

Abstract

This proposal explains the significance of my project, a fictional work that examines the relationships between humans and their technological simulations (i.e. cyborgs, robots, androids, etc). I will lay out how this has been a topic in many works of science fiction, and also in various scholarly essays that examine the effects that their blurring of divisions have upon the real world. This section includes a list of referenced books and newspaper articles. After my statement of central object, I give a small plot summary of the story that I plan on writing, giving an overview of both the society's conflicts and the protagonist's situation. The schedule is laid out that I will follow through the nine weeks. My proposal concludes with the reasons for my personal interest in the project, the prerequisite classes I've taken, and a conference and publication to which the piece can be submitted.

Significance of Project

This project focuses on our increasingly technological society and the growing struggle developing between ourselves and the technologies that we integrate into our bodies and lives on a daily basis. The New York Times has published several articles that illustrate how research is taking us closer and closer to artificial intelligence, robots capable of performing important functions in our society, and a world where humans and machines are not necessarily separate.

As these advanced computer systems are being taught to think for themselves, or robots taught to perform complicated tasks like teaching, the robots of *Rossum's Universal Robots*, and the androids of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* are no longer just a piece of science fiction, but a real possibility looming in the future. Not just a possibility but also a threat to our humanity, our power, and our reality.

My work will fit in with the literature in my field. First, it will be similar to several works of science fiction, such as earlier works like *Frankenstein*, that examined the position that man has begun to take as a creator, as well as the responsibility man has to its creations. Later works such as *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* will tie in as well, for here we see the conflict between androids and the humans who struggle to keep them in their subservient position of mechanized, while keeping themselves in power.

Scholarly representations of the issue will also guide my writing. The essay "Simulation and Simulacra" by Jean Baudrillard examines the core issue of the mechanization of man: that is by simulating ourselves through technology we undermine our own authority and power. This dangerous symbolism not only twists the reality of humans, but also the reality of objective truth and reason. Further blurring of divisions is found in the essay "Manifesto for Cyborgs" by Donna Haraway, an essay that examines the effects that fictional cyborgs have upon the perceptions of humans, men and women, upon themselves, technology, and surrounding realities.

This creative project will be unique in that it will combine technologies that have previously been left separate. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a robot as "An intelligent artificial being typically made of

metal and resembling in some way a human or other animal.” Cyborg is defined as “an integrated man-machine system.” Other characters such as the beast-men from *The Island of Dr. Moreau* fit into their own category. All of these creations have an impact upon the society in which they exist, yet for the most part they have appeared separately. My work will incorporate all of these constructs.

My creative project will be a synthesis of all of these ideas, a deep study through created characters who will take on these issues and throughout the story find their own way through the uncharted lands of new technologies and their dangers. The characters will discover themselves, they will enter into a deeper understanding of the technology that they have created, and they will tentatively move deeper into an understanding of how they’re humanity remains untouched, is diminished, or altered through the encounter with their robotic counterparts.

Annotated Bibliography

1) Fictional Works

Capek, Karel. *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots): a Fantastic Melodrama*. Trans. Paul Selver and Nigel Playfair. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, 1923. Print.

This book was the first instance in which the word “robot” was coined. It contains the important issue of whether machines possess the possibility to become human or not.

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* New York: Ballantine, 1996. Print.

The whole society of this novel struggles with what defines a human. The androids of this novel, though clearly deficient, do what they can to discredit the human authorities to their own benefit.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Walter James Miller, and Harold Bloom. *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus*. New York: New American Library, 2000. Print.

Wells, H. G. *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. New York: Signet Classics, 2005. Print.

2) Academic Essays

Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations." *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*. By Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007. 365-77. Print.

This essay is a theoretical examination of the occurrences of simulation in our modern society, and the profound effects it has upon the concept of “reality” or “power.” This essay is especially prevalent because of the harsh light it shines upon cyborgs or robots in their existence as simulations of humans.

Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. By Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 2268-299. Print.

Haraway examines the effects that the social, fictional cyborg has upon the world. The essay is focused on feminist themes, but an most important observations of the piece is how cyborgs blur the divisions between animals and humans, organic and mechanics, and physical and non-physical.

3) New York Times Articles

Carey, Benedict, and John Markoff. "Students, Meet Your New Teacher, Mr. Robot." *The New York Times*. 11 July 2010. Web. 02 Feb. 2011.

Lohr, Steve. "Aiming to Learn as We Do, a Machine Teaches." *The New York Times*. 04 Oct. 2010.

This article discusses a new super computer that is being trained to think like a human being. Although there are many flaws still in its logic and reasoning, it is a significant step forward towards artificial intelligence, or even artificial consciousness for that matter.

Weise, Jillian. "Going Cyborg." *New York Times* 10 Jan. 2010.

Statement of Central Objective

During BSI I will draft and develop a piece of creative fiction the length of a novella (17,500-40,000 words) in which I explore the impact of the technology of human simulation (i.e. cyborgs and robots), and its effects on our humanity through such questions and themes as: what defines human, and how can or should humans exist among their created simulations?

Methods

As I have learned in my various intensive writing workshops, such as EN 219 and EN 310, I will begin

my writing everyday with free-writing, a technique of getting through all of my wild thoughts floating around, get them on paper, and get them organized. It is detailed explicitly in the writing technique book:

“Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within” by Natalie Goldberg.

Because the plot of the story is intrinsic to the methods that I use to accomplish my central objective, I will give a brief overview of the plot. The story is set in a future society on earth. The humans reign supreme at the top of the social and economic hierarchy. Lesser beings are stratified in lower classes. Those just below the humans are cyborgs, human-machine hybrids. Below them are robots, purely mechanical beings. Lowest are the genetic experiments, animals of various species that have been artificially evolved closer to humans. All of these groups are enslaved, forced to work for the humans and denied the most basic right.

The protagonist is a young man working in the Department of Homeland Security. Head of the “Sub-human Division,” he will work with these groups closely. His job includes fostering better relations between humans and their inferiors, mainly in the goal of keeping the peace and increasing production. The story will be centered on the rebellion of the sub-humans, and an on a government building that sparks the ensuing battle. He will eventually be called up to meet with higher government officials, a meeting that will lead him to understand that his relationship with sub-humans is more than professional. As he delves into his own past and troubling ancestry, he will be thrown into the struggle between humans to maintain their power and the human constructs’ fight for human-status. This clearly works towards the central objective in the situation it presents, where humans and their simulations struggle over the definition of humanity.

Due to this project being creative, I will also need to work on my writing skills. In the semester prior I will take craft notes of various fictional works that have cyborgs, robots, or androids including *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Frankenstein*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *I, Robot*. The craft notes will help guide me through the drafting and revising of my project.

Progression of Project

Prior to BSI: In the months preceding BSI, I will continue to research the fictional texts, writing craft notes

on several of them to examine how they use the androids or cyborgs to examine the issues I plan to take on. I will also brainstorm ideas for character and map out the world and society that I plan to have the work set in.

Weeks 1-2: This period will focus intensely on the writing of the preparation for the piece. Finalizing what characters I want, what situations they will be in, outlining the society they will live in, etc. I will compile a binder with all of my notes.

Weeks 3-5: This will be the main work, the huge chunk of time spent towards creating the first draft. This could easily spill over into week two if I find that the preparation does not require as much time as I planned for. As soon as I finish the first draft, I will hit the drawing board, examine what's good or what's lacking in the piece, and how much progress I made towards my central objective.

Weeks 6-8: These weeks will be focused on editing. I will send the draft to professors, peers, and people that I have work-shopped with in the past, to get their feedback on what they think is working, what work and what doesn't. I plan on redrafting the piece once or twice.

Weeks 9: This final week will be devoted entirely to preparing for the presentation. I will examine what I have learned, what I struggled with, and I will also prepare a segment to read from my revised work to the other BSI participants.

Feasibility

Equipment I will need will be very basic. My laptop, writing software, and contacts to send my piece to for editing are all things that I possess.

Working on Campus

I will not need to leave Butler's campus during the course of BSI.

Personal

The inspiration for this project was born through my class EN 393 Prosthetic Gods: Technology and the Body in Literature and Film taught by Jason Goldsmith. All of my life, I have been engaged with science fiction but this year I was awakened to the potential of science fiction, not as an escapist fiction meant to

entertain but as an avenue to examine how the human person will be affected by a world full of an ever growing array of technologies, some of which are on the verge of human capacities.

My educational goals are deeply tied into this work. As an English writing major, this subject holds two points of interest to me. First, as a study of past literature, I am given the chance to delve into the analysis of other writers and synthesize it into my own work. Second, I plan on writing a piece of fiction, the focus of my major.

The completion of this piece will be immediately applicable to my goals after graduation from Butler. Applying to an MFA program in fiction is my goal, and this kind of application is intrinsically tied into a portfolio of my own works. A work with this intensive form of research and practice would bolster this greatly. I might even consider working on this piece further as part of my Honors Thesis, which I will complete on my senior year.

The skills I will gain include working on a piece full time, a feat that is nearly impossible with school and work over the summer taking up the majority of my time. I would also benefit greatly from the experience of not only completing a first draft of a work, but more from the subsequent editing and revisions that are necessary to create a piece worth reading, that will be considered seriously in the world of fiction.

I have taken several classes that have prepared me for my project, both in the fields of literature and fiction writing: EN 393 with Jason Goldsmith, EN 310 with Dan Barden, and EN 219 with Bryan Furuness.

Presentation

I could submit a sample of my piece to *Asimov's Science Fiction*, a popular magazine that regularly publishes science fiction short stories and novellas. This could be submitted to the *2011 National Popular Culture & American Culture Association Conference*, which is held every year and encourages scholarly research in the field of science fiction. This conference is especially applicable because it accepts creative writings as well, so long as they delve into the very issues that are prevalent in science fiction. <<http://www.pcasff.org/>>

Research Approval

I will not be using human subjects, vertebrate animals, or recombinant DNA.