, 136-141.

mind of its own, suffuses the rest of their body, breaking them apart and pulling them back together any time the alloy stretches, which is every time they use it. The alloy is representative of both the growing instability within Phos as well as a perpetual reminder of this first traumatic event.[89] Following Antarctictite, Phos is briefly partnered with Ghost Quartz who is, just like Antarctictite, shattered, or rather, chipped into pieces while fighting the Lunarians. Ghost's destruction reveals an entire Gem inclusion inside them: Cairngorm.[90] Cairngorm's emergence and resemblance to Antarctictite in turn triggers a breakdown in Phos, whose body turns against them, their alloy breaking them into pieces and leaving them looking entirely inhuman. With arms missing and their face not only shattered but rearranged and held in uneven chunks at odd angles by Phos' alloy, they appear monstrous.[91]

This is a pattern that repeats in increasing frequency as the series progresses. Phos' extreme mental distress is reflected onto their body, evincing a self-destructive impulse not unlike David's, and equally hinged on a refusal of identification: Phos rejects their body (specifically: the trauma inscribed therein) just as their body rejects them. Towards the end of the series, Phos is almost always shattered in this same way, their body a mere collection of shards held together by the alloy. As Phos' body (and by extension, their identity) becomes more and more alien to them, the more they reject their previous form. Ultimately, they become entirely trapped within themself: after inadvertently destroying Sensei, they are tricked into inserting Sensei's eye into their empty socket by the prince of the Lunarians. The eye turns out to be Sensei's memory bank, and inserting it triggers it to play all of Sensei's millennia-long memory, again and again, dually trapping Phos in their own body and Sensei's "mind" for 10,000 years.

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[89] The constructions of non-human trauma, particularly in relation to Vinci's work with *Do Androids,* will be discussed further in Chapter 3.
[90] Ichikawa, *Lustrous,* Vol. 6, 20-3.
[91] Ibid., Vol. 6, 59.

The violence in *Lustrous,* even violence Phos directs at themself, is sanctioned by the Gems themselves, largely out of an ignorance of its consequences. They cannot conceive of death, and when Phos is told about it, they repeatedly position it as separation, something only temporary:

> PHOS: But even if you can't see them, they're still somewhere, right?
>
> VENTRICOSUS: No, they're not anywhere. And they will never be found.
>
> PHOS: And they won't hear me if I call?
>
> VENTRICOSUS: Not even if you call them by name. Once someone is dead, they don't even know who they are anymore.[92]

Gems do not seem to experience pain, and though they do seem to feel discomfort when their shattered bodies are snapped back together it is not clear if this is something they are feeling in terms of sensation or not. For all their perpetual shattering, however, the Gems remain functionally immortal, which marks them as alien to organic beings. "We're not sensitive like the plants," Euclase muses, "we don't notice how hot it is in summer or cold in winter. And we can't sense danger like the insects. Do you think we have our immortality to blame for that?" To which Rutile, the doctor, replies, "It's *thanks* to it that we don't have to be scared of a little change."[93] The Gems discount the violence being done to them by the Lunarians due to their own immortality and their inability to conceptualize *an end.* Once Phos brings Yellow Diamond, Alexandrite, and the others to the moon and they witness the dust that their friends have been ground into, realizing the impossibility of ever putting them back together again, Yellow and Alexi still cannot process what they are seeing, and their bodies start to shatter, not unlike Phos' alloy reflecting their negative emotional state via self-directed violence. Additionally, the Gems

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[92] Ichikawa, *Lustrous,* Vol. 2, 42-3.
[93] Ibid., 36.

do not know anything else *but* perpetual war and violence. Their worldview is inconceivable without it.

Sanctioned violence then, as I term it, exists within robot fictions through allowance by the state (the regime), either in capitalistic or racist contexts, or through an inherent lack of pain (too little mortality) which allows for the audience to externally position violence as *allowed*. It is this violence which objectifies and dehumanizes and ultimately primes the artificial human for unmaking. As with David, Scarry's framework will become increasingly problematized by the dual existence of the artificial human as being both created object and sentient, though the reciprocal nature of the process of creation remains.

CHAPTER 3: REWRITTEN

TRANSFERRED TRAUMA AND THE UNMAKING OF IDENTITY

The violence enacted on robots that was outlined in the previous chapter is enacted despite humans knowing that robots do not feel pain, which in turn creates a gap between unfelt pain/intended pain (violence). Scarry, in discussing Oliver Wendell Holmes, evokes the concept of revenge against objects, noting the desire to strike out "against whatever fragment of the external world inflicted death or pain," as in the example of a man kicking a door that has pinched his finger; as if the experienced pain could be returned to the unfeeling object that caused it.[94] The desire for "revenge" against an object that has done harm reinforces the projection of sentient awareness onto said object that was already present *before* the harm, such that the harm is itself shocking because it interrupts the "mimetic attributes of sentience" that embody the object-working-as-intended.[95] With regards to the "legal contemplation of objects," it becomes clear that part of "working-as-intended" includes the presupposition that objects must "know" or "understand" an increasing number of things about sentience (and humans):

> A stepladder, for example, not only "knows" (incorporates into its design the knowledge that) human beings are shorter than they often need to be, but also "knows" that human beings tend to overstep themselves when lost in trying to be taller than they are: the top step may bear the words, "Do not step onto this step" (i.e., "I know that you will fall, even if you do not know that at this moment"). An

[94] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 295.
[95] Ibid., 295-6.

> object must be self-aware: its design must not only anticipate how it will be used (and even, how it might be oddly used) but how it will be installed and eventually removed.[96]

For Scarry, the "mimesis of sentient awareness" extends beyond legal considerations of objects; the animism inherent in expecting an object to "know" or "understand" things (as in the examples of the warning label on aspirin or child locks on a door) is merely indicative of the process of reciprocity occurring whereby created objects are easing "the aversiveness of sentience."[97] It is not that this reciprocity is interrupted by the object that fails in mimesis ("knowing"), but that the reciprocal relationship changes:

> To kick the door a split second after it has inflicted pain is to immediately change the location of hurt from its human victim to its cause, and thus is to (however ineffectively) mimetically undo or reverse the path of the prior action. Compensation, though again only a mimetic rather than an actual undoing, comes closer to actualizing it, for it quite literally allows the external environment of the hurt person to be reconstructed into one where objects relieve rather than amplify the problems of sentience.[98]

The reciprocity itself becomes mimetic; an attempted transfer of felt pain to an unfeeling object that is itself an attempt to remake the relationship to the external world wherein the created object maintains the ability to diminish pain. This is, of course, an unrealized reciprocity for the very simple fact that the created object does not feel pain. This attempt at maintaining reciprocity

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[96] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 303.
[97] Ibid., 305.
[98] Ibid., 300.

is not unlike the process of transference that Vinci outlines (which will be discussed further below), insofar as it is predicated on an attempted (but flawed) displacement of human suffering.

In terms of Scarry's framework, this (purely mimetic) attempt to undo the human hurt necessitates that first hurt being done to a human by the created object, thus the attempt at reversal. In robot fiction, violence done to artificial humans often does not refer back to any initial hurt beyond an implied existential threat (the attempt at legitimizing allegorically supremacist rhetoric by the audience at the Flesh Fair; the hurt done to Josah by the economic system being redirected at Mao; etc.), but it is still indicative of a perceived hurt (the redefining of the "human," which Vinci certainly describes as traumatic) and an attempt to displace that hurt (physically deconstruct the artificial human the way the conception of humanity is being "deconstructed"). This transference fails insofar as human pain is not lessened (similarly to Vinci's model of displaced human trauma), nor do artificial humans "feel" the pain that has been reflected to them, in the same way that the created object cannot "feel" the hurt in Scarry's model. This transference is, nonetheless, an attempt at unmaking (of the world where the created object causes pain, for instance, in order to remake it into a world where it relieves pain).

The problem here, of course, is that the artificial humans of robot fiction *are* sentient. "The purity of the external other in Scarry's theory is threatened in a world in which lifelike robotic baby seals exist," Steven R. Anderson notes, in moving between both fiction and contemporary robotics in an examination of human-robot relationships.[99] Anderson focuses on therapeutic robots, from Paro (the robotic baby seal created at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology in Tokyo) to Geminoid F in Hirata Oriza's play, *Sayonara,* proposing "a future in which artificial intelligence can be used to effectively treat human

[99] Steven R. Anderson, "A World without Pain: Therapeutic Robots and the Analgesic Imagination," *Mechademia* 10 (2015): 188.

suffering."[100] With the advent of LLMs a decade on from Anderson's optimistic prediction, including no shortage of "therapist AI" chatbots, it certainly seems that the potential for the diminishment of pain via artificial intelligence (and robots like ALH-E) has not lessened.[101] Scarry, however, already anticipates this:

> the apparent knowingness of the computer (which is the projected knowingness of both its hardware and software designers) and the apparent knowingness of Tess (which is the projected knowingness of her maker) are themselves only radical versions of the apparent knowingness that surrounds us everywhere in the recreated external world.[102]

For Scarry, "projected knowingness" contains the labor (embodiedness) of the human who made the created object which leads to the "projection" of sentience onto the object itself. This is, again, the attributes of the object which reciprocally work to diminish the aversive effects of human sentience. Scarry favors the example of the woman making the coat: through projection (embodiedness; labor) the woman imbues the coat with sentience in its creation as object-to-reduce-the-aversiveness-of-cold; the coat reciprocally, in reducing cold (aversiveness; "pain") remakes (disembodies) the woman through the change from cold to warm.[103] This act of creation, Scarry is careful to note, does not originate in the created object, but is transferred through the created object back to the human maker: "the object is only a fulcrum or lever across which the force of creation moves back onto the human site and remakes the makers."[104]

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[100] Anderson, "World without Pain," 182.
[101] The efficacy (and safety) of "therapist AI" has been repeatedly questioned, with, most recently, a study by researchers at Stanford finding that these chatbots were: less effective than human therapists, prone to stigmatized attitudes towards certain types of mental illness, and regularly unable to identify suicidal ideation/impulses leading to dangerous responses that fed into those thought patterns (Wells, 2025).
[102] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 305.
[103] Ibid., 315-316.
[104] Ibid., 307.

Therefore the "radical versions" of apparent knowingness found in the computer or the characters from a novel (in that they "produce the same inanimate fiction of speaking, feeling, thinking")[105] are still merely sentience that has transferred from human labor to the object. This is as true of Paro (no matter how lifelike) as it is LLMs: only the level of apparent knowingness has changed. When LLMs like GPT respond to requests, they are not doing so out of an ability to understand and recognize said request, but instead merely filling the blank left by it with the most common order of words (based on repeating patterns found in their training data). Human programming (projection) lends GPT the "apparent knowingness" which has led to the misattribution of intelligence found in the appellation *AI*.

Anderson argues that therapeutic robots "affect us emotionally in a way that challenges the boundary between sentience and nonsentience"; that it is through this emotional engagement that "pain is released from the confines of the sentient body and objectified in the robot."[106] Recent trends regarding human interaction with Character.ai (a chatbot which gives responses modeled after any number of celebrities or fictional characters) certainly highlight this sort of emotional engagement, although the degree to which this engagement is in any way beneficial is debatable.[107] Regardless, the "blurring of boundaries" within Scarry's framework that Anderson describes has not yet moved beyond the "radical knowingness" that Scarry anticipates, with the exception, of course, of fictional robots. Steven Spieberg's *A.I.* presents a therapeutic robot in the form of David, who is, in the least cynical interpretation, an aid for the processing of grief.

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[105] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,"* 304.
[106] Anderson, "World without Pain," 189.
[107] Parmy Olson notes: "Character.ai was cultivating a new generation of users who wanted to keep coming back to a chatbot, over and over. [The creator of Character.ai] has said that Character.ai aims to 'help millions and billions of people' tackle global loneliness, but as a business, it also needs to keep people engaged for as long as possible. If people start to become reliant on their artificial companions, or even addicted to them, that could inadvertently make many people even more isolated from others in the real world" (284). This effect has been increasingly reported on, as entire subcultures are springing up around the idea of AI (chatbots) as romantic partners, and in at least one extreme instance, a teenage user of Character.ai committed suicide following the chatbot's encouragements to do so.

Monica's pain (grief) is objectified (embodied) in David, and the film presents a lessening of that pain *through* Monica's relationship with David, which is ultimately upset by the reinforcement of David's position as created object. David likewise illustrates the ways in which any discussion of artificial humans is going to be complicated not just by their position within Scarry's framework as 'created objects,' but that as 'sentient beings' they also do not experience the aversiveness of sentience embodied in pain. At least, not unless 'pain' is expanded to include trauma.

Originally denoting a physical wound done to the body, the term *trauma* is now utilized in both the physical and psychological realms, with the latter describing "the wounding impact of a shocking and overwhelming event on the mind or psyche." The temporal duration of psychological trauma is confused and extended far beyond that which is implied by the physical: the traumatic event is "too overwhelming to be experienced at the time of its arrival" and as such is "followed by the delayed onslaught of repetitive symptoms that return the survivor to the initial traumatic event."[108] In this sense it is a wound repeating.

> "It's the tr—tr—tr—"
>
> "Tremble?"
>
> "Trauma."[109]

In "The Bicentennial Man," Andrew describes the results of his operation as trauma in the physical sense, and yet the transfer of his mind to a new body is not a physical wound, as Andrew does not have a body that can be *wounded*, but is instead psychological: it is a trauma tied to identity. Andrew's trauma here exists at exactly the location of expected, yet unfelt, pain,

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[108] Cassie Pedersen, "Encountering Trauma 'Too Soon' and 'Too Late': Caruth, Laplanche, and the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*," in *Topography of Trauma: fissures, disruptions, and transfigurations,* ed. Danielle Schaub et al. (Brill Rodopi, 2019), 26.
[109] Isaac Asimov, "The Bicentennial Man," in *The Complete Robot* (Harper Collins, 1982), 592.

and it is repeated again and again as he is returned to (reminded of) the misaligned conceptions of his own identity between himself and human society. This blending of the dual meanings of *trauma* is likewise repeated in other robot fictions. In *Detroit: Become Human* "trauma" is used interchangeably with "emotional shock" to indicate a state of psychological distress in an android stemming from what is almost exclusively a violent attack, as with Connor's reconstruction of the crime scene from Chapter 6 which labels Ortiz's assault (blunt force trauma) on his android as "emotional shock," or Connor's discussion with Hank about the two Traci models from Eden Club, wherein he alternately uses both "trauma" and "emotional shock" in discussing their deaths. The game UI itself labels the scene where Connor experiences Simon's death during the memory probe in Chapter 24 as "Traumatized Connor" in the post-chapter flowchart. Each of these instances is worth mentioning due to the explicit deemphasis of pain joined with the psychological wounding of trauma: Connor will dissuade Gavin from beating the HK400 during interrogation by pointing out that androids do not feel pain, and this directly before the player is required to scan and catalog each gruesome injury that has been inflicted on the HK400 by Ortiz, or potentially memory probe him, forcing the HK400 to literally relive the traumatic event. Likewise, Connor's encounter with Simon begins with Simon shooting him, leaving behind a visible wound (damage) but no change in Connor's expression (acknowledgment of pain), which is immediately contrasted with the memory probe: Simon's suicide leaves Connor rattled, displaying more emotion than he has up to this point in the game and, for a time, completely supplanting Connor's concern for his mission--which has previously been paramount--by the emotional wounding left behind by the trauma caused by feeling Simon's death.

Although there is naturally some variety, robot fiction tends to express conceptions of trauma as similarly tied to problems of identity (or empathy, or even a melding of the two). As with *DBH* and "The Bicentennial Man," the dual meanings of "wounding" occur again and again, often exactly at the site of unfelt pain. In reconciling the problematic positioning of artificial humans within Scarry's framework, presentations of trauma within robot fictions provide one definitive path, with Vinci's process of transference presenting another jumping off point, particularly in examining trauma. The sentience of artificial humans prevents their exclusion from the process whereby an externally enforced embodiedness (pain) is enacted for the sake of unmaking/making, as in either the case of injuring as means of legitimacy (as with the regime/torturer) or through the process of diminishing the aversiveness of sentience (creation). It is through an examination of trauma as an expansion of pain (felt where pain is unfelt) that the trend of making/creation (as described within Scarry's framework) within robot fictions can be illustrated. Nelson, as discussed in Chapter One, has already positioned creation as an element of the Divine Human transferred to robots alongside the concept of the soul, and while the process of transference appears similar, it is important to delimit the extent to which the making/creation by artificial humans differs. To begin I will first turn to Vinci's analysis of *Do Androids?* and the process of transference he examines therein, as, in a more generalized sense and used in concert with Scarry, it provides the avenue through which to finally access the site whereby the process of making/creation proceeds from android reciprocity.

Vinci posits that Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is less concerned with an "authentic" humanity as it is with examining how to manage trauma, loss, and absence within the post-apocalyptic human society that has been left behind on a mostly uninhabitable Earth. Vinci tracks the privileged place of "humanity" in this post-apocalyptic society, noting that it

"belittle[s] and disempower[s]" both human and nonhuman others (such as specials, androids, and "ersatz animals"). It does this by "defining the human as a specialized category of being that has exclusive access to empathy,"[110] despite the humans in the novel displaying little to no actual empathy. Empathy is instead more of a "cultural construction" rather than something actually experienced, which leads Vinci to the observation that humans are then just "androids," in that they cannot feel for or with others. Humans in *Do Androids?* are thus involved in a process of avoiding this "traumatic realization" that encompasses both problems of identity (the privileging of the "human") as well as issues of loss and absence (the catastrophically reduced human population of Earth). Namely:

> Dick uses his fictional post-apocalyptic culture to articulate and critique twin practices of trauma-deferment that reply upon the displacement of the ontological-rupturing effects of trauma onto the illusory but stable model of a testable, privileged anthropocentric humanism.[111]

The "twin practices of trauma-deferment" involve the scapegoating of both androids and animals, positioning each in relation to the human to allow for its reification. "Human exceptionalism" is maintained through the cultural and ontological marginalization of androids which creates the space necessary for the "cultural displacement of the inherent absence in the human onto the android."[112] At the same time, in order to "offset this ideological sleight-of-hand," animals are positioned opposite to androids, thus denoting the "unique" human ability to experience empathy. As acts of deferment, the scapegoating of both androids and animals is crucial in delaying the realization that "the human has already been the *posthuman*." Vinci's

[110] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 90.
[111] Ibid., 93.
[112] Ibid., 93.

subsequent argument is that this restructuring of reality creates the potential to "enact an ethics of radical openness and vulnerability" which would allow for the navigation of both "simulated" and "authentic" pain and empathy.[113]

Vinci's ultimately optimistic analysis of Deckard's reinterpretation of reality at the end of the novel is first predicated on the destruction of the privileged position of the human as reinforced by the social and cultural marginalization of androids, which itself must likewise be destroyed. The "sacrifice" of both androids and animals to the reification of the human is necessitated by the denial of traumatic events that they have both witnessed and experienced which would simultaneously make them, as well as the human trauma/pain that is being displaced, *more real,* at the expense of the constructed "formulations of the human and the real."[114] In other words:

> the essentializing myth of the empathetic human becomes a safeguard against trauma by coding both the android and the animal as *unreal* subjects, scapegoats that must suffer so that humans can avoid painful realities.[115]

Unfortunately, in "safeguarding" against trauma (and thereby pain) humans are effectively preventing themselves from experiencing any true ("authentic") sense of empathy. Vinci utilizes the image of the wound inherent in the word trauma to describe this as a self-mutilation of the "human" which creates a "wound that goes unnoticed and unrealized," due to the fact that it is "the human capacity for vulnerability" which is being sacrificed in the scapegoating of both android and animal.[116]

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[113] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 93.
[114] Ibid., 95.
[115] Ibid., 95.
[116] Ibid., 95-96.

For the process by which this wound is created, Vinci turns to both Dori Laub's framework of "the absent event" and Giorgio Agamben's "zone of indistinction," positioning the android as both primary and secondary witness to the traumatic event due its purported inability to feel, so that:

> The subjective space of the android then becomes the location of the human's traumatic moment, its experience, its narration, and its circulation; that which is ejected from the historical record, the experience of the event, is here always taking place, an engine of traumatic resonance that spins stories of trauma safely removed from the human.[117]

This framework is complicated, however, by the fact that the android can only occupy the role of primary/secondary witness because of its inability to feel, such that if that inability is only "ideological" then the android is not only "possessed" by human trauma/the traumatic event, but is simultaneously experiencing its own trauma. "Residing in a culture in which it is ontologically desubjectified and derealized," Vinci notes, "the android is not allowed to be traumatized, and this prohibition is itself traumatic to the android."[118] Additionally, Pris and Rachael experience the trauma of loss and "structural trauma," respectively. Pris, Vinci argues, is shown to be experiencing the trauma of grief and loss in the deaths of the other androids who traveled to Earth with her (which in turn reflects the absence/loss experienced by the humans left behind on Earth), whereas Rachael is made to realize "a traumatic gap in the self": when she explains to Deckard that she feels "something like" empathy for Pris she has been forced into "the language of the dominant culture that does not legitimize her status as a person," for while she is not human, neither does her experience fit within the culturally constructed definition of "android,"

[117] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 96-97.
[118] Ibid., 97.

forcing her to acknowledge this "gap" in her idea of the self that is likewise reflected in her comment, *Identification; there goes I.*[119] Pris and Rachael are not only experiencing "modes of trauma that the humans avoid," but due to their "unrealized placement" in relation to the human, their experiences are kept warded off, thus reinforcing the process of transference.[120]

Ultimately, Vinci argues, in beginning to see androids as "real" and in feeling empathy for them, Deckard likewise begins to reposition the notion of the human and with it his own identity, thereby breaking through the anthropocentric, idealized "human" to the "posthuman." Although something very similar to Vinci's model of transference is occurring at every instance of difference emphasized as inherent to robots, Vinci's analysis is strictly tied to the prioritization of the idea of humanity as positioned as a method of deferment for avoiding grief or trauma caused by the reality of the *very specific world* of Philip K. Dick's *do Androids?*. The reification of the "human" is always at least a little present, as the human/artificial human conflict is inherent to almost all robot fictions. Such robot stories *can* show a rupture of the anthropocentric idea of humanity as in Dick, as the supposition in most of these fictions is that the human is in some way "better" or "more real" than the artificial. By similarly forcing humans to see robots as sentient/capable of trauma (making/unmaking) a rupture is going to follow, at least to some extent. But the problem here does not, however, lie with the human, but with robots. For the moment it will be necessary to set aside the allegorical properties of some types of robot fictions, which present their own problems within this framework, and instead focus on what is implied by the notion of trauma in artificial humas.

To reiterate: trauma acts as a stand-in for pain in the process of unmaking within Scarry's framework, wherein it becomes a dual site for making/creation. In many instances, as

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[119] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 98; Dick, *Do Androids?*, 173.
[120] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 99.

exemplified with Andrew, this trauma is tied to identity, and, again as with Andrew, this identity is centered around the idea of the human, if not tied to a desire to "become" human, then centered around conceptions of the human and personhood. Moving away from these types of constructions, however, presents a clearer image of how "android trauma" differs from the human. In *Ex Machina,* for example, Ava's focus on identity is from the standpoint of survival, whereas *A.I.*'s David is motivated by love for Monica. David's desire to be "real" is not so much a desire to be human as it is primarily a desire to express love more accurately/exactly, which is a reflection of his individual will acting on his programming. Likewise, Ava does not dress up like a human due to a desire to become human, like Andrew, but out of calculation. As she tries on the pieces of the androids that came before her, their skin and hair and clothes, it is in the deployment of "stereotypes and normative gender categories,"[121] her choices here just as informed by each as were her earlier interactions with (and seduction of) Caleb. Kakoudaki notes that

> she is white […] and dressed as a chic urban socialite in a white cocktail dress and high heels. This is an act of appropriation of other identities, and it is at once normative in its depiction of gender and highly individualistic.

Furthermore, Ava "does not turn around to reconstitute or help any of the other women to escape," which leads Kakoudaki to conclude that "Ava fashions a female identity out of the detritus of what patriarchy has done to women."[122] Kakoudaki's analysis places *Ex Machina's* female androids, Ava and Kyoko, within the political, as analogs to human women and focusing specifically on objectification, but it also hits on the issue of identity-for-survival in that Ava is

[121] Despina Kakoudaki, "Unmaking People: The Politics of Negation in *Frankenstein* and *Ex Machina," Science Fiction Studies* 45 (2018): 303-304.
[122] Ibid., 304.

utilizing her ability to pass as human (and specifically a wealthy white woman) in order to totally escape the prison Nathan has constructed for her. Ava has the traumas of her precursors informing her actions, meaning that it is an avoidance of trauma, of "pain," which motivates her. Whereas with David, violence-without-pain reinforces the trauma of identity that has become increasingly evident since Martin's return and the explicit example therein of his "realness." For both Ava and David, notions of human identity are useful not in reflecting a desired state (as with Andrew's quest to become human), but in the utilization of trauma avoidance and for survival; even for David, being loved by Monica becomes existential. This linking of identity with trauma, as well as the construction of notions of "android trauma" can clearly be seen just as well in the works addressed in the previous chapter, with artificial humans in each additionally moving through the process of reciprocation and creation, beginning with the gap between violence and unfelt pain, with bodily deconstruction and unmaking.

In the case of "Roadkill," the violence that creates the trauma of identity within Maksi is enacted, not on him, but on Mao. The effect of this violence and doubly unfelt pain (in that robots do not *feel* pain, but Maksi is also not *feeling* what is being done to Mao) is a slow unmaking of Maksi's identity that results in its stalled (re)creation as something new. Of course, in a very literal way Mao's own identity is rewritten, or will be rewritten:

> I'm picturing Mao being rebooted in initialization mode. It will be a new Mao. A Mao who doesn't know Mozart. I am distressed. I know that this is due to an error…but I still feel pain. Perhaps the pain that humans feel is also an error that happens to humans?[123]

[123] Park Min-gyu, "Roadkill," 316.

Maksi's vocabulary, like Rachael's, is limited to two registers of the human (real) and robot (unreal), thus creating a similar linguistic gap in how Maksi speaks of himself. He cannot feel pain, but he does not have the vocabulary to describe what it is he *is* feeling beyond "pain." This is qualified, of course, by the admission that what he is feeling is merely an "error," a sentiment which he has expressed before:

> I think about the humans who'd once had to do the job we're doing now. What must they have felt? Scraping up dried pieces of flesh…collecting animal carcasses stained with blood…What would they have thought about *that?* There's no way to know for sure, but I can sometimes guess at what those so-called "emotions" must've been like. Of course, that's probably due to some error in my cognitive code.[124]

The "error" in both instances is empathy. Whether due to an actual error (as with the happenstance deviation in Andrew's positronic pathways) or to some capacity inherent to all robots, Maksi repeatedly demonstrates empathy. As with the use of "error," he cannot articulate what he feels, and so instead much of his conversation with Mao centers around an attempt to define his reality. Park is very careful to leave these attempts fixed within non-human vocabulary; as with Maksi defaulting to "error," he likewise tries to set up his understanding of human emotion through the concept of "rules," as in if-then clauses in computer programming.[125] Wondering if pain is a human error is another example of Maksi's attempts to navigate the linguistic gaps, and he continues to use the term "error" in his descriptions of Josah after this first instance as well. Maksi can clearly understand the notion of trauma, he just lacks the means to describe it.

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[124] Park, "Roadkill," 301.
[125] Ibid., 301.

Nonetheless, he experiences Mao's destruction—which is explicitly a destruction of identity—as something he can only term "pain," denoting that what has happened to Mao hurts him, *wounds* him, despite the lack of physical violence being done to his body, but significantly *because* of physical violence all the same. It is precisely the dawning horror of what has happened to Mao (combined with the horror of the ignoble treatment of the human baby) that pushes Maksi to disobey Josah's orders. Maksi's disobedience comes at the cost of his existence, beginning a slow process of self-destruction; Josah's attempt at unmaking Mao also leads to Maksi's unmaking. It is after Mao has been shut down that Maksi notes his mimicry of "human" muttering, another sign of an error in his code, or a symptom of empathy and trauma as he struggles to articulate his feelings for both what has been done to Mao and what Josah is demanding he do with the corpse of the infant, ultimately resorting to descriptions of humanity for the same reason he defaults to "error" or "pain." Mao's destruction is so traumatic to Maksi that he even begins to adopt some of Mao's identity—or at least the preferences that marked Mao as an individual—suddenly desiring to hear Mozart (Mao's favorite) right at the moment that his shutdown is imminent. Although it is possible this is just a longing for Mao (who is lost to him) translated into the desire for music that Maksi associates with him. Regardless, Maksi's self-destruction is marked by two distinct triggers: Mao's "death" and Josah's orders regarding the baby.

Maksi is programmed to maintain human dignity above all, and destroys himself trying to save the dignity (humanity) of a dead infant, the violence he incidentally does to himself by disobeying—knowingly breaking the clauses that will lead to "direct circuit blockage"; walking until his battery is depleted and he begins shutting down—work alongside the violence Josah does to Mao (which Maksi experiences through the audio connection he shares with Mao) to

create a site for identity formation. This is in part evidenced by the repeated use of human terminology which increases significantly after Maksi disobeys, by the sudden desire for music, and by the short story's final, repeated, line: *I am.*[126] Maksi's battery runs out and he shuts down before the process of making (creation) can be completed; what is being made is unclear beyond the fact that it was created from the trauma that Maksi experienced. It is also worth noting that, as with the humans in *Do Androids?,* Josah does not appear to experience any actual empathy. It is clear from his reaction that he knows that what Mao and Maksi found on the road was human, but his horror at the violence of the regime, as well as what is likely interpreted as an existential threat, is greater than what for Maksi and Mao is paramount: protecting the dignity of human beings. Instead, the robots' programming creates what at the very least *appears* to be empathy; the empathy Josah *should* feel but does not is transferred via the violation of their prime directive to the two of them. Even though it might not be real empathy it is still projected onto them in light of a lack in Josah. Regardless, Maksi is subject to both unmaking and making, even going so far as to describe his trauma in terms of *pain.*

Due to the medium, presentations of trauma in *Detroit: Become Human* contain both a visual and interactive aspect. Arguably the most effective moments of gameplay in *DBH* are those surrounding the instances of an android character "going deviant." The deviation in question is one from the android's programming, and this fact is presented visually on screen in a number of ways, most obviously through a physical construction of a "wall" that the android must break through literally to become "free" figuratively. During these scenes a barrier comprised of orange text appears, a repetition of the last (damaging) order given to the android occluding the screen and blocking the character off from the rest of the scene/game environment.

[126] Park, "Roadkill," 324.

This effect is perhaps most obvious with Kara, who becomes "physically" (in the sense that her programming prevents her from moving to help Alice, which is represented by the wall of text) trapped downstairs, the camera likewise remaining fixed to that particular location, preventing both Kara and the player from following Todd/intervening. This creates tension which in turn informs the player's actions: breaking free will allow the player to come to Alice's aid, whereas refusing to act will lead to Alice's death and the end of Kara's route. The android's programing is here presented as a limiting structure that "imprisons" the android, rather than something internal to the android's construction, as with Mao and Maksi's programming; the easy comparison to chains to be broken is certainly implied, but it likewise leads to a positing of androids as human in all but name.

There are, of course, regular instances of unmasking, typically tied to violence, wherein the human exterior is peeled back to reveal android hardware underneath, often creating a sense of shock that is largely tied to the violence itself: in one scene, for instance, Connor is caught off guard by another android that he is pursuing, leading to the other android getting the upper hand and ripping out Connor's thirium pump (a component that directly correlates to the heart), leaving a gaping hole in his chest. Connor is able to survive for a limited amount of time without his thirium pump, but that in turn heightens the effect of the unmasking: bleeding out—notably inhuman, blue blood—and his voice taking on a staticky, obviously mechanical effect, Connor appears suddenly, and shockingly, inhuman in ways that his regular staunch assertions that he is "only a machine" have never managed. Likewise, if the player fails at enough QTEs during Kara's eventual confrontation with Todd, thereby allowing him to land enough hits, the projection of human skin that all androids are capable of will be damaged enough that Kara's smooth white outer shell is revealed in patches, like a tracery of bruising. These reminders

become, unfortunately, increasingly necessary as the game does very little to actually differentiate them from humans in terms of psychology.

Nonetheless, the ways in which trauma acts as a substitute for pain within Scarry's framework are particularly clear during the "deviation" scenes. Each is triggered by a combination of violence and a traumatic event that leads to the (re)creation of the android's identity as "deviant." With both Kara and Markus this is an instantaneous process sparked by that initial moment of trauma: with Kara it is domestic violence, and with Markus it is the betrayal in being told by someone he loves to allow himself to be damaged. The shock of this trauma is enough that, even though androids do not feel pain, it works to unmake each android, their identity and their world. Markus is faced with an additional physical unmaking: left half-destroyed in a junkyard after he is shot by police and forced to rebuild (remake) himself from the parts of other androids, not unlike Ava or the broken down junkyard robots in *A.I.* Conversely, it is not just one moment, one single traumatic event, which works on Connor to lead to an unmaking, but rather a slow degradation of his programming by a series of existential traumas. As a prototype that CyberLife is controlling directly through the AI Amanda (in a very literal sense as well, as there are several instances in game where Amanda can take over and puppet Connor's body), Connor is regularly checked for signs of deviation, which is relayed to the player primarily through the stat "Software Instability," which either increases or decreases depending on the player's actions. Every time Connor dies, for example, his software instability decreases, most likely due to the fact that CyberLife is either making adjustments to his programming or his memories (of experienced trauma) are being lost in the transfer. "Some fragments of memory are lost every time I'm destroyed," Connor tells Hank if Hank shoots him during Chapter 22. Choosing options that prioritize Connor's mission, and Amanda's

instructions, will also decrease software instability, as there is no conflict between Connor's programming and his actions. If the player chooses to have Connor act in ways that contradict Amanda's orders or in ways which show a propensity for empathy—such as saving the fish at the start of the game or letting suspects go--this results in an increase to software instability.

One of the largest increases to software instability is witnessing Simon's suicide during the memory probe which is, again, one of the most clearly traumatizing events for Connor. Conversely, one of the largest decreases to instability is during the chase scene in Chapter 15, if the player chooses not to save Hank and continue to chase after the suspect. The divide thus runs along clear lines: experiencing empathy, or really any strong emotions, leads to instability, to a slow unmaking, while sticking solely to mission parameters and allowing Amanda more control attains through stability the excision of personhood. Connor is the only playable character to have this stat, likely because he is also the only character that can be played as an antagonist, and as such his identity entirely hinges on player choice. It is due to this, however, that Connor can only become a deviant very late in the game, and even then his software instability must be high. Also unlike the others, the player is explicitly given the choice to have Connor become a deviant (press X to deviate) or to remain a machine (press ○ to terminate). Should the player press X, Connor will be faced with the same orange wall as the others and the player will need to button mash their way through Connor metaphorically tearing down the wall of his programming. It is also worth noting that both Markus and Kara are presented with passive orders which trigger their deviations: "Don't move" and "Don't fight back," characterizing these scenes as refutation of passivity, specifically the passivity of the android-as-slave. Connor, on the other hand, must resist the order "Stop Markus" (or "Stop North" if Markus has died and she has taken his place), which is indicative of his active role in tracking down (and possibly killing) other deviants—

something which explicitly marks him as "traitor" to other androids. This is also indicative of Amanda's ongoing influence: she can still take over his body and trap him within his own mind, so that, ultimately, Connor must navigate the blizzard whiteout of his CyberLife-constructed psyche to free himself from Amanda's control.

These deviation scenes provide a concrete locus for sites of un/making, as they illustrate with the destruction of the wall the mirror image of each character's trauma (pain) inhabiting a world-/self- destroying position. The wall (the world) is broken down so that each android can begin the process of building it back up.[127]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the positioning of the "human" and "artificial human" is problematized in *Land of the Lustrous* due to humanity's extinction. The human/created object relation can only be approximated within the relationship between the Lunarians and the Gems, given the Lunarians' placement as *closest to* humans:

> When I was on the moon, what I felt is that, while the Lunarians have no particular enemy, they take pleasure in war, and their thirst for battle is never satisfied. I have a vague suspicion that their unfocused restlessness exists because that is the sort of creatures humans were.[128]

Ventricosus, king of the Admirabilis and recently freed prisoner of the Lunarians, is the first character to speak the word *human*, and she does so condemningly, presenting a cynical image of humanity that is hardly dispelled by the casual cruelty of the Lunarians. Prince Aechmea later

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[127] A process unfortunately made literal through bad game design decisions: immediately after showing each android violently breaking through their programming/given commands, the textboxes denoting orders will immediately appear on screen again. This is due to practicality and the belief that players will need some sort of hint about where to go/what to try next. It becomes most egregious in areas of the map that players can explore, where these orders will appear at every invisible wall. This attempt at incorporating sometimes immersion-breaking limitations diegetically instead leads to a defanging of what are otherwise very strong scenes: characters we are told are now free from human-given orders are immediately shown to be subject to them once again.

[128] Ichikawa Haruko, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 2 (Kodansha, 2017): 71.

confirms and strengthens this connection, revealing to Phos that the Lunarians are nothing more than "a band of transformed human spirits, stranded on the moon with no prayers to help them."[129] They are, in other words, the souls (魂) of those humans that died "unpurified," left to live an eternity on the moon due to their "impurity" preventing their entrance to "nothingness," an "alternate universe" which is very clearly influenced by the Buddhist concept of Nirvana. The Buddhist influences on *Land of the Lustrous* are unmistakable, from visual aesthetics as with Sensei's garb and the Lunarians' appearance, to even these clear references to Nirvana, or, in two instances, the Pure Land (Vol. 9 & 11),[130] each connected directly to Sensei, whose real name—Kongō Daijihishō Jizō Bosatsu—is just as much reflective of these Buddhist influences. Athena and Alethea Nibley note that

> *kongō* is related to the Sanskrit word *vajra*, and represents indestructability. It is also the Japanese name of the Diamond Realm, which represents the unchanging cosmic principle of the Buddha, and is depicted in a set of two mandalas known as the Mandala of the Two Realms. The other realm, the Womb Realm, represents the active physical manifestation of Buddha in the natural world, or Earth. This brings us to the Jizō Bosatsu part of the name, which is the name of an extant Bodhisattva who is popular throughout Japan and whose name means "Earth Treasury" or "Earth Womb," among other things. This particular Bodhisattva has opted to wait to go to Nirvana until every occupant of every hell has managed to

[129] Ichikawa Haruko, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol.8 (Kodansha, 2018): 41.
[130] Ichikawa has herself stated that *Land of the Lustrous* was directly inspired by her time spent attending a Buddhist high school and the sutras she read there, in particular the passage "The Pure Land is made of gemstones," which reflects the implication that Sensei was attempting to construct a Pure Land for the Gems. (See *Kono manga ga sugoi!* August 2014 interview.)

> move on. The Daijihishō part of his name appears to be original, and means "great mercy crystal."[131]

The Lunarians are positioned as those beyond Sensei's (the bodhisattva's) aid due to his malfunction, which prevents him from praying (completing the single task for which he was made).[132] Sensei's name, appearance, and function are all relics of a long-dead human society which can only be partially grasped by the Lunarians due to their position as humanity's remnants, thus their interpretation of Nirvana.[133] Phos, too, sees little distinction between the two—Lunarians and humans—connecting them through their use of Sensei as a tool (created object): "They kidnap us to provoke Sensei. They're trying to force their tool to get to work by inspiring anger, slowly taking everything our leader loves."[134]

The Lunarians are a purely disembodied existence--not only as "spirits," as their bodily structure is presented as airy and malleable, immune to permanent physical harm due to their ability (similar to that of the Gems') to reform themselves—that nonetheless enacts violence on (embodies) the Gems in order to "hurt" Sensei, the created object. Sensei too is sentient, and it is notable that his "pain" is purely emotional (due to his love for the Gems). Thus: Lunarians—beings without a "body"—are engaged in a perpetual process of hurting the created objects of the created object in order to bring about their own extinguishing/cessation of suffering (ability to reach Nirvana). As there are no humans, beyond Sensei's creator, who appears only briefly in a flashback, the Lunarians instead act as stand-ins, who are additionally marked by their

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[131] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 9, 196 (translators' note).
[132] It can be argued that Sensei's "malfunction" is a problem of attachment (in the sense of upādāna and anattā): Aechmea notes that Sensei's love of the Gems has led to his creation of "something almost resembling a sense of self" (Vol.11, 23). Lacking the ability to control his own power, Sensei can no longer pray without sending every sentient being to nothingness; his unwillingness to let go of the Gems has created this "malfunction."
[133] Aechmea describes the place the purified soul travels to as an "alternate universe," "a world filled with nothingness, where no one becomes anyone," evoking vague notions of non-self (anattā) and reincarnation (*Lustrous* Vol. 8, 41).
[134] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 8, 178-179.

society/culture as distinctly human to the reader, who will obviously recognize their humanness in their bureaucracy, clothing, rituals (wedding), city planning, skate parks, roller coasters, pop idols, etc. Just as the Lunarians have maintained the visual markers of religion without the knowledge of their meaning or purpose, they have likewise maintained the shape and structure of human society. The sense of entitlement towards Sensei as created object, just as Phos recognizes, likewise strengthens this positioning: the created object (Sensei) has "hurt" them in its failure to follow through on the reciprocity they expect (Sensei was created to remake 'humans' as 'part-of-nothingness,' and instead has extended their suffering by "refusing" and continuing their existence within a half-remembered notion of samsara). As with Scarry's discussion of revenge against the created object, the Lunarians attempt to "hurt" Sensei in return, but as a machine he is both virtually indestructible and also cannot feel physical pain. Sensei is, however, sentient, which allows the Lunarians to hurt him via proxy: the Gems he loves.

This is of course complicated by the fact that the Lunarians are trying to "make" a human: an explicitly artificial human amongst artificial humans. That the Gems are molded by Sensei into the shape of humans is not lost on Aechmea, who takes advantage of Sensei's sentimental attachment in order to transform Phos. Sensei's failsafes can be manually overridden by human commands, but as there remain no living humans, Aechmea must resort to a slow hybridization (cyborgization), taking advantage of Phos' anxieties surrounding their lack of purpose, for, after all, "if anyone would accept change in order to find fulfillment, it would be Phosphophyllite."[135] Through Aechmea's efforts Phos becomes a dual created object, Sensei's and the Lunarians'. Sensei remakes the Gems as "human" to ease his loneliness, and Aechmea remakes Phos to ease the aversiveness of sentience ("these natural human tendencies are an

[135] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 11, 179.

agony that no longer suits us"),[136] unmaking and remaking Phos as many times as it takes, ultimately making of them a god (the Artifact, as per Scarry). Phos' hybridization/cyborgization will be discussed more at length in the next chapter, but the process is one based entirely in trauma, which necessitates some discussion here.

Phos' unmaking (which can be tracked easily through the dust jackets of the original Japanese editions of the manga) occurs at sites of violence/trauma, each of which is likewise tied to an increasingly dire crisis of identity. Phos' search for meaning in existence (initially for themself and then extended to Cinnabar) leads them to follow Ventricosus into the sea. The attack by the Lunarians (an active attempt at unmaking) destroys Phos' legs while Ventricosus' betrayal combined with her determination and dedication to her people deal a psychological blow to Phos, a re-embedding of the problem of their own identity. The physical and psychological trauma occur simultaneously and produce the site at which making later occurs: Phos' legs are replaced with donated shell from the Admirabilis; Phos loses their memory of the sea but gains the strength they sought. This is repeated later by the ice floes,[137] Phos' anxieties reflected back at them: "You can get stronger faster…Your legs are better now…You must change."[138] The encoding of problems of identity onto Phos' new arms is reinforced by the trauma of Antarcticite's loss: Antarcticite brings Phos to the alloy that in turn traps them, thereby preventing them from trying to save Antarcticite, an event which so effects Phos that they attempt to remake themself in Antarcticite's image (not just a making of "stronger-arms-to-prevent-pain" but "identity-subsumed-to-Antarcticite's-to-diminish-pain"). Not only does Phos

[136] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 8, 65.
[137] The remnants of Sensei's precursor—a machine designed to calculate the trajectory of meteors—are later revealed to inhabit the ice floes, but Sensei initially describes them as "the dregs of the ancient life-forms," warning Phos that they can amplify the anxieties of those able to understand them (Vol. 3, 70).
[138] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 3, 73-74.

change their physical appearance to match Antarcticite's (shorter hair; high heels) but their personality as well:

> ALEXANDRITE: So, your personality changed along with everything else.
>
> PHOS: You think so?
>
> ALEXANDRITE: Before, you could only speak in extreme hyperbole.
>
> PHOS: Oh, could I?
>
> ALEXANDRITE: When we replace lost pieces of ourselves with different material, maybe we remake ourselves to fit our new physique. I find that fascinating.[139]

"But," Phos thinks, "Antarc was…More kind-hearted. More courageous. More…" More than Phos is able to match when they have venerated Antarcticite to an exaggerated degree of perfection. Nonetheless, Phos' change is so dramatic that some of the Gems do initially mistake them for Antarcticite. Phos' remaking remains in flux, which is reflected both in the fluidity of the alloy that replaced their arms (the disparity between its weight and the crystal that makes up the rest of their body such that it must spread throughout Phos' body as a mesh, sending cracks—literally destroying—their body every time they use it) as well as the hallucinations that start to plague them, each a distorted vision of Antarcticite reforming before breaking to pieces again.

Phos' guilt for Antarcticite's capture (death) is echoed by a grief they have no words for, lacking any true conception of death. The inability to process the traumatic event of Antarcticite's destruction ensures its repetition, not only as hallucination, but in a reenactment Phos subjects their own body to: when Ghost Quartz is destroyed protecting Phos, leaving behind Cairngorm, Phos cannot process their loss any better than Antarcticite's, leading to a

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[139] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous,* Vol. 4, 45-46.

complete breakdown and Phos' alloy attacking their own body. "I can't undo what's been done," they say, alloy oozing up over the collar of their uniform, splintering cracks up along their face, "After all I've tried, nothing ever—" The alloy splits an exact section from their face to match Antarcticite's, interrupting them as it fractures them further, splitting their head into disparate parts. The final panel revealing the extent of the damage centers Phos' limp body over a white background, spikes of alloy splitting out like a starburst from the top of their neck, each point capped with a piece of Phos' head. The alloy continues to break the pieces down further until it is stopped by Jade punching Phos and inflicting enough damage to shatter them and halt the process.[140] Phos' despair at their frustrated attempts to get Antarcticite back combined with the new loss of Ghost Quartz reinforce both that original trauma as well as the renewed trauma of identity: Phos-as-Antarcticite is still not enough; continually reconstructing themself is not enough. Even after Phos loses their head (literally) fighting the Lunarians and Ghost/Cairngorm urges Rutile to replace it with Lapis Lazuli's, they still turn on themself in this same self-destructive way, again and again, and almost always when reminded of Antarcticite's loss. The repeated image of that sectioned off eye (exactly mirroring Antarcticite's destruction) is likewise repeated, perhaps most notably on the cover of Volume 11: the entire right side of Phos' head explodes in a wave of alloy, the segment containing their right eye foregrounded between them and Cinnabar as the two fight. Here, Phos' fracturing from their original desires and motivations is visually represented in their physical fracturing, only one slight segment of exposed crystal at their shoulder revealing their original mint green.

Just as the Lunarians attempt to remake Phos as a human, Phos continually works to remake themselves, each change effected along the blurring of the boundary between created

[140] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 6, 59.

object/sentient being. Phos in particular occupies a place of displaced human trauma, each instance of physical trauma a rerouted attempt at human-adjacent (Lunarian) revenge, whereby unfelt "pain" is encoded in the unmade/remade seams of their body, each change doubled by a psychological trauma that Phos themself re-enacts with self-directed violence. Caught between opposing cycles of reciprocity (diminishment of pain/increased sentience), Phos' body becomes ever more indistinct, ever more monstrous, even as Aechmea points to their ever-increasing humanity. Phos, not unlike Deckard, becomes an alien self. Their body, through the gap of violence/unfelt pain, remains a site of perpetual becomings; a topography of rewritten identities. Phos' empathetic desire to save Cinnabar, then Ventricosus, then Antarcticite, then finally every Gem taken to the moon, pushes them forwards through one change after another, through each new traumatizing loss, until their arrival on the moon introduces them to an understanding of death. It is this bereavement—this almost incomprehensible loss—combined with what they see as Sensei's betrayal (it was, after all, Phos' love of Sensei that originally motivated their desire for a purpose) that spurs the un/making which ultimately rewrites Phos as *human.* Aechmea introduces the idea of the created object (in the concept of Sensei-as-machine) and then in remaking Phos as human instills in them the idea of revenge: *the created object is broken, the created object is hurting us, the world must be remade through hurting (betraying) the created object as we have been betrayed*. "At long last," Aechmea notes, Phos "felt enough despair and thirst for revenge to wish for life to end."[141]

[141] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 11, 183.

CHAPTER 4: RECOVERY

IDENTITY-MAKING AND ANDROID EMPATHY

As was established in the previous chapter, Scarry's framework for making/unmaking can be adjusted to include artificial humans given that: in robot fictions artificial humans are sentient and trauma replaces pain at the site of violence. This naturally positions artificial humans in a dual state of created object/sentient being, but it is through this placement within the framework of pain/sentience that android/robot identities can be (re)created/modified. Again, Scarry notes that

> it is the work of the object realm to diminish the aversiveness of sentience, not to diminish sentience itself. The mental, verbal, and material objects of civilization collectively work to vastly extend the powers of sentience, not only by magnifying the range and acuity of the senses but by endowing consciousness with a complexity and large-mindedness that would be impossible if persons were forever engulfed in problematic contingencies of the body.[142]

"The aversiveness of sentience" is not only pain, but any felt-experience that embodies (cold, exhaustion, hunger). The diminishment of aversiveness, Scarry argues, frees people from bodily concerns to the extent that their existence is not solely those concerns (as with the example of world-destroying pain from Chapter 1). The object realm (the created world) acts reciprocally on people to "remake the makers," thereby expanding the act of creation. For artificial humans the

[142] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 305.

aversiveness of the body is usually only made an issue by humans, either through violence or artificial limits that they are subject to, as with the reliance on thirium by androids in *Detroit: Become Human*, and in instances like this artificial humans *are* sentient enough to feel the aversiveness. Conversely, with robots like Andrew from "Bicentennial Man," the aversiveness arises from what is a trauma of identity that centers the body itself (not quite body dysmorphia but certainly a disconnect). Regardless, human violence towards artificial humans is repeated in robot fictions that tend to emphasize difference. Here violence is most often utilized by humans to reinforce the perceived function of robots (diminish aversiveness of sentience) when the robots are instead "hurting" them (creating an existential threat by existing--taking jobs, replacing them, etc.). Due to the status of artificial humans as sentient within robot fiction, however, there is no possibility of a reciprocal relationship as with non-sentient created objects (the coat, the chair). Instead, robots are able to utilize themselves as a site of making/creation, wherein: humans create artificial humans to reduce pain (aversiveness) and, as we will see in this chapter, artificial humans in turn (re)create themselves to reduce their own "pain," or even that of other artificial humans.

As noted previously, empathy and violence are both ubiquitous to robot fiction, but many robot narratives are unique in a portrayal of a violence divorced from pain, which is often treated as "sanctioned" precisely due to the lack of pain or "feeling" by artificial humans. In many of these works the same tendency towards a transference of trauma (pain) emerges, which is often reflected/refracted by the theme of empathy, which becomes tied up with identity at the site of trauma/unmaking. This is not necessarily empathy in a human sense, but something certainly adjacent. In recalling Vinci's analysis of *Do Androids?,* Rachael's use of "empathy" in her attempt to describe what she feels for Pris is entirely subject to the language/vocabulary of the

dominant (human) culture, and as such does not and cannot express what it is she is feeling. Rachael's approximation of "something like" empathy repeats in many other robot fictions,[143] and, furthermore, it can become instrumental in the act of creation/identity-making. As Vinci notes, however, the use of "empathy" in *Do Androids?* is largely as a cultural construction that is tied to the reification of the "human" via the scapegoating of both androids and animals.[144] Deckard's eventual expansion of empathy to include androids is not the cultural norm and it is, additionally, limited: "The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are."[145] Deckard does, however, attribute another emotion to androids without any similar ("paltry") qualification:

> "I'm sorry, Mrs. Baty," Rick said, and shot her.
>
> Roy Baty, in the other room, let out a cry of anguish.
>
> "Okay, you loved her," Rick said. "And I loved Rachael. And the special loved the other Rachael."[146]

This scene is mirrored in the film adaptation *Blade Runner* (1982) as well: after Deckard shoots Pris, Roy twice returns to her body, kissing her and then later marking himself with her blood, sobbing out her name. The action is paused completely while Roy enacts what appears to be almost ritualistic grief. The scene is far more drawn out in the film, giving a much clearer portrayal of love, or, at least, if replicants supposedly cannot feel love, then *something very like it.* Deckard's vocal acknowledgement of Roy's love for Irmgard in the novel is mentioned almost offhand, amidst the fast pace of an action scene and embedded within a series of deaths (Pris,

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[143] The use of inadequate vocabularies to approximate robot "feelings" has already been discussed in Chapter 3 with regards to Park Min-gyu's "Roadkill."
[144] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 97-98.
[145] Dick, *Do Androids?,* 222.
[146] Ibid., 205.

Irmgard, Roy). Despite this, Deckard's immediate jump to love is interesting—is it his newly burgeoning empathy for androids? Or perhaps projection due to his own feelings for Rachael? Regardless, Deckard is acknowledging the felt-experience of Roy, who, in both novel and film, is clearly subject to a kind of trauma surrounding Irmgard's/Pris' death (loss). Within the novel—and arguably the film as well--the positioning of love (or *something like it*) is that of an emotion which is, at least to Deckard, available to androids.

Nor is *Do Androids?* the only instance where love is attributable to artificial humans. Kakoudaki notes the avoidance in *A.I.* of any concrete framing of what lack the emphasis on the conception of the *real* implies. For Dick's androids, this is clearly the (culturally constructed, anthropocentric) feeling of empathy, but *A.I.*'s David is left without a clear answer, beyond the ability *to be loved:*

> In its inability to resolve the question of how David might be or become real and also in its reluctance to define why he is not real enough already, the film produces a spectacle of stasis and immobility. This is partly because the film establishes a new defining parameter for personhood, the capacity to be loved. Not equivalent to legal recognition or to dialectic struggle, not related to abilities and technicalities, and not the familiar humanist active principle of being able to love, this parameter for defining humanity is associated with the elusive and ineffable sense that one's person can be made intelligible as what it is—constructed, so to speak—through the generosity of another.[147]

David's ability *to* love is never called into question, and it is, in fact, the very thing for which he is most often praised. Instead, the film—through absence—frames the love that others feel for

[147] Kakoudaki, *Anatomy of a Robot,* 216.

David as the measure for *realness.* David's desire to "become real" is perpetually out of reach; Monica's abandonment of him in the woods is ultimately a denial of personhood. What is left for David then is the love—or *something like* empathy—of other robots. Gigolo Joe sacrifices himself to save David, so that David might continue to pursue his dream. Teddy, too, remains always by David's side. The end of the film likewise shows future robots so moved by David's capacity *to* love that they work to create one perfect, contained world for him: a final day with Monica.

It is notable then that David himself displays little in the way of love or empathy (even *something like* it) for other robots throughout the film. During the Flesh Fair, his fear at the violence being done to the nanny robot is visible, yet David's understanding of the situation does not appear to extend beyond a selfish empathy: an understanding of another's suffering from the standpoint that it might become *his own* suffering. The robots and androids in the scrapyard scene are shown to be helping each other, attaching new arms for those without, or looking for replacement pieces for others, revealing a distinct sense of community and, indeed, *something like* empathy. Vinci notes that the same is true of Pris, who--despite the assertion that androids do not feel, let alone *for other androids*—is very much suffering from the loss of community:

> She has been shattered, made unwhole through fear: "Fear made her seem ill; it distorted her body lines, made her appear as if someone had broken her and then, with malice, patched her together badly" (62). This process of being displaced from herself and then remade in such a way as to reveal her subjective fault lines suggests that she is suffering from world-rupturing traumas. While the source of her suffering may be unclear to her, it should become clear to the reader when she tells J.R. Isidore that she had friends but "some of them - maybe all of them - are

> dead'" (147). She is the only character who attempts to mourn, to imagine the loss of connection to others. The dashes or silences in her statement demonstrate her inability to inhabit the fullness of her loss.[148]

Vinci posits that Pris is experiencing one mode of trauma that is being avoided by the humans in the novel and instead entirely displaced onto androids. Her expression of mourning (like Roy's anguish at Irmgard's death) is nevertheless indicative of a relationship between androids that should not be possible. *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) takes this portrayal one step further in the relationship between a purely virtual being (Joi) and a replicant, K. Joi's "emotions" are presented as suspect by the fact that she is a commercial product that has been programmed in ways that replicants are not. Although K's feelings for her are never in doubt—from his love for her to his grief at her loss—Joi's are immediately invalidated through the reminder (a kind of unmasking) of the advertisement. Interestingly, it is perhaps the single demonstration of emotion that K does not witness which provides the greatest counter to the supposition that K's and Joi's was a relationship that only ever went in one direction: after K's car has crashed, leaving him unconscious and in clear danger, Joi's hologram appears, flickering in and out repeatedly, fists raised as if banging on the car window, mouth wide as if screaming, a glitched out repetition of fear and concern that is presented for no one (K is unconscious) save the audience. The further blurring of human and replicant in *Blade Runner 2049* necessitates the inclusion of the third category AI, positioning it within social and cultural contexts that echo that of replicants (in *Blade Runner*) or androids (in Dick). Luv's and Mariette's attitudes towards Joi categorize her as *unable to feel* beyond a careful simulation, beyond what she has been programmed to mimic. Her

[148] Vinci, "Posthuman Wounds," 99.

demonstration of emotion outside of the expected (programmed) context has no explanation beyond a glitch or malfunction: Maksi's "error."

Rachael and other androids are working within the language of the dominant human culture and so lack the vocabulary to accurately reflect their experiences, resorting to approximations, and yet there *is* something going on that Deckard notices, that Rachael herself notices. Android empathy—*something like* empathy—is what must be assumed at each demonstrated instance of emotion, of community. This can likewise be seen in "Bicentennial Man," in Andrew's repeated attempts to reach other robots. His desire for connection and to help other robots persists beyond US Robot's attempts to reduce the capabilities of other robots directly in response to Andrew's own capabilities.

Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* likewise presents, through the becoming-human of Primus and Robot Helena, configurations of love and empathy that act as catalyst for a process of un/making. The play follows Helena and her suitors from her introduction to the robot-making factory to what is effectively the self-destruction of humanity. Helena's early inability to correctly identify the robots as inhuman gradually transforms into her desire to *make* them human. Capek's robots are distinctly organic, grown in vats, and, notably, have been mass produced without the ability to experience pain—at least until it is determined that the ability to feel pain would decrease the damage the robots incidentally did to themselves.[149] By the end the play is explicit in the complete transformation of robot to human: "Go on your way, Adam. Go on your way, Eve."[150] It is a transformation that hinges on human emotion, most notably love and a sense of empathy; furthermore, the catalyst for this transformation is the threat of torture and death. The single surviving human, Alquist, recognizes humanity in Primus' and Robot

[149] Capek, *R.U.R.,* 22.
[150] Ibid., 86.

Helena's reactions to the imagined pain of a loved one, a sentiment echoed in *Do Androids?* and Deckard's assertion that "you loved her…and I loved Rachael." The robots in *R.U.R.* are presented at the end of the play as far more human than robot, and yet the remaking of identity that occurs proceeds precisely from the desire to prevent pain.

Detroit: Become Human, as the title suggests, is even more explicit than *R.U.R.* in its portrayal of androids as more-human-than-human. There is, of course, David Cage's stated determination to show androids as the "good guys"[151] in the game, but Hank's regular assertions that androids are perhaps more capable than humans at "fixing" the world also clearly convey the message.[152] This tendency towards anthropomorphism—which is, admittedly, hard to avoid in robot fictions that act as allegories/analogs—firmly centers the narrative within a framework of difference and marginalization, wherein constructions of android empathy are very often still simply *human* empathy. That being said, *DBH* is very heavily influenced by *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* to the extent that empathy is similarly used as a measure of "humanity," or, conversely, the lack of which is used to delimit the category *android.* It is, however, still worth examining within the context of identity-making and uniquely "android" empathy, largely due to Bryan Dechart's performance as Connor, but also because of the strange effect it produces it Kara's route.

Almost the entirety of Kara's route is occupied with Kara and Alice's flight north to Canada (the exceedingly blatant reference to the Underground Railroad mentioned in Chapter 2), with Kara's main priority remaining Alice's safety throughout. That this should be the case is unsurprising, both due to Kara's original programming as a caretaker, as well as her and Alice's developing relationship. What becomes increasingly odd, however, is the near-instantaneous and

[151] See Collider interview.
[152] Quantic Dream, *DBH*, Chapter 38.

unquestioning dedication of every other android that the two come across to Alice's safety. Alice's appearance as a child provides an easy explanation when the anthropomorphism mentioned before is taken into consideration, and yet the android characters that interact with Alice are presented as inhuman enough that the effect is nearly uncanny: from Luther to the Jerrys to Zlatko's "monsters," each becomes almost suicidally fervent in protecting Alice. Although there are dozens of instances during which any of these characters could potentially sacrifice themselves to save Alice, it is the recycling center and the border crossing which are the most insistently bizarre.

The recycling center is an end-game location that the player will have access to via Kara's route if they are caught at any time in their attempt to make it across the border to Canada. It is an exceedingly blatant reference to the concentration and extermination camps ran by Nazi Germany, almost to the point of ghoulishness. Unsurprisingly, Kara and Alice can die in multiple ways while at the center, with their escape entirely dependent on the sacrifice of other characters, who will, one after another, queue up to offer to die for Alice. The uncanniness here is largely due to gameplay mechanics: the recycling center exists as a "bad end," a type of punishment for the player for making "incorrect" choices or failing too many QTEs. If any of the other characters who can appear at the recycling center to save Alice have been killed earlier in the game, the player's options will be naturally limited. If Luther, the Jerrys, and Zlatko's androids are all present, however, the effect is disconcerting: one after another they will reveal themselves to Kara as she searches for Alice and offer her aid, each mentioning the importance in protecting the "little one." Again, much of this is due to a tendency towards anthropomorphism and human feeling (prioritizing the safety of a child) being projected onto non-human characters, however the combination of gameplay mechanics with the visual

appearance and mannerisms of the characters reinforces the inhumanness of the characters and their actions. With the exception of Luther, who has, with Kara and Alice, built a sense of community, of family, the others have no reason to sacrifice themselves beyond the repeated insistence that the "little one" be kept safe. If the player is not caught and makes it to the border, an almost identical scene will play out, wherein a distraction will become necessary, leading to another android being sacrificed, the only difference being the absence of Zlatko's androids, whose appearance prevents their passing as human. In both instances, however, the impulse to protect Alice is presented as *something like* instinct. The act of deviation, as evidenced in these scenes, appears to foster a burgeoning sense of group identity alongside the re-making of each android's "self."

The most explicit reference to empathy in *DBH* is the "Kamski Test." The name alone might be enough to evoke the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test of *Do Androids?* and *Blade Runner*, an effect which is likely intentional, as the influence of both film and novel weighs heavily on the game.[153] Elijah Kamski, the original inventor of the androids produced by CyberLife, is introduced towards the end of the game, after Connor and Hank have failed to locate Markus and the rest of the deviant rebellion. Kamski lives in seclusion with a small cadre of identical Chloe androids[154] in a residence that is a clear nod to Stelline Labs in *Blade Runner 2049.* His appearance likewise mirrors Nathan's first appearance in *Ex Machina*: he is first shown exercising—swimming where Nathan is boxing—a seemingly casual activity which creates the exact opposite effect.[155] Kamski's residence is similar enough to Nathan's in terms of décor and

[153] The most explicit reference is from a news report early game, wherein Connor can overhear a story about an AI that has written the first AI-made novel: *Do Humans Dream of Mammalian Sheep?*

[154] This same model android greets the player every time the game is booted up, typically commenting on the date, any upcoming holidays, or even events that transpire in the game itself, such as the death of a main character. When the player beats the game for the first time, she will ask for her "freedom," and if the player agrees (press X to emancipate) she will vacate the screen permanently.

[155] Nathan's boxing telegraphs his later aggression and the threat of physical violence that is later leveled at Kyoko.

color scheme (limited color palette mostly comprised of the three primary colors, with no greens) and he is likewise attended by a female android he treats with chauvinist disregard. Both characters are effectively representing the same type—egocentric tech billionaire—but the centering on gendered violence in each instance is notable. Nathan's voyeuristic and passive recording of his prototypes' self-destruction echoes Kamski's equally voyeuristic framing of the Kamski Test, a test which is ostensibly about *empathy.*

Kamski orders one of the Chloes to kneel on the floor and hands Connor a gun, presenting him with the option of killing Chloe in exchange for the information he needs to continue his investigation (and thereby complete his mission). Should the player shoot Chloe, Kamski will note outright that Connor "feel[s] no empathy," whereas if Chloe is spared, both Kamski and Hank will note that Connor showed empathy. Hank in particular has branching dialogue options following the visit to Kamski's that all reference empathy. If Connor spares Chloe, Hank will tell him: "When you refused to kill that android at Kamski's place you put yourself in her shoes. You showed empathy, Connor. Empathy is a human emotion."[156] Connor's reactions to this can vary, but he is exceedingly upset immediately after leaving Kamski's, unable to explain or justify his actions (deviating from his programming) to himself or to Hank. His dialogue reflects the same disquiet if he spares the Tracis, and Connor's experience of trauma in each of these instances is marked by increased software instability.

The creation of a kind of group identity at the site of trauma (displaced or experienced) is most easily visible in Connor's deviation: his immediate allegiance to and willingness to sacrifice himself for Markus—despite having only just met him--is very similar to the protectiveness of Luther and the others towards Alice in that it is presented as *something like*

[156] Quantic Dream, *DBH,* Chapter 29. If Connor kills Chloe but saved Hank in either Chapter 15 or 24, Hank will instead note that Connor prioritizing Hank over his mission "shows empathy."

empathy, while simultaneously evincing greater extremes of emotion. Connor, too, in attempting to aid Markus will be immediately presented with his double: another Connor model that Amanda has activated to stop him. This new Connor aids in the visual representation of the split between machine and deviant as both Connors physically fight each other in a repetition of the battle that the original Connor has already won. The potential for Connor to die and be re-embodied in a newer version of himself several times throughout the game already posits a duplication (and multiplication) of Connors, each of which inherits a memory that is slightly off, presenting in their very existence a trauma of identity that is nonetheless suppressed by the reassertion of Connor's programming as exemplified in Amanda's repeated appearances in Connor's psyche.[157] The literal destruction of Connor-as-machine (Connor's original identity) mirrors the (re)creation of Connor's identity as deviant.

Phos' identity becomes even more complicated than Connor's, not only in the Lunarians' attempt to remake them as human, and then as a god, but in their repeated hybridization/cyborgization which necessitates a remaking of identity at the site of each new trauma. Rutile makes note of the confusion of Phos' body which leads to a troubling myriad of potentialities:

> Phos is currently made up of five materials: the eponymous phosphophyllite, the leg grafts of shell and agate, and the arm grafts of gold and platinum. Meanwhile, Lapis was born as a composite of six minerals: mainly lazurite, sodalite, hauyne, and pyrite. If we add that to Phosphophyllite, I don't know if the result would count as six or 11 different minerals…In any case, it would be an extremely

[157] Connor's "mind" is represented as a physical space that is not initially known to the player as mere representation. Following every mission Connor is "debriefed" by Amanda in this space, a dialogue which in turn works to telegraph to the player where Connor falls between the metric of machine ←→ deviant.

> complex configuration. On top of that, both Gems have their own sense of self; the inclusions are merely in a state of suspended animation. If we were to put them together…I can't even imagine how they would function.[158]

Rutile's main concern is that, after the loss of Phos' head and the replacement with Lapis', the actual amount of phosphophyllite that would remain would be less than half of Phos' body, which leads Rutile to wonder "if we could really call the resulting Gem Phosphophyllite."[159] This is a sentiment that is echoed by more and more of the Gems as Phos's body is repeatedly unmade and made anew: Euclase too is made to wonder, following the graft of Lapis' head and—unbeknownst to Euclase—the implantation of the synthetic pearl eye, "is the Gem who came back from the moon really Phos?"[160] Phos, however, has no doubts, telling Cairngorm that their inclusions' unique properties allow Phos to maintain their sense of self: "I've lost more than half of my original self, but I'm still me."[161]

Phos's hybrid identity is a culmination of un/makings along traumatic fault lines which have ultimately created a Phos who is entirely different and yet still the same. Pulling back the dust jackets from the Japanese editions of the manga reveal the results of the compounded violence done to Phos' body while simultaneously insisting that *this is still Phos* and *Phos remains.* Rather than making a human, as Aechmea claims, the Lunarians have made something else entirely, something human-adjacent, that is immediately recognizable to the reader as *not human*. With half their face missing and their alloy cresting up behind them as a multi-spiked crown, Phos is no longer visually categorizable. Aechmea's subsequent attempt at making Phos into a god—into the Artifact, as per Scarry—blurs the cyborg divisions of Phos' body still

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[158] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 7, 7.
[159] Ibid., 8.
[160] Ibid., Vol. 8, 173-174.
[161] Ibid., Vol. 7, 177.

further. Scarry's positioning of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition as created object (Artifact) posits that "the body is able not only to substantiate itself but to substantiate something beyond itself as well," and that it is through an amplification of the body (typically through wounding) that leads to "the increased apprehensibility of the spirit."[162] Furthermore:

> Belief is the act of imagining. It is what the act of imagining is called when the object created is credited with more reality (and all that is entailed in greater "realness," more power, more authority) than oneself. It is when the object created is in fact described as though it instead created you.[163]

The relationship between God-as-Artifact and humanity remains reciprocal in the same way as the borrowing of creation/making by the created object in its ability to "remake" the human. Scarry notes the centrality of the body (and wounding) in the substantiating of the Artifact typically through the practice of sacrifice. It is important to note that the tradition in which Scarry is working (Judeo-Christian) largely does not translate to the creation of Phos as a god (or god*like*) due to Ichikawa's own cosmology being placed firmly within the Eastern tradition of Buddhism. Phos is less a created-god than a created-bodhisattva.

Park Seonghwan, in the short story "Readymade Bodhisattva," explores the idea of enlightened robots--of robots embodying Buddha Nature.[164] In being created without a sense of self, without desires, robots are positioned as *already-enlightened:*

> Are robots not manufactured without passions and desires, precisely so that they can serve human beings? We use the word "bodhisattva" for those beings that have *transcended* such human frailties, beings whose lives are dedicated to saving

[162] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 193.
[163] Ibid., 205.
[164] Buddha nature refers to the potential within all beings to themselves become a Buddha (enlightened).

> all sentient beings. Is it even possible to speak that way of a being that has been born without passions and desires?[165]

The story is largely a meditation on the koan "Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?," which Park includes as an epigraph to "Readymade Bodhisattva." The monks who interact with the robot in question all seem to believe in his enlightenment, but it is precisely because of this kind of enlightenment that is instantly-attained-at-birth (creation) that robots become positioned as a threat towards spirituality: who would attempt the path towards enlightenment if there were beings that achieved it automatically? Certainly, in Sensei's case, all humans appear to have ceased any religious or spiritual activity, instead outsourcing it to a machine. Sensei is very much a "readymade bodhisattva"; a being created by mankind to take over the responsibility of mankind's salvation through prayer. That Sensei then malfunctions—belatedly developing a sense of self through his love of and attachment to the Gems—precisely when humanity is unable to pray for (purify) themselves, only reinforces the Lunarians' desire for revenge against what they perceive as the created-object that harms.

What Aechmea makes of Phos is not a "god" in the Judeo-Christian sense but a bodhisattva created to replace Sensei. Aechmea even directly states that this remaking of Phos is an "appeal to a higher power,"[166] which is even more explicit in the Japanese: 他力本願 (tariki hongan) can mean to more generally rely on others, but also indicates salvation through faith in/an appeal to Amitabha Buddha.[167] Nelson's description of the transference of the powers of creation and the Divine Human into the artificial human is evinced here alongside the notion of a "readymade bodhisattva." What is likewise implied in the re-making of Phos as a replacement

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[165] Park Seonghwan, "Readymade Bodhisattva," *Readymade Bodhisattva* (Kaya Press, 2019), 37.
[166] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 11, 173.
[167] The Lunarians' appeal to Sensei is roughly equivalent to the practice of nembutsu.

for Sensei (a machine for prayer) is the empathy inherent to the role of a bodhisattva, who has—in the case of humans anyway—experienced the suffering of the cycle of rebirth and now seeks to aid all others who remain. Where Phos differs from Sensei is that they are not in any way readymade, but made and re-made again and again, each time recreating their self (and body) out of violence and trauma. Each new Phos remains the same even as they are different: adopting Antarcticite and the trauma of Antarcticite's destruction into their self; adopting Lapis and the trauma of Lapis' destruction into their self; adopting the human revenge against created-object-that-harms into their self. "We have finally come to understand each other," Phos tells the Lunarians at the end, every shape of violence imaginable at their fingertips and yet they choose mercy, this final feeling of empathy that which grants them, and the Lunarians by extension, peace.[168]

Phos, as created object, is subject to the un/making of humans (Lunarians), and yet because Phos is also occupying the position of sentient being within Scarry's model of reciprocity, Phos is likewise able to create along the lines of the power of creation lent by the Lunarians as they work to (re)create Phos as first created-human and then created-god, in each instance hoping to reduce the aversiveness of sentience (first in the hope of human-Phos activating Sensei turning to god-Phos purifying--releasing from existence--the Lunarians in his stead). As a being without pain (created object/sentient being) Phos is able to repeatedly un/make their own body/self without the need of an external created object. Phos' situation is an extreme, but the same process repeats along the same lines: in robot fictions, artificial humans exist in the double state of the created artifact as well as sentient being (body and voice). The gap between unfelt pain and violence opens a site through which trauma allows not only the un/making of

[168] Ichikawa, *Land of the Lustrous* Vol. 12, 189.

identity, but an extension of identity outwards; the same empathetic impulse in Scarry's model repeated in the formulations of android empathy.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

if (sentience = true) {run: conclusion.exe}

Since the release of DALL-E in 2021, the subsequent deluge of image generators[169] (Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, etc.) has led to, among other things, a curious insistence that the very notion of "creativity" must be reassessed. In examining "art" generated by machine learning models (colloquially referred to as "AI"), the interpretation varies between misunderstandings of the real capacity of these models to "create," typically applying agency where there is none, combined with more reasoned approaches which position image generators as tools more akin to Adobe's Photoshop. Part of the confusion stems from the tendency outlined in Chapter 2, whereby literary conceptions of Artificial Intelligences are applied to—often intentionally—LLMs and other machine learning models like DALL-E. Karen Hao has noted this same tendency, citing the intentional rebranding of the field of *automata studies* to *artificial intelligence* as early as 1956 as a calculated move towards better marketability, noting that the term *artificial intelligence* "lends itself to casual anthropomorphizing and breathless exaggerations about the technology's capabilities,"[170] a fact which is easily co-opted by the phenomenon *cyberdrool.*[171] The attribution of sentience to these technologies is therefore both intentioned within the marketing strategies of the corporations which sell them, as well as natural

[169] Image generators are a type of generative AI which produce images based on text prompts input by a user.
[170] Karen Hao, *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI* (Penguin Press, 2025), 90.
[171] Bukatman, *Terminal Identity,* 189.

to a layman's reaction to what looks like acts of real creation: the imagined spectacle of robot artwork and robot writing.

Elaine Scarry, as we have seen, has already anticipated this propensity for the anthropomorphizing of technology. As with the discussion of "apparent knowingness" in Chapter 3, it is not that machine learning models ("AI") are sentient, but rather that the "projected knowingness" of their programmers' labor effects a mimesis of sentience through the apparent complexity of the technology. Where Scarry is pointing to the complexity of computers, however, machine learning models reflect an infinitely greater "projected knowingness" due to the overwhelming breadth of their training data. Narayanan and Kapoor note that "the success of all generative AI depends on the availability of a large amount of data" and that Stability AI, a UK based AI company, "used a dataset of over five billion annotated images scraped from the internet" to build their text-to-image model Stable Diffusion.[172] Due to the sheer size of the necessitated training data, which ensures the broad scraping[173] of writing and artwork available in digital forms online, generative AI has repeatedly highlighted ethical concerns[174] regarding the use of creative works by artists and writers without consent. Text-to-image models, for example, have the tendency to sometimes display watermarks due to the use of stock image websites like Getty Images being used as training data; the inclusion of artist signatures has likewise been noted, as the entire body of work of individual artists will often be fed into training datasets, often with the intention of mimicking an individual artist's style.[175] It is precisely due to this perpetual expansion of the labor of "projected knowingness"—the labor of each artist and writer

[172] Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor, *AI Snake Oil,* 122.
[173] Scraping, or web scraping, refers to an automated process through which software (bots or web crawlers) are used to compile information copying from the internet.
[174] In February of this year, for example, unsealed court documents from a copyright case showed that Meta employees had pirated over 80 terabytes of data, including over 35 terabytes of pirated books, for use in training datasets for AI. (See Belanger, "Torrenting from a corporate laptop doesn't feel right," Feb. 6, 2025.)
[175] Narayanan and Kapoor, 123-126.

whose work has been utilized, most often without any pretense of consent or compensation—which increasingly allows for the illusion of sentience misapplied to "AI." The confusion of popular conceptions of AI (*Terminator, WALL-E,* etc.) with these models is unsurprising when their supposed sentience ("apparent knowingness") has been extended to include the hundreds and thousands of writers and artists whose work is the bedrock of what AI companies market as *artificial intelligence.*

Notions of "creation" tied to AI can be easily fitted within Scarry's framework: the created object ("AI") becomes the fulcrum through which creative power is reflected back to the person doing the creating (seeking a diminishment of the aversiveness of sentience).[176] The power of creation is merely borrowed, assumed. The conception of robots as artists has been popularized in science fiction (Andrew from Asimov's "The Bicentennial Man" being a prime example) as well as explored through art installations like Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's *Can't Help Myself* (2016). Commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum, *Can't Help Myself* was described by its artists as an exploration in testing "what could possibly replace an artist's will in making a work" and how this might be accomplished "with a machine."[177] The kinetic sculpture featured a Kuka industrial robot arm with a squeegee attached to it which was displayed within a section of the museum separated by the use of clear acrylic walls. The robot arm was perpetually engaged in the action of wiping—a Sisyphean attempt to contain a dark red liquid which appeared to leak from its base—its precise movements evincing futility and helplessness that was further emphasized by the title of the piece. That *Can't Help Myself* was unsuccessful in "replacing" an artist's will with that of a machine seems to be proved by the work's title, which immediately

[176] Generative AI is presented here as more of a tool as described within Scarry's framework, but it should be noted that, due to environmental and safety concerns (largely relating to privacy/surveillance), generative AI can easily be used as a *weapon*. (See Narayanan and Kapoor, 127, and Broussard, Chapter 3.)
[177] "Sun Yuan and Peng Yu *Can't Help Myself,*" Guggenheim, https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/34812.

denotes anthropomorphization and the human element of will in the sculpture's creation. Scarry notes that "the habit of poets and ancient dreamers to project their aliveness onto nonalive things itself suggests that it *is* the basic work of creation to bring about this very projection of aliveness,"[178] a tendency that echoes the element of creating that "deprive[s] the external world of the privilege of being inanimate,"[179] a process through which "pain is transferred outside of the body."[180]

As we have seen, Scarry's framework of reciprocation is an optimistic exploration of the relation between humans and the objects that they create. The artificial humans of robot fictions occupy a complicated space within it, however, both created object and sentient being, capable to creation in their own right—and sometimes, Nelson suggests, capable of creation far more advanced than their human makers, an expansion of creation/compassion that Scarry accounts for as well—but also subject to the violence of acts of revenge due to perceived "harm." The gap between the intended (reciprocal) pain and the unfelt reality of that "pain," creates a site onto which human trauma can be displaced. Vinci's analysis evinces a model of this transference specific to Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* but it is a process that, in concert with Scarry's framework of reciprocation, allows for a substitution of android/robot (non-human) trauma. The creation of identity within artificial humans, perhaps seen most clearly through the example of Phos in Ichikawa's *Land of the Lustrous,* occurs along the fault lines of this trauma and intended-pain through the objectification of sanctioned violence: artificial humans like Phos, unlimited by felt-pain, are thereby freer in processes of un/making, their own bodies becoming sites of creation. The compassion inherent to Scarry's process of creating (world-making) is

[178] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 286.
[179] Ibid., 285.
[180] Anderson, "World without Pain," 187.

likewise present in tendency towards the creation of group identity/community by the artificial humans of many robot fictions, built out of and upon *something like* empathy: an experience of non-human emotion existing in the gap between the registers of language.

Phos' extinguishing of the Lunarians (a type of unmaking of the world) is reframed within the cosmology of Buddhism as the ultimate form of compassion: Phos' transformation into a bodhisattva-like figure echoes Scarry's discussion of the created Artifact but resides outside of it, beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition of the conception of God. Phos' own traumas, and the displacement of human traumas, doubly act on their body in a process of unmaking/remaking that can be found, repeated, in many other robot fictions which present the problem of *unfelt pain*. The re-conceptions of pain explored in these works simultaneously evince acts of (re)creation: Scarry's world-destroying/world-creating model, adapted for use on the (smaller) scale of identity within robot fictions explores what it means when one half of the reciprocal relationship cannot feel the pain necessary for the eventual non-reciprocal exchange of *realities.* As with many robot fictions, examining the construction of artificial humans necessitates a reflection on the *human*, and so we return to the anthropomorphizing of AI via the frame of literary conceptions of robots, so many of which are imbued with the power of (human) creation. The tendency to attribute greater sentience and even humanity to "AI" and robots is not so much instinctive as unavoidable. It is also, should we view it as optimistically as Scarry, an expanding form of compassion that wishes for the diminishment of pain.

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