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Terminating the Technopocalypse in James Cameron's *Terminator* Films

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Of all the cinematic visions of the end of civilization dramatized by Hollywood over the decades, one of the most memorable is the apocalypse that is the narrative center of the *Terminator* franchise: the rise of the machines and their systematic liquidation of the human race. According to the timeline presented in 1984's *The Terminator*, Skynet, the intelligent computer program designed to coordinate the United States defense network, became self-aware in 1997 and "decided our fate in a microsecond. Extermination." In 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the top-grossing film of that year, the subtitle refers to August 29, 1997, when Skynet will have launched the United States' nuclear arsenal against Russia in order to provoke the retaliatory counterattack which will kill three billion people and make the world available for conquest by the machines. In both movies, characters from the post-apocalyptic future travel backwards in time into the pre-apocalyptic present, infecting the security and peace of contemporary civilization with the dire prophecy that they embody. Whereas post-apocalyptic movies have become a familiar subgenre, James Cameron's two *Terminator* movies stage a more subtle *pre*-apocalyptic situation. In doing so, they represent the apocalypse not as a concrete reality, but as a future possibility, a time-sense that more accurately reflects the temporal character of the apocalypse as it exists for those of us living in pre-apocalyptic times. This narrative twist allows the first two *Terminator* movies to articulate much more compelling depictions of the phenomenology of apocalyptic scenarios as they actually exist in contemporary society, as compared to the depictions enacted in the more literal genre of post-apocalyptic narratives, which tend to reiterate themes and situations familiar from the genre of the Western. In *Terminator 1* and *2*, the imminent end of the world forces its way into Sarah Connor's

consciousness like a retroactive trauma, a memory of the future that infects all of present reality in its perceptual structure.

The *Terminator* films employ the trope of a the “copy without an original” – the hyperreal entity famously described by Jean Baudrillard – in a way that relates the paradoxical situation of the backwards time-traveler with the paradoxical relationship between human beings and the apocalypse they anticipate. Like a backwards time-traveler who makes himself come true, the apocalypse is a collective attempt to channel an eschatological sensibility into present reality, thereby projecting it into the future. We think of the apocalypse as a future event, but it is fundamentally a way of framing present experience, and indeed, all of human history, within a totalized narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. To this extent, the apocalypse is not simply something that *will* happen; it is a structure of perception that saturates lived experience and reconceptualizes the present as pre-apocalyptic. This aspect of the apocalyptic imagination was expressed by Frank Kermode as the distinction between the *imminent* apocalypse, that which awaits us in the future, and the *immanent* apocalypse, that which “throws the weight of ‘End-feeling’ onto the moment, the crisis” (25), illuminating present experience with eschatological intimations. Baudrillard makes a similar distinction when he postulates that, despite the widespread demand for a “violent resolution of reality” – an imminent apocalypse – the apocalypse continues to “elude our grasp in an endless hyperreality” (*The Illusion of the End* 8). The apocalyptic explosion “is always a promise, it is our hope ... But that is precisely what will never happen. What will happen will never again be the explosion, but the implosion” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 55). In contemporary reality as Baudrillard describes it, “Everything has already become nuclear, faraway, vaporized. The explosion has already occurred ... Everything has already been wiped off the map” (*Anorexic Ruins*, 34). Both *Terminator* movies

dramatize a pre-apocalyptic situation in which the technological apocalypse is already immanent, already implicit in the immediate environment. All of the action in both movies is motivated by the characters' preoccupation with this strange kind of future that penetrates into the present and walks among us.

The specific nature of the immanent apocalypse portrayed in both films, however, undergoes a crucial shift in the development from *Terminator 1* to *Terminator 2*, a shift which corresponds with an ambiguity in Baudrillard's description of the hyperreal, imploded apocalypse. On the one hand, "the precession of the effects over their causes," according to which the apocalypse, like everything else, "happen[s] before having happened," represents "the definition of fate" (*Fatal Strategies*, 198). The effect that pre-exists its cause is fated to meet up with its cause; its future is established as a condition of its ontological structure. The inexorability of this fatalistic time-sense is captured in the temporality of *Terminator 1*. The events surrounding Sarah's first encounter with the terminator robot suggest that the characters in the original film are all caught in a closed temporal loop at the center of which is the once and future apocalypse. But Baudrillard also describes fate as a "reversible imminence" (*Fatal Strategies* 179), suggesting that hyperreal reversibility results in the disappearance of "the rational principle that prevents the effect from returning back on the cause to cancel it out" (*Fatal Strategies* 112). In this more open-ended time-sense, past and future have no obligation to the present. Past and future are reversible and paradoxical, "connected – not at all according to rational relations ... but according to an incessant cycle of metamorphoses" (185). This pataphysical time-sense, also characteristic of a hyperreal condition, accurately describes the temporality of *Terminator 2*, in which the overriding hyperreal tone of the film itself seems to propel the narrative to an "escape velocity" (to use a Baudrillardian term) that liberates the

narrative and the characters from any accountability to fatalistic imperatives. The conceptual flexibility both of Baudrillard's theoretics and of Cameron's imagined universe allows for the expression of both of these formulations of the immanent technocalypse.

Although both *Terminator* movies take place in the pre-apocalyptic period, the sense that the apocalypse is immanent as well as imminent is embedded in the texture of the films' narrative space. The *Terminator* films establish a technocalyptic scenario in which human beings invent their own apocalypse. Unlike the apocalypse that is brought about by alien invasion, a strange new disease, an astronomical event, or the wrath of God, the technocalypse is a fate mankind has brought on himself as a result of his Faustian pride in his own ingenuity. Depictions of ecological and nuclear apocalypse also point to the culpability of mankind as the engineer of his own extinction, but ecological apocalypse is generally represented as an unforeseen byproduct of other activities, and nuclear apocalypse is typically depicted as the result of political dysfunction rather than as resulting from some danger inherent in technology itself. *Terminator's* technocalypse suggests that the teleological thrust of our technological society has always been a push toward the apocalyptic moment in which human beings would tinker themselves out of existence. *Terminator's* technocalypse is the cinematic expression of the impulse Paul Virilio described as "philanoia, this love of madness on the part of the sciences and technologies, which is now seeking to organize the self-extermination of a species that is too slow" (14-15).

The opening scene of *Terminator 1* plunges us into the world of 2029, in which Los Angeles is reduced to a twisted landscape of wreckage and where automated killing machines seek and destroy the remnant of human survivors. The movie's preliminary shots establish this post-apocalyptic situation as the initial point of orientation for the movie and the series as a

whole, giving the main events of *The Terminator*, which transpire in 1984, the feel of a flashback. This post-apocalyptic frame of perception invests the whole movie with a tragic fatalism, and particularly informs the signification of the movie's many mechanical objects. Cars, trucks, factories, bulldozers, cranes, and motorcycles are commonplace objects of the 1980s Los Angeles lifeworld, but from the perspective of the post-technopocalyptic future, these machines are clearly understood to be the precursors to the homicidal robots that will destroy us. Cameron invests these machines with proleptic menace in the very beginning of the movie when he cuts from the death-machines of 2029 to a disorientingly looming metal shape moving through the night sky. Is it another futuristic killing machine? No, it turns out to be the hydraulic prongs of a front-loading garbage truck. Our relief at the banal innocuousness of this image, however, is troubled by the suggestion that our urban landscape is saturated with signs of the coming apocalypse. This sense is reiterated again when Reese falls asleep in a car and the mechanical noises of a nearby construction site induce a reverie that is simultaneously a flashback and a flashforward of the hunter-killer robots of the future.

Indeed, this association between innocent everyday gadgets and the future apocalypse they cryptically prophesy is a motif throughout *Terminator 1*, inflecting the significance of all of the movie's representations of technology, a few significant examples of which include the answering machine in Sarah's apartment, Ginger's Walkman, and the futuristic ambiance of the Tech Noir club where Sarah has her first encounter with the terminator robot. Constance Penley, commenting on the dense atmosphere of mechanical devices in *Terminator 1*, argues that "Today's machines are not ... shown to be agents of destruction because they themselves are evil, but because they can break down, or be used (often innocently) in ways they were not intended to be used (127). Penley advances this position in support of her reading of *Terminator*

I as a “critical dystopia,” in which technology is not represented as a deterministically apocalyptic force, but as a neutral tool that human beings are free to use for good or ill upon their own discretion. Penley’s thesis, however, is contradicted not only by the central plot point of the *Terminator* universe – that the machines obey their own technological imperative in their decision to eliminate the human race – but also in the more subtle details of the role played by technology in the characters’ pre-apocalyptic lives. If Ginger had answered the phone herself instead of relying on the answering machine, her life might have been saved. If Sarah had not left her whereabouts on the recorded message, the terminator would not have been able to track her to the Tech Noir club. If Ginger had not been wearing her Walkman, she would have heard the sounds of her boyfriend being killed in the kitchen and could have escaped or sought help. In all of these situations, the technological devices are not malfunctioning, nor are they being used improperly. In each case, these devices are doing their appointed work of saving their owners the labor of speaking to each other (in the case of the answering machine) or of thinking their own thoughts (in the case of the Walkman). The answering machine removes the human being from the social role of direct communication. The Walkman serves a similar role of removing the Walkman listener from any perceptual engagement in a shared social world. For Ginger, her wish to cut herself off from the human world with the answering machine and the Walkman result in her being murdered by a machine that is a kind of advanced iteration of the same technology. Ginger’s murder by the terminator is therefore a kind of literalization of the virtual self-extermination that Ginger’s technological devices had allowed her to achieve. The Tech Noir club provides another instance of the same pattern. The clientele of Tech Noir come to immerse themselves in a totalized technological environment in which the stainless steel décor, the flashing laser lights, and the synthesized pulse of the music overwhelm individuality, vocal

communication, and subjectivity itself. They are seen dancing in solipsistic obliviousness, abandoning themselves to the promise of technology to relieve them of the burden of existence. There is a poetic justice in the emergence of the terminator robot into this fetishistic technodystopia, soullessly distributing a literal annihilation that is a kind of fulfillment to the post-human aspirations of the club-goers. In this manner, the technocalypse to come is represented as a metaphor for the technocalypse that has already taken place. The terminator cyborg only finishes the job that the answering machine, Walkman, and techno music had initiated.

This situation recalls Heidegger's observation in "The Question Concerning Technology" that "The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence" (29). Before the lethal machines actually show up, the fascination with technology and technological modes of thinking falsifies our relationship to nature and to ourselves, a variety of self-termination which makes robo-execution more or less redundant. In *Terminator 2*, the sight of two boys playing with guns causes John Connor to reflect on the inevitability of technologically-mediated human self-termination on a global scale: "We're not gonna make it are we?" The reprogrammed terminator, drawing on his "detailed files" of human history and psychology, shares his objective assessment of mankind that "It is in your nature to destroy yourselves." His description of the apocalypse as a self-induced human deed underscores the insinuation throughout these two movies that technology is not an Other that attacks humanity from outside; human beings bring about the technocalypse as a fulfillment of their own nihilistic desire. Baudrillard speculates on the ontological underpinnings that may motivate this technological death-instinct. "Perhaps thought is, ultimately, horrified by itself in its incompleteness, its ever unverifiable form, which is always irremediably complicit with a questioning and an illusion;

perhaps it wants, in the end, to produce itself as function, fulfill itself as desire? ... Artificial intelligence represents the final solution to the problem of thought” (*Impossible Exchange* 112). Baudrillard self-consciously employs the phrase “final solution” to associate the Nazi’s attempt to exterminate their undesirable citizenry with an underlying will to accomplish the technologically-mediated extermination of human existence itself, and Cameron seems to suggest a corresponding comparison in his use of Holocaust imagery to describe human existence in a machine-controlled world, where human beings are concentrated into camps, branded with a serial number on their forearms, and either killed outright or kept alive to work. In both Baudrillard’s formulation and Cameron’s narrative, humans use technology as a way of refining themselves out of existence. The answering machine relieves human beings of the need to talk to people, the Walkman relieves human beings of their need to occupy their own thoughts, Skynet relieves human beings of any responsibility for their geopolitical situation, and artificial intelligence replaces the need for human intelligence. The grand achievement of the technoutopia is that human beings are entirely *de trop*, entirely free, entirely useless. The climax of *Terminator 1* takes place in an automated factory, a sidewise reference to 80s-era political controversy about the displacement of human workers by automated assembly lines. In the context of the movie as a whole, the argument that automation kills manufacturing jobs is wittily extended to imply that the universal automation of global affairs which Skynet seeks to bring about will kill the “job” of human beings as a species. Once the entire world is an automated factory, humanity will have achieved its apparent goal of technologizing itself into obsolescence.

In *Terminator 2*, the sense in which technology “afflicts man in his essence,” functioning to terminate human existence in a pre-apocalyptic mode, is embodied in the character of Miles Dyson, the Cyberdyne computer whiz who is destined to make the engineering breakthrough that

will result in Skynet's capacity to bring about the end of the world. In his brief scenes, he is represented as a suburban Faustus, a family man who is so absorbed in his technological inventiveness that he is becoming a stranger to his own family. Pressed by his wife to explain the reasons for his preoccupation with his work, he tells her to "Imagine a jet airliner with a pilot that never gets tired, never makes mistakes, never shows up to work with a hangover." In the same way that the perfect factory is one from which the human workers have been eliminated, so does the ideal airplane have no pilot. The large dinosaur toy which incongruously adorns Miles's Cyberdyne office space suggests that the true work of the Cyberdyne Corporation is human extinction, and Miles speaks an ironic truth when he says of his latest research, "This is gonna blow 'em all away." Miles's techno-utopia is thus coextensive with the technocalypse in that it is a world from which human beings have been eliminated, and it is only a logical extension of Miles's logic to jump from an airplane that does not rely on human beings to the flying machines of the post-apocalyptic future which are programmed to eliminate human beings from the world altogether. But Miles is not primarily intent on eliminating airplane pilots from the world; the primary function of his life's work is the elimination of himself from his own life. His wife is clearly correct in her accusation that Miles's heart and mind are in his neural net processor rather than with his family, and her description of Miles's son and daughter as his "other babies" emphasizes the fact that his biological progeny inhabit a subordinate position in the structure of Miles's operational parameters. Although Miles agrees to take his children to the water park, it is clear from his body language that his real life takes place in the circuits of the neural net processor. As happened with Ginger and the Tech Noir clubbers, an assassin from the future threatens to make Miles's dream of technologically-mediated self-extinction come true. This is a familiar pattern from *Terminator 1*, but with the significant twist that Miles's assassin is

not actually a cyborg from the future, but Sarah Connor, behaving in every way exactly like a killer cyborg from the future.

Sharon Willis observes that the scene in which Sarah attempts to murder Miles Dyson is “crucially pivotal to the plot” (65), and, indeed, it also represents a culminating irony in the development of Sarah Connor’s character. Sarah’s encounter with the first terminator in *Terminator 1* impresses upon her the violent essence of technology, ripping her out of her 80s lifestyle of consumer gadgets and her “Jetsons” tee-shirt and transforming her into a low-tech guerilla. She trades her hair-dryer for an automatic weapon, her motor-scooter for a jeep, and her cold-blooded iguana for a trusty mammalian dog, and we last see her leaving the freeways and skyscrapers of Los Angeles for the rugged Mexican desert. Her love affair with the time-traveling resistance fighter Reese, culminating in his tragic self-sacrifice, has caused her to introject his worldview and mode of life, making her effectively a post-apocalyptic warrior living in pre-apocalyptic times. In *Terminator 1*, while Reese and Sarah sleep under a bridge, the scene cuts to a flashback/flashforward of Reese’s post-apocalyptic home, but when the film cuts back to Reese and Sarah, it is revealed that what we were seeing was Sarah’s dream of Reese’s post-apocalyptic home, replete with details that she would have no way of knowing. Reese even explains to her that the dogs in her dream were the dogs they use in the future to detect infiltrating terminators. Sarah’s contact with the coming technocalypse has affected her not only in the way she thinks, but in the way she exists; it has punched through the conventional barriers represented by linear chronology and has caused her to exist with a new relationship to time. From the moment the battling time-travelers materialize in Sarah’s life, her life becomes something different from what it had been, owing its motivational force not to her pre-apocalyptic memories, but to her relationship to the future post-apocalyptic situation. This twist

in Sarah's temporality becomes more explicit in *Terminator 2*, in which Sarah's nightmare of the nuking of Los Angeles becomes a framing device for the whole movie, repeated in various degrees of detail three times throughout the narrative. In James Cameron's *Aliens*, Ripley's chronic nightmares about her experiences from the first movie could be overcome by returning to the scene of the crime and defeating the monsters once and for all. For Sarah Connor, however, traumatized by something that has not even happened yet, no such reprieve is possible. Sarah's newly configured temporal situation indicates that the technological wizardry of time-travel has unhinged Sarah from conventional patterns of human existence. Dr. Silverman, Sarah's psychologist, may be a buffoon, but he is certainly correct in his assessment that Sarah needs to be confined to a maximum security mental institution for the safety of herself and that of other people. Indeed, within 24 hours of escaping from Pascadero, she is outside Miles Dyson's house with a sniper rifle aimed at his head. The metallic percussive leitmotif that has been associated with the Arnold Schwarzenegger terminator plays on the soundtrack, and Sarah uses the same laser pointer targeting device that was aimed at her own head by the terminator at Tech Noir in *Terminator 1*. It is clear that Sarah Connor, mother of the resistance against the machines, has somehow become technologized in her being. It is as if she had introjected not only the post-apocalyptic awareness of time-traveling Reese, but also the apocalyptic inhumanity of the time-traveling terminator cyborg. Indeed, while Reese impregnated her with the seed of the future through their sexual congress, the terminator from *Terminator 1* also penetrated her body with a dildo-shaped piece of shrapnel at the "climax" of that movie, implying that her son really has two daddies, and that her new identity itself owes its genesis to her encounter with both combatants. Sarah managed to survive the first terminator, but the sequence in which she

empties assault rifle clips at Miles's horrified family suggests that her humanity may have been a casualty of her encounter with apocalyptic technologies.

In her attempt to assassinate Miles Dyson, Sarah employs the same logic used by the machines, which initiate both *Terminator* movies with their plot to change the future by murdering a human being in the present. In the first movie, the machines' plot not only fails, it sets the events in motion which would not have happened had the attempt to prevent them never been made. As in the Oedipus story (or as in a folk tale that Baudrillard is fond of referencing, "Death in Samarkand"), the attempt to change fate becomes instrumental to bringing about the fated events. If Reese hadn't followed the terminator back in time, he could not have fathered the boy who would become John Connor, and he would not have given Sarah the military training she passed down to her son. As in a Greek tragedy, the ontological atmosphere of *Terminator 1* is steeped in irreversible fate. Events could not have happened otherwise than they did; the machines must always have been destined to send the terminator back in time, and the terminator must always have been destined to fail. While it is true that the ordinary sequence of effects and causes are switched around, everything takes place on a single timeline, and there is no possibility of a fatal contradiction that would problematize the perfect symmetry with which the narrative manages to weave together past effects with future causes. As for the apocalypse, it too is represented as unalterably imminent. As in *La Jetée* and *12 Monkeys*, the temporality of *Terminator 1* involves eddies capable of circulating the future back into the past, but this novel temporal maneuverability does not imply any expanded freedom to change the fatal sequence of personal and civilizational death. Indeed, Sarah's task in *Terminator 1* is not to prevent the apocalypse from happening, but to ensure that future events happen exactly as they have already happened, for only if the technocalypse takes place can John Connor distinguish himself as the

inspirational resistance leader the human race requires him to become. Victory for Sarah consists of assuring that the future happens just as if it were the past, ensuring that time remains a closed loop. Sarah takes on the responsibility of maintaining the tragic course of this history, like a penitent observing the stations of the cross, any hope of redemption coming only after the end of the road. Reese takes his time-traveling mission knowing that it will end in his death. Sarah, too, must realize that she will not live to see the 2029 she is committed to bringing about. The temporality represented in *Terminator 1* is characterized by a mechanical physicality. Past, present, and future are all merely points along the same automated assembly line.

In *Terminator 2*, however, the fatality of the apocalyptic time-sense is disrupted through a magical interpolation. In 1984, Reese recites a message to Sarah that her future son had instructed him to memorize. “I can’t help you with what you must face, except to say that the future is not set. You must be stronger than you imagine you can be. You must survive or I will never exist.” In the context of the first movie, John’s comment that “the future is not set” represents a warning: Sarah cannot rely on the fact that her son exists in the future as any guarantee that she will survive to give birth to him in the present. It is her grim responsibility to live her life backwards from its end-point, and to drive out stoically, as she does at the end of *Terminator 1*, into the coming storm. In *Terminator 2*, however, John’s message is remembered differently from the way it appears in the original movie. In 1995 (*Terminator 2* takes place several years in advance of its 1991 release-year), John Connor’s recitation of his 2029 self’s message to 1984 Sarah interpolates a sentence that changes the meaning of the original message. In the new version, the line, “The future’s not set” is followed by the aphorism, “There’s no fate but what we make for ourselves.” In this new context, the open-ended-ness of the future is transformed from a dire warning against altering the future into a prescription for shattering the

constricting fatalism that a mechanical formulation of the future had established.

Correspondingly, in conspiring to act as if the interpolated line had always been part of the original movie, the characters assert an even more radical suggestion that the past is an entity that is just as fluid as the future. Rather than representing a closed world in which temporality and human will are both subordinated to a mechanical descent into technocalypse, *Terminator 2* explodes the chain of cause and effect that ties the past and future of *Terminator 1* into such a merciless trap. By apparently going back in time to alter his own message, John sets the whole franchise on a new direction, one which embraces pataphysical violations of the grandfather paradox. In the world of *Terminator 2*, the reconfiguration of the temporal order becomes the background for a reimagination of the nature of the technopocalyptic scenario.

In the worlds of both the movies' audiences and characters, American history between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s is characterized by a significant development in the identity of the technopocalyptic threat. Although Glasnost-era policies would soon lead to a rapid dismantling of Cold War hostilities and nuclear anxiety, in 1984, the nuclear apocalypse still occupied the cultural imagination as an imminent possibility. *Wargames*, which revolves around a computer-induced nuclear apocalypse similar to that depicted in *Terminator 1*, had been one of the top-grossing films of 1983. That same year, *The Day After*, a television movie about the nuclear apocalypse, attracted an audience of 100 million viewers, and was followed by a debate of public intellectuals during which Carl Sagan illustrated the imminence of the nuclear apocalypse by inviting his audience to "Imagine a room awash in gasoline, and there are two implacable enemies in that room. One of them has nine thousand matches, the other seven thousand matches" ("The Nuclear Dilemma"). Helen Caldicott's 1984 book *Missile Envy*, bore the subtitle, "an expert's account of the frightening facts behind our blind rush toward atomic

disaster.” Sagan and Caldicott use rhetoric that represents the apocalypse as a real imminence on the visible horizon. In 1991, however, the famous Doomsday Clock that measures the imminence of the nuclear apocalypse ticked backwards to the earliest time it had ever registered (or has registered since). The month of July, when *Terminator 2* was released, saw the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and, by the end of that year, the USSR would dissolve as well. The genie of Mutually Assured Destruction showed signs of returning to the bottle, and even John Connor remarks that “the Russians are our friends now.” As a result, the story of *Terminator 2* carries forward its 1984 vision of the nuclear apocalypse, but this vision mutates in ways that reflect the different attitudes of a different historical moment. In particular, while *Terminator 1* portrays the coming technocalypse in the tragic, fatalistic mode, *Terminator 2* reimagines this event in a mode that is essentially comic and reversible. This alteration in the phenomenological texture of the technocalypse corresponds with a more complex manner of representing the relationship between the present and the future and between original and copy, as well as between human beings and technology.

Sarah’s Cassandra-like predictions of the apocalypse establish continuity from the first movie to the second. In *Terminator 2*, Sarah still thinks of Judgment Day as a *fait accompli*, an event that is no less real for taking place in the future. In *Terminator 1*, Sarah’s co-worker, commenting on a news report about the murder of another woman named Sarah Connor, had told Sarah, “You’re dead, honey.” In retrospect, this casual comment bears a chilling double-meaning, suggesting that a death that is inevitably bearing down on Sarah in the form of the terminator is equivalent to a death already achieved. Fate confounds a linear progression of past, present, and future by regarding the whole timeline as a simultaneous event. Throughout the first half of *Terminator 2*, Sarah insists upon this fatalistic collapse of the future and the present,

having learned to see the history of the near future as the past history of Reese's 2029. For Reese, the apocalypse is as real as any historical event, and when Sarah, having introjected Reese's mission and temperament, angrily rants at the same police psychologists at whom Reese had ranted in 1984, she uses his future perspective to explain the existential status of her jailers. "You think you're safe and alive? You're already dead! Everybody! Him, you, you're dead already! This whole place, everything you see is gone! You're the one living in a fucking dream!" Sarah is in a privileged position to evaluate the true nature of reality because of her ability to see through the illusion of freedom created by linear time. Even her dreams are real, her repeated dream of Judgment Day constituting more of a prophecy than a fantasy. Sarah's time-sense is similar to that of the *Beowulf* poet, whose depictions of life and riches are always permeated by an awareness of the inevitable destruction of all youth and beauty. A more contemporary comparison would be to Manfred Steiner, the autistic character in Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* who sees everything from the perspective of its future ruination. In this grim kind of time-sense, the imminent apocalypse itself is only a metaphor for the immanent apocalypse that has always already invaded the structure of the present, deadening it by emptying it of freedom or hope. Short-term survival is the best that Sarah can hope for, and her existence in *Terminator 2* is an extension of the grim countdown to apocalypse established in *Terminator 1*.

Although Sarah's character anchors the connection between *Terminator 1* and *Terminator 2*, and although her voiceover narration in the second movie foregrounds her point of view, her importance to the story of *Terminator 2* is upstaged by the real star of the movie, Arnold Schwarzenegger, in his triumphant return to the role that made him a mega-star. By 1984, Arnold's appearances in *Pumping Iron* and *Conan the Barbarian* had established him as

“the hardest of the hard-body heroes” (Jeffords 141), a class of 80s movie stars whose pumped-up physiques and hyper-violent masculinity enabled them to personify a type of reality that was serious, brutal, and deadly. In a way, Arnold’s character in *Terminator 1* epitomizes the hard-bodied action hero as an unstoppable killing machine. Cameron’s inspired idea to turn this hard-body protagonist into the definitive bad guy exploits Arnold’s freakish, robotic, and Nazi-esque appearance to create the unique tension that makes *Terminator 1* such a memorable film. By 1991, however, Arnold is no longer a morphological oddity, but the top-grossing celebrity of all time, and the real inspiration of *Terminator 2* seems to have been the narrative possibilities that could be generated by juxtaposing Arnold’s *Terminator 1* character with his cuddlier post-*Twins*, post-*Kindergarten Cop* persona. In terms of the storyline, Arnold’s character in *Terminator 2* is exactly the same as his character in *Terminator 1*; they are twin units of the same model of killer cyborg. But the manner in which Arnold’s character is introduced in *Terminator 2* indicates that, although the character is the same, the way we are supposed to understand the terminator icon is being redefined. The terminator robot is still the envoy from the post-apocalyptic future and a kind of avatar of the technocalypse itself. Cameron relies on our memories of the first movie to associate this character with the inevitable end of the world, even going so far as to conclude *Terminator 2*’s opening-credit montage of a post-apocalyptic playground with a looming image of the steely death’s head of the T-101 Arno-bot. When the T-101 travels into the present, cinematic cues reactivate our memories of the corresponding scene from *Terminator 1*. Both sequences begin with an establishing shot of a passing truck, followed by images of rustling street-litter and blue electric discharges. In both movies, Arnold materializes naked in a crouched position, approaches a group of incredulous humans, and articulates a deadpan request for their clothes. These points of repetition refer the audience in two directions. We see that a

terminator robot has a very predictable modus operandi upon infiltrating a human community, but we are also learning that a *Terminator* sequel has a similar predictability that caters to the infantile pleasure in repetition and familiarity while simultaneously stimulating the awareness that a repetition is also a novelty. When the first terminator approached a trio of punks to steal their clothes in *Terminator 1*, the audience's unfamiliarity with the origin and qualities of the terminator cyborg rendered the action disorienting and unpredictable, and the soundtrack, the setting, and the performances all worked together to enhance a mood of unsettling edginess. In the corresponding scene in *Terminator 2*, this disorientation effect is replaced by self-referentiality and game-playing. The deserted parking lot has been replaced by a crowded honky-tonk bar. The crazed punks have been replaced by good old boys whose reactions to the naked cyborg are essentially comic. We even see the scene from the cyborg's point of view, in terminator-vision, inviting the audience into the franchise not only by recalling similar shots from the first movie, but also by literally inviting us into the terminator's head, to imagine ourselves in his place. When the new terminator turns violent, furthermore, he does not turn horror-movie violent (the first terminator drove his fist into the punk's abdomen and pulled out a handful of viscera); the new terminator's violence is just good old-fashioned rough-housing. Even before John Connor explicitly reprograms this terminator not to kill people, he has already been so reprogrammed by the manner in which his character has been reinvented for a new historical moment. When Arnold finally emerges from his confrontation with the honky-tonkers, the soundtrack plays the famous riff from George Thorogood's Bo Diddley homage, "Bad to the Bone." We are assured that this terminator is "bad" in a cool, funny, nonthreatening way. With his leather jacket, motorcycle boots, and Harley Davidson, he is more of a cyborg Fonzie than an inexorable force of death. The scene concludes with a comic exchange between

Arnold's terminator and a biker dude. The terminator doesn't want to dig his fist into the biker's chest cavity; he just wants to borrow his shades to complete his iconic Terminator look. In *Terminator 1*, the terminator wore sunglasses to conceal his wounded flesh; in *Terminator 2*, he just wears them because he wears them. This whole sequence is an in-joke with the audience, reprising the menace and gore of *Terminator 1* as a musical comedy routine.

The reprogrammed Arno-bot from *Terminator 2* is an emissary from a very different style of technocalypse than that represented by his forerunner. The very idea that the terminator robot can be reprogrammed to aid mankind is a reversal of the original movie's technophobia, and the corresponding suggestion is that the technocalypse itself might be reprogrammed from a fatalistic inevitability, as Sarah sees it, into a kind of pataphysical game. As trite, rote, and crassly commercial as many sequels are, sequels at their most interesting represent a compelling postmodern genre. Some sequels mimic their original as closely as possible, some sequels extend or amplify the basic premise of their original, and some sequels twist the themes of the original film into new permutations, dialogically generating adaptations of the original movie's themes to reflect the altered historical landscape in which they are created and received. Even sequels to movies that don't involve time-travel play with multiple temporalities: a sequel is a continuation, but also a repetition of the original. As a result, a sequel takes on a deeper perspective against the background of its original, retroactively rewriting the original (as *Terminator 2* literally rewrites *Terminator 1* in its revision of future-John's message to Sarah) while also revisiting the themes of the original with a new self-awareness. As Stephen Mulhall explains, sequels can allow a cinematic franchise to "renew itself over time, in part by explicitly reflecting upon what is involved in inheriting a particular set of characters in a particular narrative universe – the constraints and opportunities internal to ... that inheritance"

(5). *Terminator 2* provides an interesting case study of how a sequel can fold out the themes of its original into a new dimension, squaring, rather than adding to, its predecessor. In the same way that the formidably real terminator of the first movie is succeeded by the self-referential celebrity terminator of *Terminator 2*, the one-dimensional time-line that the characters were fated to exist within in *Terminator 1* is reimagined in the sequel as a trajectory that can be understood and successfully manipulated from a new position of self-consciousness. In *Terminator 1*, none of the denizens of 1984 knew anything about time travel or the rise of the machines or Judgment Day. They were acting in obliviousness, entirely responsively, engaged in crisis management and driven by immediate necessity. In *Terminator 2*, the characters enjoy a new level of self-consciousness regarding their situation within to a wider historical picture. Throughout the central part of the movie, they are not running from their pursuer, but brainstorming ways to alter the fate of mankind with tactical incursions into the present history, which they can clearly see because of the insight they have acquired by living through the first movie. The temporality of sequeldom allows the characters in *Terminator 2* to take advantage of Baudrillard's observation that "When we know the rules of the game, we can change them" ("This is the Fourth World War").

Specifically, this new sense of temporal plasticity de-realizes the future history of the first movie and, simultaneously, the present as well. The shift in the representation of reality in the two movies is personified in the figure of Arnold's two terminators. There is no ambiguity concerning the ontology of the first terminator. Its steely endoskeleton epitomizes the being of the hard body reduced to its essential qualities: ruthless efficiency in pursuit of a single goal. It is here to kill you and that is all there is to know about it. Its lethality is a brutal indicator of its reality. When Arnold returns for the second movie, he is still a machine and, what's more, he is

still the same make and model of machine from the first movie, but his relation to the real/illusory binary has become more complex. Whereas the first movie dramatized a very stark contrast between the real human beings and the cybernetic imitation, the presence in *Terminator 2* of a second robot that is even more exotic than Arnold's model creates a continuum of humanity, with Arnold occupying an ambiguous middle-ground between the flesh and blood human beings with whom Arnold's robot develops a relationship on one side and the extremely alien T-1000 model of terminator on the other. The T-1000, a product of cutting-edge CGI technology, makes Arnold's android seem quaintly human by comparison. Compared to this strange entity, the T-101's physiology is reassuring in its more conventional limitations and vulnerabilities. Arnold might not be human, but he is "more human" than the T-1000. In addition, John flips a switch inside Arnold's skull that allows the terminator to learn. As the Arnold robot begins to pick up pieces of slang and comes to understand the meaning of emotional pain, the movie suggests that human beings do not have a monopoly on the capacity for human behavior. The T-101 is a machine, and not even a true cyborg, since its organic outer covering only serves the function of a disguise, one which is easily removable, rather than acting as an integral component of its functioning. Nevertheless, Arnold's terminator takes on qualities that we associate with human psychology. The division between the real humans and the cybernetic impostors has become blurry, and now in order to survive, Sarah Connor must overcome the knee-jerk technophobia that she learned from the first movie and ally herself with a world of simulacra.

In addition to softening the ontological boundary between human and non-human, the robot played by Arnold in *Terminator 2* also embodies a paradox that confounds classical temporality. Baudrillard defined the essence of hyperreality as "the generation by models of a

real without origin or reality” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 1). Rather than a cause followed by an effect, or an original reality followed by a representation, hyperreality is a condition in which copies have abandoned all reference to an originary reality. In his analysis of time in Baudrillard’s hyperreality, William Bogard explains that “simulation is like a miracle, for only a miraculous technology could revive the past in the present (and project it endlessly into the future) ... The miracle produces a cyborg time-traveler.” Arnold’s robot, of course, is Baudrillard’s cyborg time-traveler come to cinematic life. Not only does he embody Baudrillard’s temporal paradox in his status as a robot that has not been invented yet, but *Terminator 2* takes this hyperreal condition a step further when Arnold and his human friends break into the Skynet laboratory where the Arnold robot was invented and destroy all the research that led to his existence, effectively terminating Arnold’s unborn self. According to *Back to the Future* rules, Arnold should disappear from existence at this point, but Arnold’s variety of existence does not rely on past circumstances. Arnold’s *Terminator 2* robot existentially log-rolls on a free-floating temporal precession in which copies need have no reference to any past original. To make matters even more complex, the research that Arnold and his friends destroy in the Skynet laboratory is itself based entirely on a piece of the terminator robot from the future that Sarah had destroyed in 1984. If the terminator machine had never been sent back in time in the first place, we discover, the terminator machine and all of the planetary robotic infrastructure that dominates the post-apocalyptic future of the *Terminator* mythology would never have come into existence. The Arnold machine gives birth to itself in a closed temporal loop that is outside of linear time and in which the copy is literally its own original. Moreover, this hyperreal entity is the perfect foster-father for John Connor, who, as a representative of the new techno-savvy generation, is himself a hyperreal construct, having

orchestrated the circumstances of his own conception by sending Reese back in time to impregnate his mother. Both the machine and the boy are hyperreal, detached from the old binaries of nature/technology, past/future, and authentic/artificial. Naturally, as John's mother comes to realize, the hyperreal robot is the perfect father for her hyperreal son. "Of all the would-be fathers who came and went over the years, this thing – this machine – was the only one who measured up. In an insane world, it was the sanest choice." The brave new world of hyperreality compels Sarah to reassess her twentieth-century prejudices about the relationship between reality and simulation.

As Sarah mulls over these reflections, we see her absent-mindedly carving something into the picnic table where she is seated. Falling asleep, she has her most detailed dream yet about the nuclear apocalypse, and when she wakes up, we see that what she has carved is the slogan "NO FATE." John correctly identifies this phrase as a portion of the reconstituted message that his future self had sent back with Reese to deliver to the woman who would become his mother. This magical message – a repetition without an original in several different senses – inspires Sarah to the same course of action pursued by the Skynet assassins: to change the future through preemptive murder. This insight reveals an important development in Sarah's understanding of the nature of time – the future is not a preexisting reality – but the fact that she seeks to alter the future through the same (failed) methods employed by the machines suggests that she remains fixated in the past, traumatized by her encounter with the brutal reality of 1984. Her lingering commitment to a dichotomous ontology in which the real is pitted against the artificial and in which humans are pitted against machines comes across clearly when, having failed to kill Miles, she snarls at him, "Men like you invented the nuclear bomb. You don't know what it's like to really create something, feel it growing inside you. All you know how to

create is death and destruction.” During Sarah’s earlier rants, the audience was intended to understand that there was a serious truth underneath her frenzied words. In this instance, however, Sarah’s thesis that life-giving women who nurture the future are eternally pitted against death-dealing men set on destroying it is received by John, and presumably by the audience, as a hysterical misinterpretation of their situation. John tells his mother that she needs to be “more constructive,” playing the role of the parent in their relationship, as he does throughout the movie.

Of course, John is in a unique position to be the parent-figure to his own mother due to his own hyperreal condition of being proxy-parent to himself. Furthermore, as the stand-in for the target audience of *Terminator 2*, John Connor belongs to a generation that never knew nuclear war as a prominent existential threat. In the movie, this circumstance is reflected in the fact that, in stark opposition to his mother, John has never known a bad-guy terminator and cannot relate to his mother’s bias against his pet robot. John knows about his mother’s past experiences, and he knows about the apocalyptic future that supposedly lurks on the horizon, but he is not traumatized by this knowledge. When John and his Arno-bot escape on a motorbike through the Los Angeles River culvert, they embody a postmodern version of Huck and Jim and, indeed, John shares the natural boyhood innocence of Huckleberry Finn, a perennial American character whose purity of heart allows him to perceive the world in a way that bypasses the hypocrisies and conventional prejudices of adult society. Indeed, it is this very promise of future possibility represented by a new generation and by generativity itself that the first terminator’s project of “retroactive abortion” had sought to erase. Fixated in her siege-mentality, Sarah had raised John to be the military leader she believed him to be fated to become. As we observe during her violent assault on Miles Dyson, even when Sarah thinks of altering the future, she

thinks of doing so through militaristic, terminator-esque means. But John's real military genius, it turns out, is in convincing his mother to imagine non-lethal (if not nonviolent) possibilities for bringing about change. John's true tactical brilliance as a soldier is an extension of his hyperreal origins and values. He interprets his own (simulacral) message from 2029 – "No fate but what we make" – to mean that the war between humans and machines need never take place. The height of military acumen, it turns out, does not consist of technical effectiveness, but of the capacity to reimagine the shape of the battlefield and the terms of the war. His love for his Arno-bot father figure, the time-traveling celebrity simulacrum, is coextensive with his ability to redefine the shape of fate and the meaning of the apocalypse. His leadership in arranging the siege on the Cyberdyne laboratory succeeds in exploding the fatalism of *Terminator 1*, reshaping the future from a visible nightmare into the invisible suspense of "a dark highway at night." John expresses no concern that cancelling the future war that plays such an important role in his own origin might imperil his own ontological status. His hyperreal condition has liberated him from any loyalty to past or future origins, leaving him free to continue to invent himself out of paradox and contradiction, as he does (or did, or will do, or would have done) when he first sends Reese back in time to become his father. John Connor's fluency in the dynamics of hyperreality allows him to embody and enact transformative permutations on the meaning of the end of the world as well as of its continuation.

Although James Cameron ceded control of the *Terminator* franchise, it has continued to thrive in the form of more sequels, a television series, video games, and comic books, as well as in the cultural imagination. The perpetuation of this franchise requires that John's reversal of the apocalypse will itself have to be reversed in order for there to be a post-apocalyptic future from which time-traveling cyborgs can continue to travel. Accordingly, "We see [Judgment Day]

actually happen in the less-than-superb *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*. But in the new television series, *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, we find out that it has been postponed until 2011, and [in] *Terminator: Salvation*, it actually happens in 2018” (Brown and Decker 1). This multiplicity of past, possible, and future timelines suggests that the apocalypse can never be definitively foreclosed, but must be perpetually managed. At the heart of the *Terminator* universe is the intuition that we come into contact with the immanent technocalypse every time we interact with a technological object, and, indeed, that all technological objects are death-machines *in utero*. The global substitution of artificial intelligence for human intelligence and of simulacral cyborgs for human beings – the reversal of copy and original that is the essence of *Terminator*’s technocalypse – is already underway in our contemporary lifeworld. While *Terminator 1* establishes a classical representation of the technocalypse as an inescapable fate to which we are already doomed, a time-sense to which *Terminator 3* returns, *Terminator 2* reimagines fate as a game of self-consciousness and self-invention.

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