



Cyborg Incorporated: Mechanics, Aesthetics, and Cyborg Narrativity in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*

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Abstract

Reflecting on the ubiquity of screens in contemporary life, this paper seeks to suggest that we inhabit a “cyborgian condition” in which (human) bodies (and self-understanding) are composed with technology. Upon analyzing David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983) and *eXistenZ* (1999), and in engaging with existent theoretical discourse, this paper studies the movement and appearance of arguably posthuman performing bodies on the screen, and the ways in which they can be accounted for as special narrative vehicles. Drawing upon Donna Haraway’s primarily text-based exploration of the cyborg’s radical potentiality, and Daniel Punday’s literary analysis of corporeal narratology, this paper introduces the concept of “cyborg narrativity” by emphasizing the unique “aesthetic” and “mechanical” properties of cinematic (that is, visual) storytelling. In examining cyborg typologies and presenting “cyborg narrativity” as a way of approaching the “new” body image(s) that technological changes propel, this paper incorporates Cronenberg as a co-theorist, making visible new ways of understanding “being(s) in technology.”

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Surrounded by (technological) screens, varying from computers to mirrors, we find ourselves existing in what protagonist Nicki Brand in David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983) refers to as “overstimulated times” in which we “crave stimulation” (00:10:34). Always in one way or another engaging with technical tools, the subject finds herself increasingly fusing with the devices she uses to enhance her abilities, which operate as an “...expressive medium for [her] being-in-the-world” (Trigg 75). Whilst technology is arguably as old as humanity itself, it is the role that it plays today in not merely simulating or

elevating but rather creating reality that leads post-phenomenologist Don Ihde to conclude that, moving away from the basic notion that “we are our bodies” (both socio-culturally and biologically), we have now become “bodies in technologies” (138). We see these “bodies in technologies” brought to the screen and turned on their heads through the works of Canadian horror-filmmaker David Cronenberg, who argues that technology has not so much taken over our body-environment but rather what occurs is “...the absorption of technology into the body and the extension of the body through technology” (“commentary” 00:47:48). More than just existing in technology, then, as Cronenberg illustrates in *eXistenZ* (1999), in which a seemingly organic video-game universe starts to display a “very weird reality-bleed-through effect” (01:19:22), we have additionally become bodies through and bodies as technologies. Given such an updated state of both being(s) and world(s) in, as, and through technology, it might be useful, as Udo Krauwurst writes, to understand and diagnose such existential circumstances as the symptoms of a “cyborgian condition” (145), an ontological status resulting from this continuous merging of extensive technological tools and extending, transforming selves. This notion of the cyborgian as a characterization of life in what Marshall McLuhan refers to as the “electric age,” where “we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information” (64) can be a useful interpretation of increasingly technically mediated environments, or “medial ecologies” (Hayles 5), that we occupy and construct ourselves in. Cyber-spatial territories, henceforth, Michael Heim argues, serve perfectly as “...a metaphysical laboratory, a tool for examining our very sense of reality” (31) in which the artist, as “a mad scientist [whose] life is their lab” (Cronenberg & Rodley 7), can by means of creative investigation provide us with “(cognitive) maps” (Jameson 89) that help guide us meaningfully through such updates of being and challenging representations thereof. The condensation of “technical images” (Flusser 10) and material reality of the cyborg, as a celluloid figuration that has now entered the popular imagination, then “becomes synonymous,” as Christine Cornea notes, “with an understanding of contemporary life” (4) in which we see the same occur. An important, yet often overlooked artist and producer of such “images of thought” (Deleuze and Guattari 16) undertaking precisely this critical, cartographic endeavor, is David Cronenberg, a former biology-student turned director who “...look[s] at each [of his] films as a sort of lab experiment” (qtd. in Hickenlooper 4). Cronenberg, this paper asserts, comes to perfectly embody the performative scientist examining our cultural condition which finds expression in his films through the merging of visual play and philosophical experimentation.

Cronenberg's cinematic corpus, particularly *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, revolve around body as the center of both creation and destruction and figure into a dynamic of renewed interest in the body across art and theory. As Dylan Trigg writes in *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*, Cronenberg's filmography is a "...testament to the primacy of the body in the structure of the subject" (85); extremely "body-conscious" ("fear" 00:10:49), perhaps even body-obsessive, Cronenberg treats the material body as the phenomenological basis for our being, even as "the primary fact of human existence" (qtd. in Dee). Such a renewed focus on the body reflects a "corporeal turn" (Sheets-Johnstone 3) in cultural studies and critical analysis, in which the body is foregrounded as the situated center of identity, informing contextualized knowledge(s) and ontologies consequently. In his book, *Narrative Bodies: Towards Corporeal Narratology* (2003), David Punday introduces the notion of "corporeal narratology" (vii) to address this previous lack of focus on or even denial of embodiment, resulting in a kind of disembodiment in narrative. According to Punday, this is "the result of a [textual] tradition that has worked to shape the body's relevance to narrative in very peculiar and sometimes contradictory ways" (viii). The non-primacy of the body in literary analysis is not so much caused by an actual invisibility or non-existence but is rather the consequence of a post-enlightenment discourse concerned with bodily transcendence and writing the body, as subordinate matter opposed to ratio and ideas, out of narrative. In seeking to move away from such body-phobia, bodies in cinematic narrative, which opposed to textual bodies, quite literally carry the narrative through movement, character development, and dialogue therefore require distinct analysis. Although Punday makes a point in arguing that "[w]hat makes the body so important to narrative and to our ways of thinking about reading is how it seems to resist powerfully textual representation" (viii), this paper suggests that Cronenberg's work, as a cinematic rather than a textual corpus, does precisely this; it foregrounds the body through reflection to such an extreme that his films become corporeal and produce almost somatic effects of fear. Given that Punday's analysis remains textual and does not take into consideration the cinematic, there is an important novelty to the corporeal narrativity that Cronenberg's corpus displays given his visualized focus not just on the human body but also on its relationship with the technological domain. This paper's contribution, in bringing together Donna Haraway's arguably revolutionary writings on the (subversive) cyborg and Daniel Punday's exploration of the role of bodies in narrative, thus becomes two-fold: cyborg narrativity, itself a cyborgian synthesis, complicates the technology-affected body whilst pointing at its narrative agency. If technology, as Cronenberg seeks to

exemplify in his films, is “first of all an extension of the human body” (00:47:48), then the notion of “corporeal narratology” defined by Punday might require an update, both in terms of moving from text to film, as well as from “purely biological/organic” to “cyborgian” bodies. It is this update of “cyborg narrativity,” as a “critical invention” (“commentary” 00:06:22) positioning not just the body but more accurately the synthesized/synthesizing cyborg body as a narrative “map(ping out)” (McCracken 288), that this paper seeks to introduce, both through its content and its *incorporative*, patch-work like writing style, weaving together former theories and the analysis of the author.

Looking at Cronenberg’s films through the lens of visual writing and “body”-language, instead of solely belonging to the body-horror genre, it further adds to the ongoing dialogue(s) about the role of the body in narrative, the body and technology, and cinematic versus textual representation. By incorporating aesthetics and mechanics of both corporeality and technology as agents of (self)production together into a “cyborg subject,” who not only has its own peculiar style of appearance but also embodies as well as operates according to an arguably palpable philosophy, Cronenberg, as a “metaphysical poet” (qtd. in Rodley 131), enables his characters and stories together to operate through what this paper shall term “cyborg narrativity.” What lies at the heart of this paper, therefore, is not just a critical intervention into the role of the (cyborg) body in narrative, but also the cinematic fleshing out of such criticism through illustrated embodiment of these concepts in Cronenberg’s two selected works. On one level, Cronenberg, as the “God, artist, mechanic” (*eXistenZ* 00:22:10) of heterotopic worlds, experiments with the sometimes-experienced-as-intrusive infiltration of technological devices. An example thereof is *Videodrome*’s “Civic TV, the one you take to bed with you” (00:01:00) technology in Cronenberg’s films is always-already present, not just as McLuhanian extensions but as (new) body parts or organs of perception which, as further exemplified in *eXistenZ*, enable access to new (game) worlds in which systems “port into you” and where, instead of using batteries, “you’re the power source” (00:38:06). Cronenberg critically examines and oftentimes rethinks our relationships to technology by means of “diffraction as a mapping of interference” (Haraway 300), sometimes in culturally unsettling and uncanny ways. In doing so, through his moving visualizations, Cronenberg forces us to look into a cinematic mirror that is seemingly haunted. It is not just the mirror-image, then, but on a more fundamental level the cyborgian self-image that Cronenberg enables us to see and engage with. Both *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, in their focus on technology, mediation, and identification thus come to display what

Fredric Jameson refers to as “[a] shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology [that] can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject” (63), a condition of which we can recognize the symptoms especially through cultural texts. Yet, such a fragmentation of the subject made literal in Cronenberg’s films does not result in the post-modernist “death of the subject,” but rather signifies the “birth” of “new flesh” (V 01:13:15) as inherently embodied, technological, and thus material.

Building on Espen J. Aarseth’s idea that “the text [is] a kind of machine, a symbiosis of sign, operator and medium” (55), Cronenberg’s films, in themselves already cyborgian constructions composed on “writing machines” (qtd. in Rodley 169), operate by producing certain “special effects.” Moving from text to cinema, amongst other things, we see a shift from emphasis on linguistic characters, that is letters, to physical characters or bodies. Both Cronenberg’s films foreground the technology-infused body as the central force, if not source, of narrative construction, by focusing, as Daniel Punday puts it, on “how the body contributes to our ways of speaking about and analyzing narrative” (IX) as well as by visually updating Donna Haraway’s manifested understanding of the “cyborg” as “...a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as fiction” (149). He introduces us to a more “New Materialist” (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012) visual writing of film thus allowing the cyborg more aptly to be both “theorized and fabricated” (Haraway 150). An understanding of this visual writing of film in Cronenberg’s works is rather crucial here, as it not only synthesizes textual theories and material manifestations, but also seeks to underline the multiple ways in which “bodies,” particularly in the selected two films, not only act out a language-based script but actually write and establish narrative gestures physically.

Originally coined by Australian neurologist Manfred Clynes in 1960, the term “cyborg” is a neologism made up out of the words “cybernetic” and “organism,” introduced to “...describe the new symbiotic entity that results from the alliance between humans and technology in a closed, artificial environment” (qtd. in Aatseth 51). The figure of the cyborg, with all its ambiguity and embodied paradoxicality, has a complex history which mimics the inherent multiplicity and entanglement of the cyborg itself. The cyborg, as Donna Haraway puts it, is something we all are; she writes, “by...our time, we are all chimeras...hybrids of machine and organism... the cyborg is our ontology... a condensed image of both imagination and material reality” (15). This definition, from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women:*

The Reinvention of Nature (1991), that Haraway provides us with helps us see that despite the sometimes trivial mode through which the cyborg is represented (such as in the *Terminator* (1984–2019) and *RoboCop* (1987–2014) franchises), “the cyborg,” as she states, “...is from the start a polluted category” (qtd. in Olson 4) and what Sue Short calls an “indeterminate creature” (3). The cyborg’s growing appeal as a kind of cultural phenomenon or icon, can in part be understood as the consequence of a fascination with such technological complexity and historical ambiguity. In popular fictional portrayals of the cyborg, for example, the non-neutrality that comes with this indefiniteness is illustrated by the clear-cut “goodness” or “evil” of the cyborg concerned.

In both of Cronenberg’s films, the viewers find themselves much closer to an undramatized image of reality-as-we-know-it, in which people live their lives together with technology in increasingly intensifying ways; cyborg is not the obvious villain or hero but becomes accessible to the viewer through their own mirror-image. Cronenberg’s assembly of the cyborg-trope in stories and people’s day-to-day intimacy with technological devices, then, seems to echo precisely what Haraway means when she writes that “[t]he cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience,” and that “the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (149). The paradoxical, simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction (a film is a kind of illusion, after all) of this optical illusion thus arguably becomes one of the main driving forces in Cronenberg’s visual writing. As such, things in *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* are not as they initially seem: by foregrounding the body in both films Cronenberg toys not just with alternative, sci-fi representations of cyborg bodies as cultural-technological embodiments of the now and new, but even more so plays with the idea of socially-real reflection, not necessarily presenting novelty but rather mirroring what already is and perhaps always was. *Videodrome* tells the story of Civic TV CEO, Max Renn, who, in his search for new sensationalist television shows to broadcast, stumbles upon the seemingly illegal Malaysian program “Videodrome,” a show displaying sexualized “[t]orture, murder [and] mutilation” (00:12:19) and finds himself being affected in different ways by viewing it, leading to the distortion not just of his reality but also of his physicality. *eXistenZ* shifts the focus from the dangers of passively consumed television towards the active participation in videogames. The viewers follow female protagonist, Allegra Geller, game-designer at Antenna Research and inventor of the new “metaflesh” game system (00:05:32) which, through “game pods” attached by “UmbyCords” to “bioports” (00:05:55), “a sort of hole in

your spine” (00:20:43), enables the physical “walking through” (00:16:03) and interaction between a virtual game world and the human nerve structure, echoing Cronenberg’s conviction that technology “...is first and foremost an extension of the neurological system” (qtd. in Natashi). Whilst “downloading eXistenZ by Antenna Research” into her audience (00:07:32), however, Allegra is attacked by a fanatic member in the audience, who has been able to pass the security because of his “flesh and bone” weapon (00:14:47), and calls for “[d]eath to [Allegra] the demoness” (00:09:21). Allegra finds herself on the run with her body-guard Ted Pikul for not merely threatening the safety, but rather risking the stability of reality by mixing and messing with existence through her games, leaving her many anti-eXistenZialist enemies. Max is similarly accused of contributing to “a social climate of violence and sexual malaise” (00:10:09), thus threatening the safety of the real in *Videodrome*.

The two films lend themselves particularly well to both analysis and embodiment of cyborg narrativity. Not only are there numerous thematic overlaps between them which in different ways display how cyborg narrativity functions, the relationship between the films can also be characterized as one of conjoined twins, partially separate entities that exist as parts of the same “body,” in conjunction with Chris Rodley’s suggestion for perceiving the films as “inverse twins” (8). Both films, based on original scripts written by Cronenberg, concern themselves with notions of reality, biology, and technology, all brought, almost literally, in touch with one-another, played out in and on the arena (V 00:20:29) that is the conjoined (non-essentialized) body itself. Especially in mediating understanding between technology and human identity, these narratives operate as “...running on the complex infrastructures of social and psychic systems” (Clarke 13), given that they concurrently build on and go against popular culture and its beliefs. As Lia M. Hotchkiss notes, “[b]oth *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* metacinematically toy with the truth value of the cinematic signifier” (18); *Videodrome* disorients us seemingly without end, thus making it impossible to distinguish between what is real and what is not, whereas *eXistenZ* starts off with definitively hallucinatory circumstances of entering the game and, with it, marking its descent into the (seemingly) “unreal.” It is only towards the end of *eXistenZ* that it becomes clear to the viewer that what initially seemed to be a linear narrative of deterioration and dissociation that maintains a clear division between fantasy (game) and reality, is actually the glitch of one kind of hallucination into the other, thus, making it impossible for the viewer, even as the film comes to an end, to determine what was actually “real” or whether everything depicted was actually part of one big

game. Whilst *Videodrome* gradually dissolves the separation between real and hallucinatory—a journey embodied by the protagonist Max, these distinctions do not make sense to begin with in *eXistenZ*. Not merely attached by thematic overlap, then, the films also finish and complement each other’s narrative in a true twin-like fashion, virtually leading *eXistenZ* to pick up where *Videodrome* left off. Inasmuch as *Videodrome* introduces the idea of the organic taking over mechanical functions, it is in *eXistenZ* (where the merging of representation and reality, set in motion in *Videodrome*, has become established as indistinguishable) that Cronenberg fully fleshes out his Canguilhemian philosophy that “all is body” (Natasi). Hence, the organical has not merely *become* (as in *Videodrome*), but moreover always-already *is* the mechanical. The films, as twins, conjoined or inversed, thus continue to speak to each other in numerous ways. The dialogue on the technologization of the body and biologization of technology therefore endures, leaving not just Cronenberg but also, though differently, the audience, in Hotchkiss’s words, “still in the game” (16).

Situating Cronenberg as a weaver of fictional creation (technofantasies and scenarios in sci-fi) and reality-observation (cultural anxieties over the use of technological devices), building on Haraway’s claim that the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an “optical illusion” (149), this paper argues that it is precisely such an optical illusion that Cronenberg makes visible to the viewers, by “show[ing] the unshowable [and] speak[ing] the unspeakable” (Cronenberg qtd. in Rodley 131). This element of making-visual is crucial to Cronenberg, for as he claims, “I have to show things because I’m showing things that people could not imagine... if I had done them off-screen, they would not exist,” henceforth attempting to make it “common currency of the imagination” (qtd. in Rodley 41–43). Cronenberg’s films thus allow the viewers to see a specific, post-Harawayian, updated vision and its “effective/affective” (Hurley 203) bodies. Writing as an act of mere textuality in an age of “the image, the imagined, the imaginary” (Appadurai 31) proves insufficient on its own in reflecting upon such circumstances. Embracing cinematography as a type of “light-writing” (Williams 16) and as “technolog[y] of inscription” (Hayles 117), instead, allows us to revise a literature-based understanding of writing and thus move towards the idea of writing through the body as image construction. This move from traditional writing, that is textual inscription in narrative, towards cinematic writing based on movement, gesture, and image is important to consider in the context of visual narratives, and particularly so with regards to Cronenberg’s films. To indeed “speak the unspeakable,”

Cronenberg invents an explicit bodily language that narrates, not merely through words but rather through visual materiality and corporeal expression, an aesthetic that surpasses the somewhat simplistic categorization as “body horror.” As bodies move and act out in front of Cronenberg’s camera, they establish narratives not predominantly by means of textual scripts, but rather through bodily/technological wounds, growths, and viruses translated into “readable” imagery.

In *Videodrome*, the image is a central feature: it is the televised image that compels, even brainwashes Max initially, for as Professor O’Blivion predicted “[t]he television screen has become the retina of the mind’s eye” (00:11:24), and that same image transforms, inscribes, and reshapes him in his image as a cyborg tape-recorder (01:03:06); thus, the image has become embodied, the flesh has become image. The making of television shows, of which the Civic TV station as well as the Rena King Show (00:09:38) are examples, then is another theme in the film (itself an image construction). *eXistenZ* pushes forth this centrality, focusing on virtual-image-construction, that is the job of a video-game designer crafting worlds of images for entertainment-purposes. Unlike *Videodrome*, in the game “eXistenZ,” which later turns out to actually be part of the metagame “tranCendenZ” pioneered by PilgrImage (01:29:53), all is simultaneously flesh (given the organic-looking game-devices used), but is also (technological) image given its video-game nature. Such a paradox then seems to give birth to the new flesh that *Videodrome* prophetically closes with. Image and flesh become one, embodied by the cinematic Cronenbergian cyborg who writes narratives on and through its own body, translated and projected onto the screen.

As we move from text-based writing to visual, cinematic writing, in which medium and (film)maker become, in somewhat cyborgian ways, intertwined mechanically as well as aesthetically through their collaboration, the focus on film becomes highly relevant given its reliance on cinematographic technology. As Jacques Derrida notes, there seems to be an inherent assemblage-ness to cinema (qtd. in Landow 9), which this paper argues already makes cinematic production, especially given its use of montage, “cuts, pans, and zooms” (Brophy 9), cyborgian per definition, for it connotes the mixing and consequential blurring of organic and mechanical elements into what Gordon Coonfield calls “machinic assemblage... not [as] a thing, but as a process, and ongoing organizing of multiplicities” (qtd. in Spicer 83). Such an understanding of cinema as both a cyborgian medium and product that is constantly in-the-making, then, has profound effect on narrative and especially narrative cinema, for as Bruce Clarke

notes, “a narrative text is a story that is ‘told’ in a medium” which is then shaped by such a medium consequently (22). In Cronenberg it is the captured-on-film body itself, as “...both the marker of boundaries and the expressive medium for our being-in-the-world” (Trigg 75) that is transformed into such a mediator or story. Videodrome, in particular, contains a number of scenes in which physical changes on the body-surface give indications of the narrative’s prospective trajectory: what Max first thinks is a “rash” (00:33:32) actually turns out to be the beginning of the transformation that ends with his body turning into a video-war-machine. *eXistenZ*, which ironically barely makes use of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery), shows less grotesque physical changes but nevertheless uses the body-game-simulator as its storyboard. The appearance of the bio-port plug-ins located on Pikul and Allegra’s backs change each time we move onto a different story-layer. The assemblage or coming-into-being of the cyborg as cyborg, then, is a constant process in *Videodrome* as well as *eXistenZ*: distinctive parts lose their status as solo units and become mixed together, to such an extent that neither beginning nor end, but only blend can be recognized. As such, the aesthetics of *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, that is, the philosophy of how things look in the film, is a “cyborg aesthetic” that presents itself through acts of hybridity and synthesis. This blending, as Haraway writes, is purposeful for “there is a pleasure in the confusion of boundaries” (qtd. in Fleckenstein 42), which finds expression through the inversion of numerous binarisms in Cronenberg and might in part explain why Cronenberg’s cyborgs are sometimes hard to recognize as cyborgian.

Messing not just with our idea/image of the cyborg but also blurring the lines between concepts informing particular understandings of the relationship between body and mind, we cannot easily fit these fleshy cyborgs into an already-existing, fixed category, which of course is precisely the point. The binarism that first, and according to Steven Shaviro most importantly, collapses in Cronenberg’s works is that of Cartesian dualism between mind (thought) and body (matter) because his films demonstrate how “...neither can [any longer] be said to be the cause or ground for the other” (130). *Videodrome* demonstrates this parallelism through Max’s confusing hallucination for materiality, constantly touching his body (V 00:51:51) to find signs of reality but whilst doing so never being sure of what is mind and what is body. Similarly, in *eXistenZ*, the game itself is no longer just a product of mind, as one would traditionally expect with an “idea-turned-game,” but rather results from “[y]our body, your nervous system, your metabolism, your energy” (e 00:38:14): there is neither beginning nor end in sight. The ambiguous, transgressive blurring

of numerous borders, especially between the organic and the machinic, occur and become anatomized in *eXistenZ* and *Videodrome*. Such syntheses allow Cronenberg's creatures to be cyborgian as opposed to simply monstrous or robotic, for they are neither just mimetic, artificial, metal constructions nor simply slimy and gross. Cronenberg's cyborgs are inherently embodied, symbiotic, and move far beyond being simply organism or mechanism. However, this does not make these cyborgs any less organic or "natural." Rather, what is organic versus what is mechanic is reconfigured through the rejection of an inherent human nature or essence, increasingly blurring the lines between human and machine through the image of the cyborg. As both films progress, it becomes clear that, through the incorporation of all kinds of devices into the body, we are all made up out of different parts. Whether it is watching television, playing video-games, or simply wearing glasses and riding a bike, we are constantly using tools, mechanizing and enhancing ourselves, and in this manner consequently changing ourselves physically.

The non-essentiality of the cyborg, defying both the organic and the mechanic backbone, allows for it to function as an important "demonstrating" monster. As Vicki Kirby notes in *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, "[t]he image of the cyborg has inspired critical discourse because [of] its volatile instability, its contours...the identity of the cyborg is regarded as monstrous because there is nothing about a cyborg that [can] be regarded as essential" (146). This lack of essence is exemplified not merely by the fact that in both *eXistenZ* and *Videodrome* bodies lose their status as undoubtful markers of reality, but is also brought forward by the numerous human-machine comparisons which radically de-center any kind of human essence as of central importance in informing a stable identity. In *Videodrome*, for example, electronic pirate Harlan shouts at Max that he is "...not a mechanism you can switch on and off" (V 00:57:47), because Max treats his subordinate as if he were just a machine, urging Harlan, as if he were a human tape-recorder, to document all *Videodrome* broadcasts. Cronenberg ironically pushes this literalization further as it is precisely such a human tape-recorder, complete with suggestive stomach-slit, that Max himself turns into as the narrative progresses. His identity and that of the machine have become physically intertwined, the human essence not so much lost but never present in the first place and constantly reprogrammed. It is this open-endedness, then, operating according to a kind of illogical logic that cannot be reduced to X or Y, that allows Cronenberg's beings, such as the cyborgian Max-as-recorder, to be both "hideous and beautiful at the same time" (Barker qtd. in Jones 175). As monstrous as Cronenberg's cinematic bodies

often are or become, then, it is precisely this element of developing techno-monstrosity that is of fundamental importance: as Haraway remarks, "...monsters have the same root as to demonstrate; monsters signify" (Haraway 333n16) and "...have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations" (180). Thus, positing Cronenberg's cyborgian monsters as creatures born out of, existing on, as well as frequently crossing over, boundaries such as "the border of organic and inorganic things" (Castanyer 4), these limits are constantly uprooted.

This understanding of the nature of technology, as expressed by both Allegra and Max, echoes Cronenberg's own artistic view that "technology is not this very inhuman thing that imposes on us... but [that] it in fact comes from us, it's part of us, it's an expression of us" ("Cronenberg on Cronenberg" 00:20:05). Cronenberg's philosophy, thus, is not merely a repetition of McLuhan's argument that "[a]ny extension... affects the whole psychic and social complex" (19) and that "technology is an extension of man" (23) but rather emphasizes, as Canguilhem argued, that "machines can be considered as organs of the human species" and that "[a] tool or a machine is an organ, and organs are tools or machines" (55). While in *Videodrome*, we see the protagonist undergo a kind of word-becoming-flesh of Canguilhem's argument as the film progresses, thus laying bare a process of "cyborgification" explicit for the viewer to see, *eXistenZ* further builds on this transformation in demystifying the body as a stable referent or "ontological access" (Hansen 5) to the real by now fully accepting the technological status of organic matter and vice versa. No longer bearing certainty, for it is the "real" itself that has, alongside the bodies themselves, been transformed in the process, Cronenberg's fleshy cyborg bodies are a testament to a novel kind of mechanical organization that moves beyond where it has gone before.

Cronenberg's films as cyborgian narrative texts and performative cyborg embodiments are situated and flow over into the outside-of-the-text, thus subverting the grammatical rules separating inside from outside and word from flesh, that structure them. As Michael Grant argues, such subversion is the result of Cronenberg's systematic violation of matters of our experience resulting in the violation of "the grammar of inner and outer" (6) as well as in a transgression of the "grammar of our concepts" (Wittgenstein qtd. in Grant 3). This violation in *eXistenZ* and *Videodrome* sometimes comes with literal violence: pushing the flesh to its extremes, the viewer's inner world is touched by the exterior image in truly unnerving ways (Shaviro 137). The genre of body horror features perfectly into this disordering of the inner and the outer, for in spilling its guts horror par

excellence makes insides visible, “pushing the spectacle of interiority” (Grant 1). Cronenberg’s visual, almost biblical treatment of the “(video)word made flesh” (V 01:12:46) also performs such an internal/external collapse or implosion because, as Karen Barad notes, it “...challenges the presentationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things” and opposed to “...turn[ing] everything (including material bodies) into words,” as written fiction arguably does, instead “...is a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real” (802). In this sense, neither word, nor body any longer serve as proofs or representations of truth: rather, word and body, now “uncontrollable” (V 00:36:43) are merely testament to narratives embodied by the medium that tells it. Reality and fiction, originally constructed as each other’s opposites, become (con)fused: it is no longer clear where “reality,” as we know it, ends, and where the hallucination begins. Depending on the protagonist’s perception, we are handed down to Allegra and Max’s account of their experience as well as their bodies “backing” this up, experiences they often do not understand themselves. It is important to note here that this is not a classical example of unreliable narration, a literary invention which foregrounds the role of consciousness, that is mind, in constructing reality: rather, what we see here is an example of what Katherine N. Hayles refers to as “the remediated narrator...foregrounding a proliferation of inscription technologies that evacuate consciousness as the source of production and recover in its place a mediated subjectivity” (117). Remediated, literally, by technology, the protagonists find themselves “interpellated... into technoscience” (Haraway 49), which is a main characteristic of cyborg narrativity. There is a systematic “dislocation of narrative discontinuity” (Grant 15) leaving the unsettling question of what is actually going on perpetually in the air throughout the films. As Michael Grant notes, this sense of looming existential danger that the films generate in the viewer also represents their ambiguous narrative drives given that “the film[s] seem to go forward only hesitantly, feeling [their] way” (14 emphasis added). For the technophobe as well as the technophilic, the form of cyborg narrativity that exists throughout Cronenberg’s works is threatening for both mechanical and essentialist worldviews. This is not only because of its unstable narration, the display of graphic scenery, or the arguable twistedness that informs the ideas worked out throughout his films, but more fundamentally because they challenge the often taken-for-granted notion that, phenomenologically speaking, our bodies are the “touchstones” (Cronenberg qtd. in Rodley 145) of our reality, and as such generate uncanny feelings of anxiety or indeed, existential horror.

In both *eXistenZ* and *Videodrome* “realness” versus “fictionality” as definitive categories of meaning no longer matter, that is, they no longer signify. The initial association between quality and felt “realness,” both expressed by the multiple pro-realism collectives in *eXistenZ* as well as summed up in *Videodrome* by Max when he states that “[y]ou can’t take your eyes off it... it’s so realistic” (V 00:12:41) because more clearly fictionalized programs are “too sweet” (V 00:19:45), is not only questioned by Cronenberg but also denounced in *eXistenZ* where there seems to exist a longing for the unreal to take over the real. Allegra finds herself on the run, when an almost Rushdian “fatwa” (v 00:35:35) is issued against her for designing a game that, according to the anti-eXistenZialists, is “too realistic” and threatens reality. She comes to function as an embodied “demoness” (00:09:21) and identified enemy of the natural and the real, arguably because in her creation of eXistenZ as an “instant-on world” (00:27:45), she is in fact “playing God.” This binary opposition of fantasy versus reality, in addition to that of body and mind, the mechanical and the organic, and inner and outer, consequently, is completely rejected, if not entirely “deconstructed” by Allegra. The game-pods designed by her not only show no sign of digitality and are indeed products of “mutated animal organs” (e 00:55:12), she also perceives bodies in games and bodies in “reality” to be identical. Such a doubling is illustrated by the fact that in-and-outside the game there are no differences in the appearance of the bodies of the characters, that is, no electronic or virtual alteration is evident that would make it possible to distinguish between the two worlds, except change in hairstyle and outfit (e 00:40:02). It is in this sense that, despite the different (cyborg) body-types that the two films depict, there are only bodies of uncertain evidence that take us by the hand and carry us through transformation and destabilization. Whereas in *Videodrome* it is (video) technology that destroys any traditional form of physical presence through the incarnation of the “new flesh,” *eXistenZ* seems to already exist in this reconfigured fleshy “ecosphere” (“commentary” 00:01:49) and makes everything, from “pink-fone[s]” (e 00:11:58) to playing videogames a matter of flesh. The endings of both the films leave the viewers with the sense that, as Steven Shaviro notes, “the distinction between fantasy and reality, or between inner bodily excitation and outer objective representation, has entirely collapsed” given that these texts of cyborg narrativity set into motion a state in which “...technology becomes ubiquitous, and is totally melded with and objectified in the human body” (141).

This cyborg aesthetic, with its implosion of numerous binaries as important symptoms of cyborg narrativity, becomes visible

throughout *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* and gives birth to a new metaphysical variety of cyborg body-types, both “embedded and embodied” (Braidotti 28), that are constantly in the making. Cronenberg presents such complex, alternative, non-traditional cyborg-body-productions, through the visualization of subversive and inversive body-images. As Denis Mellier and Charles La Via note, Cronenberg’s cyborgs are “intimate becomings,” materialized through a process of decomposition/recomposition which has been rendered visible” (106). In both films, everything that matters, is physical, despite the optical illusion of simulation, mimicking virtuality: the constant presence of organic elements, either as bleeding tv-screens (V 01:12:15) or as nipple-reminiscent game consoles (e 00:20:00) remind us that it is the body itself, albeit changing, that we always return to. In this sense, this overarching understanding of corporeality is essential to making bodies meaningful, and “...defines a general body through which all of the textual objects touch” (Punday 82–83). The cyborgian body-imagery reflected when positioning Cronenberg’s protagonists in front of the mirror thus “...is designed to call attention to the ways in which science, technology and medicine routinely contribute to the fashioning of selves” (Kull 52). It is these “special effects” of body-imagery which Cronenberg’s films generate that lead this paper to posit that when performing a reading of his works, it is insufficient to understand the “body horror” that appears in his films as merely a matter of style. Rather, in focusing on the function of horror present in Cronenberg, it soon becomes evident that exploding heads (e 01:07:08), ripped-open bodies (V 01:20:5), and growths of new, oftentimes disgusting-looking limbs (V 01:12:06) are not part or even driving forces of the films for their shock-value or blood thirst. Instead, the horror in Cronenberg, particularly when combined with the cyborg narrativity that his films exemplify, serves as the actual phenomenological, philosophical skeleton, structuring the viewers’ experience and consequential self-(as-body)-perception in a way that effects both the personal, private as well as public, social body.

As a “literalist of the body” (Shaviro 129), Cronenberg’s cinematic corpora are, like Russian dolls, full of bodies-within-bodies, henceforth generating a wide range of body-types, which conceal and reveal themselves as “sites of intimate knowledge” (Lacan qtd. in Trigg 38). Given that, as Alan Hyde remarks, “there is no knowledge of the body apart from our discursive constructions of it” (6), these body-types prove especially informing. In the first place, the two films are, as previously stated, due to their nature of construction, cyborg bodies in and of themselves. Beyond bodies of work, we also see the turning-cyborg bodies of the protagonists and their reflection there-

upon. Literally positing the protagonists as “armed” with weaponry (V 01:05:45), guns play an interesting role here: the films themselves being full of numerous weapon-references, that is, describing a camera-part known as “flashgun” (V 00:54:10) and “shooting” images/“shooting questions” (e 01:32:12), the corporeal extends itself and comes to “incorporate” all, including ammunition. In *eXistenZ* similarly, whilst McLuhan justifiably argues that games “...incorporate both the action and reaction of the whole population into a single dynamic image” (208), what the viewers see is not just structural inclusion but actual, physical as well as complete incorporation of the “imaged” in which “you do not so much play, as the game plays you” (Castanyer 8), which is interestingly coupled back to film by Cronenberg as a form of “interactive cinema” (“Cronenberg on Cronenberg” 00:21:42).

The less visible bodies within bodies in Cronenberg’s films are corporations, such as *Videodrome*’s Spectacular Optical and *eXistenZ*’s Antenna Research, PilgrImage and Cortical Systematics, collectives that can alternatively be called “sociotechnical assemblages” (Ihde 92). The anti-corporatism present in Cronenberg’s works, expressed through the numerous espionage plots and corrupting corporate interests in both films is quite remarkable, because as the etymology of the word “corporation” suggests, it is the human body writ large. As Cronenberg states in an interview, “[a]n institution is really like an organism, a multi-celled animal in which the people are the cells... the very word ‘corporation’ means body... an incorporation of people into one body” (qtd. in Rodley 29). A worker, then, is simply a body within a larger body, similar to *eXistenZ* gamers playing on, as well as within, their own bodies. Cronenberg’s body-literalism thus comes to fruition in different ways, all of which make use of a “corporeal schema” that generally envisions “the world as flesh” (Hansen 82), and understands everything as and through (the) corporeal. Cronenberg’s enduring interest in the physical, henceforth is at bottom, as Jonathan Dee notes, “a metaphysical one” and deserves new critical reading.

Bearing across “material” (Hayles 48), even “talking metaphor[s]” (Jones 175), Cronenberg’s cyborg is a paradigmatic figuration that exists in a constant state of flux and transformation in such a fleshy world. It is in the search for alternative, quite literally constructive formulations of both the cyborg body and narrativity, then, that Cronenberg performs the task of the creative scientist, enabling us to move away from traditional literary theory concepts concerning narrative, replacing them with “ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks” (Landow 2), by focusing instead on but also narrating

through the a-typical, seemingly organic cyborg body of the “new flesh” (01:24:40). This observation of difference echoes David Hakken’s argument that, given the “...newer forms of cyborgification [that] are so different from their predecessors... we are justified in developing a [new] typology of cyborgs” (72). With a new typology also comes a new topology, for as Haraway writes, “bodies are maps of power and identity” (180), which requires critical reading. Narratives of cyborg fiction play an important role in such a cartographic endeavor, performing a socio-cultural function in providing the viewer with transformative, transportive metaphors and “body maps” (Schiphorst qtd. in Hansen 64–65) that help the viewer mediate cultural conflicts and social reality. Narrating through the body as such becomes the cyborg’s weapon that arms the viewer with new “...constitutions [of] narratives of the Other” (Appadurai 36) and allows the viewer to witness the “...collapse of metaphor and materiality as not a question of ideology but of modes of practice” (qtd. in Cornea 11) through the Jamesonian “aesthetics of cognitive mapping” (89). Such newly practiced forms are paradigmatic because they require the viewer to redefine the human in the face of a new mutually determined human-machine hybrid reality or cyborg world or as arguably posthuman “liminal entities” (Halberstam & Livingston 203). Cronenberg enables his audience to see two, inversed twin-like versions of how such entities might look.

The cyborgian aesthetic of binary-inversion and transgression gives birth to numerous mutations of the new flesh, figuring into different body-images and a new cyborg-typology, which operate according to a particular physical, narrative mechanics of mixing and moving. Fully embracing Marshall McLuhan’s predicament that “the medium is the message” (54), then, finally this paper argues, that, recalling Edward Said’s judgement of author Salman Rushdie, Cronenberg’s work is not just “about the mixture” of body and technology; “it is that mixture itself” (qtd. in Hotchkiss 28). This mixture itself that is Cronenberg’s monstrous corpus of films allows us, through the cinematic visualization of narrative bodies, to update Haraway’s understanding of the cyborg as existing in written form through literary (science) fiction and leads us to Cronenberg’s exploration of these cyborg bodies literalized and brought to filmic “life.” As Schneider notes, the “making literal” that Cronenberg often comes back to does not divorce performative bodies in film from “discursive systems of representation” but rather “...draws attention to the reality effects of the symbolic” (qtd. in Cornea 11). It is this kind of mechanism that provides Cronenberg’s cyborgs with fuel to move (mechanics) and show (aesthetics).

The mechanics fueling *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* come not only with their own techno-corporeal mode of narration that is intensely physical, but more subtly, especially due to its genre as (body)-horror, moves and activates the bodies of the viewers through the establishment of intersubjective, physical special effects. Cronenberg narrates through the increasingly mechanized flesh a vivid materiality which is not merely quoted but rather "...incorporated into [the films'] very substance" (Jameson 55). In the films, changing bodies become signs of change within the films more generally and serve as clues that help us move through the narrative meaningfully. Making use of the body itself as a primary site of operation for story-telling, Cronenberg enables bodies to visually "tell" the story by means of demonstration. This is exemplified by the growth of Max Renn's hand into a fleshy gun (01:03:53), the growth of a brain tumor caused by visions (00:36:11), the emerging slit on Renn's stomach suggestively shaped like a videotape recorder (01:02:33), and bleeding television-as-stomach (01:12:15) in *Videodrome* and through the presence of "game-pods" and "UmbyCords" (00:19:00), the "fitting" of the bio-port (00:18:29), organic gristle guns (00:14:08), numerous instances of infected bio-ports (01:20:21), and use of virtual-reality inspired gaming gear (01:27:43) in *eXistenZ*. Each of these physical altercations that progresses throughout both the films serve as part of what McLuhan refers to as a larger "...collective surgery carried out on the social body." Such a surgery, given the absence of "immunity" (70) allows the medial, technological virus to spread and become part of the biology, as new organs of perception, of Cronenberg's subjects that appear to us on the screen. The moving and "sca(r)ring" of bodies within and beyond the screen in part depends on Cronenberg's play on pre-established narratives of technophobia, to be found in the real-life context of the films' creation. Given its portrayal of the uncanny, consuming horror-cinema is a physical experience, causing heart throbs, gut-wrenches, and shock. Furthermore, there is also a distortion of the characters themselves that takes place throughout both films, thus resulting in what Fleischman and Strauss refer to as the "...turning [of] the theory on its head that man is losing his body to technology" (qtd. in Hansen 3) that causes a kind of anxiety in the viewer, who in watching a film essentially already loses his body to the screen because virtual 2D experience temporarily replaces 3D/4D experience of the off-screen body. Such phobia, as illustrated by Pikul who initially defends his not-having of a bio-port as being due to "a phobia about having [his] body penetrated" (00:17:43), builds on the understanding of the "organic" body as hermetically sealed: any kind of intrusion then becomes an external danger threatening such a coherence. These narratives, then, are literalized and pushed to their extremes. Not only

are there actual depictions of the perceived-as-intrusive entering of the mechanical into the organic realm (V 01:05:31 and e 00:24:27), but there is also the sense that such a perception of technological penetration might in itself be illusory, given Cronenberg's underlying philosophy that there is actually no such thing as exterior technology that is not also already an internal matter. Almost all technological devices in both *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, after all, come from within quite literally (e 00:10:01 and e 00:08:10). Cronenberg materializes Vicki Kirby's idea that regardless of the structural frame "...through which man's body is ciphered and located as being in the world, one can only presume that this information also informs the very matter of his body's material constitution" (3), resulting into the cinematic performance of all kinds of anatomical dissections of the video-drome and video-game bodies in the films. The narrative bodies Cronenberg produces through such mechanics are "transgressive bodies" (Richardson 3) because they push narrative subjectivity to its extreme, displaying an affective "ecstasy and terror of abjection" (Shaviro 156). Terror, because the viewer, in a sense, sees his fears of physical effects of technology come true in the cinematic world through characters and scenarios that Cronenberg depicts. Yet, by making everything body and through numerous sexual references, Cronenberg also displays a kind of "jouissance in abjection" where pleasure meets pain (Beard 127). Such mechanics, which Cronenberg makes use of, appeal, through story and characters, to the other side of the audience who instead of fearing technology rather technophilically obsess over it and its promise of bodily transcendence and salvation. Cronenberg, similar to the technophobic, dramatizes such *philia* or techno-fantasy to an almost comical degree and criticizes it consequently through clever use of narrative structure. Reflecting upon such dreams of self-enhancement and technological possibility serves as a recurring theme in Cronenberg's work, thus, in turn mirroring the real-life response that the increasing importance of technology generates: that of intense phobia, or *philia*. Such a mirroring presented through cinematic performance then facilitates the move, as Karen Barad notes, from "...questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality...to matters of practices/doings/actions" (802).

Cronenberg does not merely echo such narratives of fantasy or horror, but rather goes against what Kathleen Woodward describes as "a disavowal of the limits of the body" (qtd. in Bender 59) as one of the ideologies of technology, by reasserting and transgressing, not transcending, such limits. Protagonist Allegra Geller, game designer or "game-pod goddess" (00:05:55) in *eXistenZ*, perfectly illustrates the ideological idolization of technology as a means to "overcome our

finitude” (Ihde xiii) by seeking to transcend her physical existence in reality by moving into the realm of the virtually real. Even after digging a tooth-turned-bullet (00:14:08) out of her shoulder and in the rear of another assassination-attempt at the gas station, Allegra remains convinced that her game-invention will, in the words of her super-fan Gas, allow for the “...breaking out of the cage of your own making” (00:26:14), that is, the physical body that puts limitations on human ability. Both Allegra and her fan, it thus seems, experience their bodies as a burden on the mind, rather than a point of entry into world: as a cage capturing the soul, transcending the body through technology thus becomes a motive of liberation, albeit, as Cronenberg comes to show, a misleading one. The viewers witness Cronenberg’s rejection of certain ideological fantasies of technology when this transcendental search eventually leads to Allegra’s loss of reference point to the real (similar to Max’s experience), given that her physical body no longer provides her with solid evidence of actual existence in “reality.” It becomes questionable, henceforth, if *eXistenZ* is really “just a game” (00:47:11) that you can “...pop right out [of]...if there’s a problem” (00:50:23) by pushing pause: the distinction between the “game” and life slowly disintegrates for both viewer and player alike. Allegra seems somewhat aware of this collapse, or rather, implosion, when she states that *eXistenZ* is “a game everybody’s already playing” (01:13:17) in reply to Pikul’s sense of disorientation, that is, as existence or life. Through narrative strategies of self-referentiality (names, TV shows, and themes), glitches (moving from one (game) world to the next, game personality vs. real-life personality), repetition (repeating of lines within the game), and a looping (particularly *eXistenZ* ends where it began, though differently), almost hallucinatory narrative structure, Cronenberg thus misleads the technophobe and lets him run in circles. Such a (non)structure in both films, whilst initially suggesting a mere existence of different “levels of reality” (Gas 00:21:45) towards the end of the films demonstrates not so much how reality is layered but rather how it is always blended, leaving the viewer wondering whether with either technophobia or technophilia, he got the wrong end. This sense of confusion is something both *eXistenZ*, when the narrative turns out to be a narrative within a game with a narrative outside of it, and *Videodrome*, when Max kills himself, hallucinated or real, to become the new flesh, leave us with. As narratives within narratives, through a cyborg aesthetics, Cronenberg thus makes use of mechanics of multiplicity, multilinearity, and (con)fusion which characterize cyborg narrativity.

In conclusion, upon analyzing both Cronenberg’s use of mechanics and aesthetics, it becomes evident that the narrative embodi-

ment Cronenberg experiments with relies, in its performance of cyborg narrativity, on a merging of these mechanics (of story-telling, that is, narrativity) and aesthetics (of visualization and personification, that is, subjectivity). Understanding the (cyborg) body as a narrative vehicle with its own mechanics and aesthetics exemplified by Cronenberg's works, then, allows us to more aptly comprehend how "...bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic nodes" (Haraway 292), hence, generating meaningful polysemic posthuman signs and Harawayian figurations. Aesthetics and mechanics, as well as subjectivity (appearance) and narrativity (technique), become intertwined in *eXistenZ* and *Videodrome* and perfectly illustrate/perform, the cyborg narrativity, itself a combination of the aesthetic subject and the mechanism of story-telling, as an "enacted destabilization of the real" (Hotchkiss 16) and a consequential demonstration of the "fragility of reality" (Cronenberg qtd. in Rodley 144). Given their shivered non-traditional coherence, the narrative structure in the films appear to mimic (though arguably also vice versa, for as William Mitchell notes, "[w]e make our tools and our tools make us" (qtd. in Allen 33)) the ways in which Cronenberg represents the humanist subject phenomenologically in his work, reiterating Paul Ricoeur's understanding of the subject as "...a fragmented multiplicity, a subjectivity without a centre" (qtd. in Langsdorf 47). We see this cyborg narration, the implosion of subjectivity versus narrativity and aesthetics versus mechanics, come to its full fruition not just at the end but all throughout *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* especially through the motif of the screen, which is always-already present given their cinematic nature and keeps returning. There is a stark contrast between the films in this sense: whereas *Videodrome* is full of screens that talk (V 00:01:10) and often mediates its characters through them (Nicki 00:09:19, Brian O'Blivion 00:11:43, Max 01:13:48, Barry Convex 00:46:58, and Mascha 00:54:28), in *eXistenZ*, where we would expect screens given its focus on (computer) gaming, it actually makes no use of screens and virtually performs the final step "to the technologically 'wired' body cages..." given that "the video game, even with a very large screen, remains framed by the screen" (Ihde 10). Brian O'Blivion, who "...refuse[s] to appear on television, except on television" with his "television name...designed to cause the cathode-ray tube to resonate" (00:11:34) is enigmatic here: precisely through disembodiment given that, as we later find out, O'Blivion is already dead and only remains existent through seemingly organic, breathing videotapes and hallucinations, he comes to embody the new flesh. The screen has become not just a body-mediator but a body in itself, generating not just new cyborg-body images but also mirroring a new sense of self existing in a cyborgian era.

Reiterating Maurice Merleau-Ponty's observation that "humans are the fabric into which all objects are woven" (qtd. in Allen 31), given that all technology in the films is simultaneously organic, Cronenberg's metaphysical cinema, "as a form of world-production" (Ivakhiv 192), shows us how one can visualize such cyborgization to proceed through cyborg narrativities. Reading, or better put, experiencing such visual texts of cyborg narrativity can help us, then, in developing "...a kind of cultural literacy of technology and science" (Olson 2). In this sense, the cyborg narrativity that Cronenberg's films require us to read and feel through not only result in a better understanding of these works, but also help us better see how we, as actors outside of the film, might fit into such fictional schemes that blend into reality. It is for this reason that cyborg narrativity in *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, as this paper sought to make explicit, using the cinematic texts to illustrate the theory rather than the other way around, not just contributes to act of reading but also updates ways of seeing and, consequently, leads us to a different self-image of the cyborg, as Haraway states, as a "...disassembled and reassembled postmodern collective and personal self" (qtd. in Seidman 102). If, as Alain Millon argues, "it is across the virtual body that our culture constructs its own body image" (14), then David Cronenberg places us right in front of a mirror, however scary and confrontational that might be. Looking ourselves into the eye, with *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* in mind, we realize that what the viewers see is not just a cyborgian material-semiotic construction, wearing glasses, driving vehicles, operating all kinds of devices and thus always-already, in one way or another, cyborg, but what the viewers see in addition, as puzzling as it may sound given Cronenberg's horror-components, is a story, an image of hope and creative ability to change through tools of our own making.



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