

# Prosthetic Gods, Projected Monsters: Imagination and Unconscious Projection in Narratives of Technological Horror

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## Abstract:

This paper examines several narratives of techno-horror in literature and film. Special attention is paid to the recurring trope of monstrosity arising from a technologically augmented sense of sight. Utilizing a psychoanalytically informed analysis, this paper argues that fictions can express latent, untenable dimensions of very real experiences. In the case of techno-horror, narratives of sight, imagination, and projection-made-monstrous are rooted in contemporary relationships with technology and its capacity for depicting and transmitting unconscious fantasies. In this relationship, the technological is the extension of a tangible category of humanity, while nevertheless containing the fear that this extension dissolves its stability.

Thus, the genre of techno-horror is unique in expressing the role of unconscious fantasies – our unattainable ideals for becoming “prosthetic Gods,” as Freud put it (1930) – in our relationship with technology. Like the ideal of transcendence in religion, this technological ideal is a desire for both an impossible future, as well as the wish to return to an equally impossible, infantile past. Ultimately, this paper suggests that techno-horror narratives are expressions of a failure in taking responsibility for the othered unconscious fantasies that motivate our relationship with technology. Understanding these narratives within the context of psychoanalytic projection and situating them within the long tradition of imagining a transcendence of the human subject affords a better understanding of the cultural work accomplished by these contemporary expressions of the human-made-monstrous.

**Keywords:** projection, imagination, psychoanalysis, monsters, technology

As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen reiterates in each of the seven theses that introduce his seminal collection, *Monster Theory*, the monstrous body is a “cultural body” – it points to or, rather, it de-monstrates (from the Latin *monstrare*) something other than its own form.<sup>1</sup> That which is other – the monstrous and inhuman – often emerges out of, and at the behest of its counterpart: the familiar and human. These demonstrations serve a variety of functions from regulating behaviour to demarcating social, aesthetic, and even geographic boundaries – as medieval maps famously noted on the peripheral regions of the known world: *hic sunt dracones*.

Monsters, most importantly, tell a double narrative,<sup>2</sup> obscuring the origins of their own culturally transformative and regulative work. They are a distorted mirror image of ourselves, or rather, of our interiority – our own desires, wishes, and impulses which are unbearable to

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<sup>1</sup>Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 13.

conscious reflection. Monsters are forces of deconstruction, of the abject, the unconscious, and the imaginary, amongst other theoretical registers, each offering a descriptive language for examining a common theme: the self as other.

Thus, it is not surprising that monstrosity is most often depicted as the hybridization of an element of humanity with something that is wholly other to it. The unfamiliar element that is most often coupled with the human is the animal – think the werewolf, centaur, or mermaid. But in our contemporary cultural imagination, animality is just as often supplanted with mechanization – think scientific creations and automata, such as Frankenstein’s monster, the Terminator, and the rogue AIs which mirror gods and demons in the Gnostic cyber-spaces of *Neuromancer* (1984) and *The Matrix* (1999-2021). In narratives of science fiction and horror, the technological often evokes an age-old sense of animism or religious transcendence, participating in a feedback loop where hopes for the future find themselves paired with realized fears of regression.

The narratives of technological horror which are my focus share the common theme of an augmented sight – one which promises much in terms of future humanity, but often results in monstrous visions. What these narratives underscore, is that the way in which we imagine the world exposes an inextricability between the familiar, the represented, and the unfamiliar, the unrepresented which threatens what *is* represented from an area outside of its control. Cultural images – whether of restrictive monsters or emancipatory future-humanity – are psychological projections. And, like all of our capacities to represent, imagine, and dream, they are never free of the unconscious. This capacity is – at its foundation – a capacity to take what is unbearable *within* ourselves and project it into a monstrous or sublime form that is situated *outside* of ourselves.

Thus, my arguments in this paper, although focused on fictions, are really about how fictional narratives – as cultural dreams – express latent dimensions of real experience. Not least of all, our relationship with technology. One of Freud’s central insights continues to be relevant in this regard. While his broader aim was to understand the internal origins of individual as well as cultural narratives, fantasies, and ideals, he developed a valuable language for describing how the latent and untenable, or, rather, the *unconscious* regions of experience find their voice not only through dreams, for the individual, but through collective cultural products such as religion, technology, and fiction. Thus, through imagination and representation, we instantiate the categories of ourselves, as subjects, in relation to what we consider to be other. And in imagining technologies which expand the familiar subject, while inevitably pushing up against (and sometimes wandering into) the other, we find the inexpressible moment in which *hic sunt dracones* mutates into *hic sunt machinae*.

In the first section of this article, I engage with Victoria Nelson’s suggestion that secular, Gothic monstrosity is a modern “back door” into traditionally religious notions of transcendence. Emphasizing the relationship between the cultural imagination traced by her historical analysis and the broader language of psychoanalytic projection, I elaborate on the role of real and imagined technologies in the migration of transcendence that her work describes. In so doing, I underscore the continuity between traditionally religious or supernatural conceptions of transcendence and the anticipated extensions of the human subject which preoccupy the contemporary technological imagination.

In the second section, I examine several contemporary cultural artefacts which narrativize the monstrous-transcendent augmentations of humanity through technology. Specifically, I focus on the pineal eye as evoked by H.P. Lovecraft, in his short story “From Beyond,” and by

Georges Bataille in his literary-philosophical reveries. For these authors, the pineal eye perpetuates a model of transcendent, sublime, yet monstrous sight while shifting the means of fostering this augmentation from the realm of the spiritual into the technological and biological. I continue, in the third section, by examining two films which explore related themes: David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and Olivier Assayas' *Demonlover*. Both films express the close association between a capacity for monstrous, transcendent vision and contemporary practices of augmented sight, especially through technologies of cinema and new media.

Finally, in the last section, I suggest that the re-reading of Freud offered by critical theorist of the imaginary Cornelius Castoriadis elucidates the role of autonomy and creativity in popular culture's dreams of techno-monstrosity. Even though the genre of techno-horror depicts the confrontation of the human subject with itself as a failure of understanding, this failure simultaneously contains the possibility for self-recognition and autonomy. I suggest that psychoanalysis' emphasis on autonomous, individual responsibility – on a “scrap of independence”<sup>3</sup> maintained by the ego as we encounter the contents of our own minds – illuminates this dimension of our imagined relationship with monstrous technology.

Fantasies of techno-horror are the negative prints of an unrealized future promise. They express a failure to sublimate the regressive psychological forces beneath our relationship with technology. This technology is an extension of a human subject that strives, and inevitably fails, to realize its own unconscious ideal: prosthetic Godhood.

## 1. Technologized Transcendence

“Whether it manifests as lightning or a wall socket,  
the transcendental force formerly perceived as divine energy now powers machines.”  
- *The Secret Life of Puppets*, Victoria Nelson<sup>4</sup>

Victoria Nelson has argued that a cultural transformation has occurred since the Protestant Reformation.<sup>5</sup> The unseen, supernatural forces of the divine and demonic have migrated from a spiritual and immortal *pneuma* to a personal and mortal *psyche*. That is to say that, far from being eradicated, “earlier notions of the soul and divine agency often surfaced in secular literature and poetry in disguised or demonized form,” represented most frequently as the symptoms of mental illness.<sup>6</sup>

Amidst this process, the popular, literary imagination became the new nexus through which old narratives of transcendence were transmitted and maintained – but with a reworked relationship regarding the human subject. Nelson calls this the “sub-Zeitgeist” of the religious imagination. This sub-Zeitgeist is a “desacralized transcendence”<sup>7</sup> through which the traditionally religious migrates into other realms of cultural representation – not least of all into

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<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XVIII (London: Vintage, 2001), 67–143; for a discussion of Freud’s crucial insistence on this “scrap” of individual autonomy, despite the ultimately unresolvable, unconscious conflicts and tensions upon which the psychoanalytic subject is founded, see Joel Whitebook, “‘A Scrap of Independence:’ On the Ego’s Autonomy in Freud,” *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 16 (1993): 259–382.

<sup>4</sup> Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 259.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson, *Secret Life*; Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, *Secret Life*, 164.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson, *Gothicka*, 15–17.

the way we have come to culturally depict the familiar-unfamiliarity of the dynamic psyche. The discredited and discarded world of external deities, demons, and monsters is thus introjected into the demoniacal and alien nature of our own, only partially conscious, minds.

Especially, the literary genres of the supernatural, with their emphasis on the psychological dimension of horror, have assumed the role of a latent outlet for the sacred – a “back door to the world beyond appearances.”<sup>8</sup> This is a world, which, even as it is dismantled and deconstructed on an ontological and epistemological level, always seems to captivate as a means of explaining and describing feelings and experiences that seem other to everyday, mundane life. The traditionally religious experiences of revelatory uprushes of meaning are thus preserved, in all of their cultural and personal experiential force, but are transposed, emerging from a mysterious *within* and not from a sacred *without*.<sup>9</sup>

Nelson thus locates an important transition, not only with regard to cultural expressions of what is other and alien, but also pertaining to the manner in which culture represents what is familiar and close to home. The nineteenth-century Gothic saw an increased interest in expressing the entangled relationship between the irrational and the rational, and as a result, “transcendental forces once perceived as external would slowly be internalized to those areas of human perception labeled the ‘imagination’ and the ‘unconscious,’ [...] art and science (as well as human consciousness itself) would replace religious worship as unacknowledged venues for the drawing down of the divine and the raising up of the human.”<sup>10</sup> The experience of transcendence, as it shifts from the externality of spirit to the interiority of psyche, is thus reworked as the manifestation of otherwise common, repeated encounters between the human subject and the limits of its own self-representation. Interpreted within a psychoanalytic framework, encounters with the transcendent and sacred are reformulated to be encounters with psychic projections.

For Freud, the psyche’s capacity for projection is, ultimately, a defense against the unbearable experiences, affects, and impulses with which the human subject is in constant conflict. Through projection, the human capacity for imagination becomes a vehicle for the untenable and unpleasurable *within* to be managed by being encountered as an untenable and unpleasurable *without*.

The psychoanalytic subject is forged out of a relationship between two kinds of psychological processes. The primary processes are those of the pleasure principle. They are motivated by our unregulated internal impulses, desires, and drives – ultimately, by the body. The secondary processes are those of the conflicting reality principle. They arise from the external, renunciatory demands that reality impresses upon us. The reality principle demands a renunciation of infantile desires and wishes, their sublimation into alternate forms that recognize the restricting demands of an external reality.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Freud sees the reality principle not quite as a negation of pleasure, but as its deferral. The reality principle, although abolishing the infantile notion of narcissistic omnipotence – the belief that our wishes can immediately and automatically spring from thought and desire to deed and fulfillment – nevertheless displaces and contains this ideal to the unconscious fantasizing of symptoms, reveries, and dreams. It is among

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson, *Secret Life*, 165.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XII (London: Vintage, 2001), 219.

this category of imaginary experiences that projection, as a defense against an unbearable inner experience, is located.

Projection, essentially, engages with a kernel of the long-abrogated wish for narcissistic omnipotence; it engages with the wish that a thought might simultaneously be a deed, and for a desire to be its own simultaneous fulfillment. Projection is thought, affect, and memory made flesh, while nevertheless masking the subject's agency in encountering its own interiority as an external experience. The power of psychic reality – of our experiences as we perceive them affectively and internally, as opposed to how they might actually be – is thus affirmed in the projective capacity to imagine the world to be otherwise, to play with boundaries, with categories, and with demarcated meanings. It is in this human capacity for imagination – operationalized through art, religion, dreams, neurotic symptoms, etc. – that Freud finds a sublimated expression of the primary, unconscious impulses for narcissistic omnipotence. He writes that it is through this psychic faculty of projective imagination that we can circumvent the demands of reality-testing and “[fulfill] wishes which were difficult to carry out” under its renunciatory restrictions.<sup>12</sup> Reality is not wholly torn apart through this kind of fantasizing; such fantasizing is not a regression to the level of a primary, infantile illusion of omnipotence.<sup>13</sup>

Freud's understanding of the dynamic tension which underpins the very structure of the psyche dissolves any sense of what is fantasy vs. reality, and what is normal vs. deviant psychical functioning, into an interconnected spectrum. “Each one of us,” he notes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “behaves in some one respect like a paranoiac, corrects some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him by the construction of a wish and introduces this delusion into reality.”<sup>14</sup> The development and progress of civilization, by which Freud broadly means the achievements of culture (*Kultur*), is understood to be inextricable from an increase in unhappiness, even as it fulfills humanity's most longed-for ideals of mastery over nature. For Freud, this relationship, between culture as the collective fulfillment of wished-for ideals and an inexplicable unhappiness that arises from their fulfillment, is the result of civilization's inherently renunciatory demands – demands which are rooted in the individual psyche. Civilization both fulfills the individual's earliest ideals of power and mastery, the remnants of an infantile narcissism, while simultaneously instilling an internal guilt, one which ensures that cultural developments are always tempered by the reality principle, always curbed from engaging in a truly regressive collapse into unconscious fantasies of omnipotence.<sup>15</sup>

Freud notes that technology itself, as a part of this ambivalently progressive, civilizing force, is rooted in the dynamic attempts at resolving a primal wish. Technology is a means through which uncertainty is harnessed, a means through which “man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning.”<sup>16</sup> The telephone serves as an extension of the ear, the television as an extension of the eye. Technology is the material product of an ideal omnipotence and omniscience,<sup>17</sup> an imaginary extension of identity impressed onto the world and operationalized as an actual extension of the body – the realization of the human subject as a “prosthetic God.”<sup>18</sup> Technological extensions are, in this

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<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XXI (London: Vintage, 2001), 79-80.

<sup>13</sup> Freud, “Formulations,” 222.

<sup>14</sup> Freud, “Civilization,” 81.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

way, the products of the same narcissistic impulse which fuels the capacity for imagination. And this is a capacity which resides at the boundary of inner and outer experience, where the wish is preserved for thought to be automated in its fulfillment as deed. Technological extensions thus serve a broader sublimating process which places infantile ideals into the service of progressive, civilizational advances. The fulfillment of this process contains the renounced kernel of a desublimation in which the discourse of progress perpetually intersects and is intertwined with the germ of regressive collapse into the primary, infantile narcissism that is harboured unconsciously by each mature subject.

It is significant, then, that Nelson notes technology has come to dominate contemporary cultural expressions of formerly religious transcendence. In doing so, technology “did not rob us of the idea of the soul at all. On the contrary, the machine *received* this idea.”<sup>19</sup> The technological extensions of the human body, like gods, demons, and spirits, who sublimated the ideal of infantile omnipotence into an abrogated, external form, continue to act as objects which are both real and partially-fantasized, both rooted in the subject and external to it. Through these technological objects, just as through supernatural beings, our internal worlds can co-exist with the necessarily renunciatory demands and disappointments of external reality.

Recognizing the continuity of this transition, from the ideals of divine enhancement to the ideals of the machinic augmentations, it is possible to explore the notion that the very process of imagining the human subject is one which occurs at an intermediate place: one which cannot collapse itself into categories of familiarity and otherness, humanity and inhuman monstrosity, but only exists in the transitional state of passing from one and into the other. The paranoid fantasies of a technologically facilitated latent threat to the human subject – of technological monstrosity – are thus also the elucidations of a disjuncture that is not only encountered *in here*, but resonates with an *out there* – they problematize the distinctions which we draw between the one and the other.

Technology is, thus, always partially imagined – partially responding to an extension of the subject which is totalizing and complete, but never truly realizable through the limited artifice of machines and mechanical augmentations. Each technological advance carries with it its own imagined future, which it has not attained. Each technological advance is thus always partially un-invented, even as it promises an aura of perfectibility to each human sense or appendage it augments.

The desire for fostering a potential human perfectibility is the trace of a repressed wish for omnipotence. This wish is only ever imperfectly and incompletely reified by technology in practice. However, technology’s inextricable relationship with this unconscious wish – its perpetual existence as a channel for partial returns of a repressed narcissism – is precisely what makes it a fruitful site for emergent monstrosity, for the emergence of the other and unfamiliar than is, at once, the familiar, but unacceptable, self. Technology *de-monstrates* the unconscious, precisely as it fails to realize the subject’s unconscious wish for perfectible omnipotence.

Technology is the expression of an unconscious fantasy – and thus a “back door” to the sacred – in the same way that notions of gods and spirits pointed to an abrogated ideal of omnipotence desired by the human subject, cast-off and projected onto objects, figures, and forces found without, in the external world.

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<sup>19</sup> Nelson, *Secret Life*, 250.

## 2. The Pineal Eye as an Imagining Machine

“‘That [pineal] gland is the great sense-organ of organs – I *have found out*. It is like sight in the end, and transmits visual pictures to the brain. If you are normal, that is the way you ought to get most of it... I mean get most of the evidence *from beyond*.’”  
 - “From Beyond,” H.P. Lovecraft<sup>20</sup>

Nelson notes that twentieth-century American horror author, H.P. Lovecraft, is a kind of paradigm for examining not only the collapsed identification of the monstrous and the transcendent, but their collective dependence on projection – making the internal, external – as a means of self-reflexive discovery. That is, Lovecraft’s protagonists – often going mad from monstrous knowledge at the end of each narrative – are following parallel lines of discovery: one being collective and cosmic, dwarfing the significance of humanity and its ideals in favour of eldritch beings; and the other, individual and subjective, *de-monstrating* a monstrosity within through encountering a monstrosity without.

This kind of resonance between the monstrous inner and outer is, as Nelson calls it, a kind of “psychotopographic” externalization – a projection – in which the subject externalizes an untenable, inner reality in order for it to be experienced in a form which influences and affects the subject as an external reality.<sup>21</sup> Assailed by the reified form of its own dissociated and ejected portions, the subject fails to recognize the depths of itself once these depths come to be mapped outwards onto a monstrous, external – and ultimately, differentiated - reality. There is thus a recurring narrative in Lovecraft’s fiction, as a contemporary bearer of a seemingly discarded, but really only transformed, transcendence. It is a narrative central to locating the human subject in Lovecraft’s cosmos: the human always exists as a hybridized form, always forced into realizing itself through gazing at an other that springs out of itself, and yet is established as that which the human subject is not.

Particularly in his short story, “From Beyond,”<sup>22</sup> Lovecraft fixates on the latent, monstrous potentials of our capacity for imagination. The story begins when an unnamed narrator visits a reclusive friend, a scientist by the name of Crawford Tillinghast. During his visit, the narrator comes to realize something is horrifically wrong with Tillinghast, who reveals a machine he has been working on. It is a machine meant to stimulate the pineal gland, located in the brain, facilitating a capacity to see an omnipresent dimension which is overlaid atop our own. This dimension is populated by unfathomable, malicious monstrosities whose very existence obliterates any sense of an anthropocentric cosmos.

The feeling of dread which permeates Lovecraft’s universe comes precisely from the sense that the categories that we utilize to demarcate meaning, to denote what is familiar, definable, and human, ultimately relate to a universe that is, at best, indifferent to our categories and, at worst, ravenously malevolent. Lovecraft’s understanding of the human, as a category of identity, emphasizes its perpetual tension with an inhumanity that is located both in an unseen without, but is also accessible by amplifying sensory capacities that are ever-present from within. Psychoanalytically, Lovecraft’s subjects become aware of the inherent irrationality – the inherent drives, desires, and impulses which are antithetical to the conscious subject – in relation to reality, in the externalized, reified form of inhuman, cosmic monsters.

<sup>20</sup> H.P. Lovecraft, “From Beyond,” in *The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft: Dreams of Terror and Death* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 47.

<sup>21</sup> Nelson, *Secret Life*, 110.

<sup>22</sup> Lovecraft, “From Beyond.”

In “From Beyond,” Tillinghast, operating within the long tradition of literary “mad scientists,” recites a monologue in which he criticizes the limited scope of human perception, concluding, nevertheless, that it is an inner capacity which can unveil “whole worlds of matter, energy, and life which lie close at hand.”<sup>23</sup> His machine is at once an augmentation of the familiar senses, as well as an apparatus meant to act upon “unrecognized sense-organs that exist in us as atrophied or rudimentary vestiges.”<sup>24</sup>

Significantly, Tillinghast’s machine is not a mere extension of the subject that widens its vision, but instead a forced regression. Thus, Lovecraft’s pineal eye is a kind of fantasized organ of the unconscious, re-engaging with the primal, narcissistic ideal of reifying imagination – making thought into matter. Going against the grain of reality and its renunciatory demands, such a magically omnipotent ability is – essentially – monstrous. It is this internal monstrosity which is crystallized, externally, into the form of a monstrous, othered, and previously unseen cosmos. In this process, what is obscured is the fact that a concrete, definable human subject is not *embedded* in this cosmos, but that the dynamic familiar-unfamiliarity of the human subject, its disavowal of portions of itself, is ultimately the *source* of that very cosmos. It is this disavowed monstrosity that is the unconscious foundation of the familiar, and Tillinghast states as much when he proclaims that “we shall overleap time, space, and dimensions, and without bodily motion peer into the bottom of creation.”<sup>25</sup> What is peered into is the unseen foundation of the visible, the repressed instability at the core of the subject’s tentative stability.

Lovecraft’s story is an illuminating example of the contemporary expression of technology alongside other means of imagining an extension of the human – specifically, transcendence and monstrosity. Technology, as a practice of partial attempts to reclaim an infantile omnipotence, receives, as Nelson has argued, the traditional dimension of spiritual transcendence. Like religion, it does so both as a transformation of mundane experience into more sublime, higher, forms, as well as in the form of a regressive return of the repressed. Imagining technological extension participates in the kind of unconscious fantasizing which both dissolves and reaffirms the limits of the human subject, dissolving it in fantasies of grandiosity, while also reaffirming its limits in relation to an external, monstrous, reality that is formed from out of its own unassimilable, unconscious wishes.

Technology promises a supersession and amplification of the human, the fulfillment of a long-repressed wish for omnipotence, but one that poses a threat to the human subject. The terror of this wish’s fulfillment and the unconscious guilt of infantile regression is reified into a human-made-monstrous. The former suggests new ways of envisioning the augmentation of human potential, and the latter grapples with the regressive origins of this narcissistic wish, ultimately coupling the extension of the subject with its very dissolution, an interruption and breakage of the bounded relationship between inner and outer experiences, between fantasy and reality.

Not unlike Lovecraft’s literalization of unconscious fantasizing as an organ of sight, Georges Bataille, too, presents a kind of philosophical fantasy of the pineal eye as a nexus of powerful imagination which is both constructive and dissolutive.<sup>26</sup> For Bataille, socially-rooted anthropological or scientific representations necessarily collapse in their inability to correspond

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The imagery of the pineal eye is shared by Lovecraft and Bataille as well as their era – both tap into an early twentieth-century investment towards unlocking the human potentials which were promised by the Theosophical confluence of psychology, biology, and emergent waves of proto-New Age comparative spiritualism.

to experience: they demand mythological representations, they dissolve in their inability to result in anything but phantasms.<sup>27</sup> Bataille imagines the pineal eye as an organ exclusively attuned to our capacity for mythological, phantasmatic sight. This organ, however, is doomed (much as is the fate of the characters in Lovecraft's story) to a self-immolation, as humanity's evolutionary erection guides its gaze upwards to the blinding sun. The pineal eye, Bataille writes, "is not a product of understanding, but is instead an immediate existence; it opens up and blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being, or more exactly, the head."<sup>28</sup> The pineal eye is thus, for Bataille, an organ of imagination, yet it is one that *consumes*, as well as represents, the rational order through which the subject has come to stabilize itself and its world. It is an organ that enables new, unthinkable thought to burn through a previously closed system of logic but leaves little room for the emancipatory hope that a new system might take its place.

Rodolphe Gasché, interpreting the phantasmatic in Bataille's thought, finds it to be neither fantasy nor imagination in their usual contradistinction from reality. The phantasm is a *rupture*: co-dependent on the reality out of which it breaks, a reality that was itself sustained by its potential extension into the phantasmatic, and co-creative of new forms of reality that assert their existence in this moment of breakage that is, in fact, a simultaneous moment of extension. As Gasché notes, "in a sense, the phantasm matures in a matrix, until it is pushed out and *projected*."<sup>29</sup> This is a crucial elaboration of Bataille. The rupture that is effected by the phantasm, is encoded, structured, and saturated by the system that it cleaves open. This is the functional quality of projection through which the newly thinkable, the previously *unthinkable*, operates – whether regressive and monstrous or progressive and emancipatory.

One of Bataille's images through which he models the contradictions of the human subject is what he calls the *Jésuve*, an amalgamation of the parodically creative *je suis* and the erotic yet eruptive force of *Vésuve*. The *Jésuve* is imagined as the extreme limit of experience, through which one's subjectivity, the "I am" in relation to the world, meets its ever-present phantasmatic contradiction in the form of the archaic pineal eye. The pineal eye, erupting "at the summit of the skull like a horrible [...] volcano,"<sup>30</sup> is the forgotten component of the *je suis*, the logical, yet forgotten interiority that is contained by its consciously accepted structure. The pineal eye – as evoked by Bataille's image of the solar anus and the volcanic *Jésuve* – erupts, literally *projecting* its contents outwards and decapitating, in the process, the regulating role of reason and boundedness as encapsulated in the head.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, for Bataille, the category of the human is solely the shell whose breakage facilitates the necessary resolution of a tension in our very being. The human subject emerges at the moment in which it shatters, revealing itself to have been an obstruction of a latent reality that extends itself into something beyond the human as it comes to erupt and be projected outwards

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<sup>27</sup> Georges Bataille, "The Pineal Eye," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927 - 1939*, ed. Allan Soekl, trans. Allan Soekl, Carl R. Lovitt, and Donald M. Leslie, Jr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 79-82.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> Rodolphe Gasché, *Georges Bataille: Phenomenology and Phantasmatology*, trans. Roland Végső (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 146.

<sup>30</sup> Georges Bataille, "The Jesuve," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927 - 1939*, ed. Allan Soekl, trans. Allan Soekl, Carl R. Lovitt, and Donald M. Leslie, Jr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 74.

<sup>31</sup> This image shares a resemblance with another one of Bataille's conceptualizations of the contradictory nature of the human subject, the *Acéphale*. The *Acéphale* (translated as 'headless' or 'leaderless') is depicted as a headless Vitruvian Man and would come to be the guiding emblem and eponym for a literary group, journal, and 'secret society' established by Bataille in the 1930s [For the texts published by *Acéphale* see Alastair Brotchie and Marina Galletti, eds., *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, trans. John Harman and Natasha Lehrer (London: Atlas Press, 2018).].

into new forms of thought, new experiences, and new realities. In this process, the human is both reified and drained of meaning at once – not capable of bearing its interior, it sacrifices its exterior in order to eject what cannot be contained, what cannot be recognized, into a recognizable, albeit monstrous, object.

Lovecraft's monsters, in "From Beyond," who emerge from out of the human – literally, in the form of amplified brain functioning – can be thought of as phantasmatic beings. They are born out of the shattering of a fixed idea regarding what constitutes knowledge, perception, and the limits of experience. In breaking out of the matrix which defines the limits of representation, they serve to simultaneously ratify its limits by obscuring the restraining processes of sublimation and renunciation which prevent a recognition of an outer monstrosity's otherwise internal origins.

By thinking through the dialectical inseparability of humanity and inhuman monstrosity, each constructing the other, we can start to perceive a desublimating force that antithetically underpins the otherwise civilizing and regulating force of projective imagination, of abstracting the untenable. Lovecraft's technologization of the constructive/dissolutive aspects of the imaginative faculties is, in fact, a technologization of hitherto unseen psychic currents. Currents which were previously envisioned as the supernatural and spiritual forces of a sacred cosmos. Envisioned either as religious transcendence or technologized monstrosity, what is made visible in imagining either form of human extension is the perpetual overlap of the unconscious with consciousness, made known solely through an indirect, sublimated, and symptomatic form. It is apparent that the manner in which both technology and religious transcendence are imagined share a sense that human experience is always akin to a palimpsest. New, idealized futures are cast atop of regressive wishes for omnipotent power and control; the promise of progress is thus inseparably marked by the threat of regression.

Describing the effects of the pineal eye's augmented sight, Lovecraft likens it to a cinema projection onto a painted screen: "indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise were mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every *known* thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities. It likewise seemed that all known things entered into the composite of unknown things, and vice versa."<sup>32</sup> The mad Tillinghast exclaims to the narrator, "you see them? You see them? You see the things that float and flop about you and through every moment of your life? You see the creatures that form what men call the pure air and the blue sky?"<sup>33</sup>

Gasché's explication of Bataille's phantasm resonates with this proclamation. The phantasm is a hybrid, growing inside a system of enclosure, feeding off of it, before it can break beyond its boundaries into something new, something previously unthinkable. The phantasm is "a nonplace in-between, suspended between the actual places of the inside and the outside, it is an irreducible middle that corresponds most accurately to what it is supposed to represent, since it is itself a crack, a division, and a being that is in-and-for-itself not by itself."<sup>34</sup> The human subject itself is just such a crack, a mere, fluttering moment of transgression defined by its irreducibility, its perpetual in-betweenness. The human subject is a dynamic process – it is the moment of tenuous transition, from a bounded place into an expansive outside, one into which it naturally stretches yet within which it cannot ever be sustained.

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<sup>32</sup> Lovecraft, "From Beyond," 49.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Gasché, *Georges Bataille*, 148.

### 3. Old Fantasy/New Flesh

“‘The television screen is the retina of the mind’s eye. Therefore, the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain. Therefore, whatever appears on the television screen emerges as raw experience for those who watch it. Therefore, television is reality, and reality is less than television.’”  
- *Videodrome*, David Cronenberg<sup>35</sup>

Exploring similar themes, David Cronenberg’s 1983 body horror classic, *Videodrome*,<sup>36</sup> also examines how fantasy is not only transmitted through technological amplifications but the literal transmutation of idea and image into matter and flesh. The film’s protagonist, television producer Max Renn, finds the line between reality and imagination to be blurred as he seeks out increasingly shocking (that is, erotic and violent) entertainment for broadcast. Just like Lovecraft’s “From Beyond,” Cronenberg’s film poses questions such as: Is the monstrous a product of the protagonist’s insanity, or is the world full of tangible, external monsters? Does mind affect matter? Are mind and matter all that different? Just as in “From Beyond,” *Videodrome* focuses on technology’s capacity to accelerate something that has long-existed inside the human body. The human appendage which is accelerated in *Videodrome*, transforming thought into matter, is described as either an evolving organ of future-humanity or a malicious tumor that regressively consumes a naturalized human state. It is “like an organ” or a “tumor,” “old flesh” and “new flesh.”<sup>37</sup>

Media theorist, W.J.T. Mitchell, asks an important question, analyzing a crucial scene in *Videodrome* as he does so: “what do pictures want?” The scene in question echoes the television spirit world of *Poltergeist* and inverts Sadako’s TV emergence in *The Ring*, as Max Renn’s television set, pulsating with fleshy veins, seduces and literally consumes him through its screen. The answer is plain: the images we broadcast through our technological media want *us*.<sup>38</sup>

What is significant, in relation to this scene, is the ambiguity which *Videodrome* sustains between flesh and fantasy, human and machine. The desires stimulated by or depicted in pictures – specifically the pictures of mass entertainment which stand in, as reified forms of our collective and personal internal fantasies – stem from us, from viewers, perhaps more so than from marketers, content creators, writers, or directors. As Mitchell emphasizes, the desires that motivate our representational practices – art, entertainment, etc. – stem from the discarded parts of ourselves, a kind of second self which, psychoanalytically, can be interpreted as the second self of unconscious desires and fantasies.

Not necessarily with regard to monstrosity, but obscenity, Mitchell makes clear that the image itself is not in any essentialized way ‘obscene’ or ‘monstrous.’ Obscenity is constructed through the disavowed and abrogated desire to see and consume, a desire which stems from the viewer and is finely tuned by their own personal emotions and experiences, as well as the social context in which they are embedded. Images, then – those which arouse abjection and horror – are really receptacles for subjective projections. As Mitchell notes, “a picture is less like a statement or speech act, then, than like a speaker capable of an infinite number of utterances. An

<sup>35</sup> David Cronenberg, *Videodrome*, Blu-Ray (Universal Pictures, 1983).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> WJT Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 217-221.

image is not a text to be read but a ventriloquist's dummy into which we project our own voice.”<sup>39</sup>

Yet unlike the machine in “From Beyond” or the signal broadcast in *Videodrome*, the technologies which we do actually develop in order to represent our fantasies – television, videotape, digital media, the news feeds of social networking platforms – are never quite so automated. Although our relationship to them is founded on projection – the projection, specifically, of what we desire but do not acknowledge – they are nevertheless not an ever-ready and automated bio-technological hybrid which we can seamlessly jack into.

Our representational technologies do not autonomously mediate between mind and matter. Fantasy does not leap from the inside out – even as we desperately try to bridge that gap with algorithms that know what we want before we want it, and an overabundance of speed and information that will never leave us wanting. Technology does not directly answer our fantasies, people do, because technologically facilitated images are ultimately works of artifice.

This is illustrated in the complementary vision of Olivier Assayas’ 2002 film, *Demonlover*.<sup>40</sup> Assayas’ film, like “From Beyond” and *Videodrome*, also depicts the transmission of fantasy through technologies that represent, or aid us in better perceiving, reality. But, by acknowledging the role of others, of society itself, and side-stepping the automation of fantasy-fulfillment in the form of a mind-matter mutation trope, *Demonlover* is far more prescient and terrifying.

In the film, media executive Diane – embroiled in corporate espionage – is tasked with purchasing the rights to distribute Japanese animated pornography (*hentai*). The animation company she is dealing with needs financing in order to facilitate their transition from an outdated 2D to a new 3D format. One of the most striking, albeit entirely understated, scenes in the film is when Diane asks, during an early meeting, whether the *hentai* artists use models for their depiction of underage characters.

The question is central to the film: Is a real, living model necessary to stage and orchestrate the representation of a fantasy? Is a model necessary in order to facilitate the transition of fantasy from inner to outer reality, even if the fantasy product is entirely one of artifice, entirely unreal, or, perhaps, monstrous? Fundamentally, where do our images of what is other to ourselves and to established reality come from?

The Japanese term *hentai* is significant in this regard. In English, *hentai* exclusively means a type of animated pornography, which itself includes many varying styles and subgenres, which is produced in Japan. In Japanese, however, *hentai* is a word that consists of two characters (変態) – one meaning unusual or strange change, and another meaning condition, attitude, or appearance. The term, more generally, means transformation, transition, or metamorphosis. More specifically, it is then applied to Japan’s domestic animated pornography and carries the connotation of sexual perversion – a *perverse transformation* in sexuality and desire.<sup>41</sup>

*Demonlover* goes on to answer the question regarding the necessity of models in the externalization of fantasy. Of course, in that early scene where Diane meets with the animation company, they admit with great reticence that they had had an instance of an animator using underage models for his characters. But it is not until later in the film that the issue of fantasy

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>40</sup> Olivier Assayas, *Demonlover*, DVD (Lionsgate, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> “へんたい, 変態, Hentai,” Jisho: Japanese-English Dictionary, accessed May 14, 2022, <https://jisho.org/word/%E5%A4%89%E6%85%8B>.

models is really brought to the foreground. Diane discovers that the distribution of the hentai site, “demonlover.com,” is actually a front for a website called “Hell Fire Club,” where users submit their fantasies and pay to have them performed and streamed by living subjects in real time. This is the real aberrant metamorphosis of fantasy – from 2D to 3D to real life models. *This* is the real *hentai*, and the website of the innocuously artificial 2D and 3D pornography is a natural portal into the manipulation and orchestration of real life. In Hell Fire Club, real life is not only the abstract model, but the indispensable real-time medium for modelling fantasy.

However, Assayas does not seem to be arguing for the common assertion that pornography or violence onscreen leads to offscreen enactment. Instead, what *Demonlover* makes clear is that the online fantasy image is indistinguishable from reality precisely because it is *made* from it. It uses up reality like an artist uses a medium, and like unconscious fantasies use conscious experiences of abject monstrosity, untethered from its internal origins, to approximate an expression of the inexpressible.

By avoiding the automatic leap from mind to matter in the generation of fantasies, Assayas’ horrific image of fantasy-generating machines resonates with our actual experience of technology today, with the “real” user-generated content which we continuously produce and consume online. These ‘real’ technological systems are the evolution of the imagining machines evoked by Lovecraft and Cronenberg in the form of fictional, technologically mutated, organs. Instead, *Demonlover* illuminates what is only latent in these other two narratives: that molding reality is both a terror and a sublime desire, that technological progress is a palimpsest which writes the future over the surface of barbaric regressions. The desire to possess one’s fantasies as external objects, to receive mirror images of the disavowed portions of oneself, is the desire that motivates how we imagine future-human experience as much as it is motivated by a narcissistic wish for mastery which equates inner experiences with external reality.

When one logs onto Hell Fire Club in *Demonlover*, the first things that flicker across the screen are scenes of bondage and torture with the instruction: “send us your fantasy and we will make it real.”<sup>42</sup> This is seen when Diane first discovers the site, but it is repeated once again in the final scene of the film where it is Diane herself who is now a victim of Hell Fire Club. As a model and toy for users to play with by proxy of the Club’s sadistic torturers, users can dress Diane as various famous characters and celebrities, as superheroes and video game characters. And in this final scene, a young boy uses his father’s credit card to submit a rape fantasy involving the character Storm from X-Men. He settles in to watch his fantasy inflicted on Diane, all the while doing his science homework. She is, of course, no longer Diane, no longer a human being, but a toy: a raw medium, standing in as a simulacrum of humanity for the purposes of playing out the representation of another’s fantasy. As on-the-nose as this final scene is, the film is powerful precisely because it uncomfortably de-fictionalizes what Lovecraft’s pineal eye and Cronenberg’s organ of the “new flesh” both suggest. That is, the young boy’s fantasy of domination is the foundational, narcissistic fantasy of the human subject, realized by technological extensions of our senses and projected onto the screen of that same technological system.

Dudley Andrew, in chapter three of *What Cinema Is!*<sup>43</sup> offers an excellent discussion of the role of projection – as in the role of screening cinema – from traditional films to new media. Although not focusing fully on the psychoanalytic implications of the term, Andrew notes that the power of the image, in depicting realism, is dependent on its capacity for facilitating

<sup>42</sup> Assayas, *Demonlover*, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Dudley, *What Cinema Is!: Bazin’s Quest and Its Charge* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 66-97.

projective eruptions – emergences of something new, something left unrepresented in the image itself. These eruptions emerge both from a fleeting transparency beyond the cinematic frame – through cinema’s ability to depict screens within screens – as well as from within viewing subjects themselves, cast onto the concrete representations of the screened image.<sup>44</sup> In *Demonlover*, Assayas’ meditation on computers as fantasy-generating machines is the screen within the screen, and his characters, such as the teenage boy, stand in for viewing subjects. However, these viewing subjects are also us, the viewers of the film, who recognize the resonance between the wish-fulfillment that the depicted machines provide and our own fundamental fantasies of omnipotence which underpin our real relationship with technology.<sup>45</sup>

What *Demonlover* implicitly highlights is that our actual systems of technological representation – our social networks, news feeds, channels, etc. – all *do* ask us to send them our fantasies. They do so implicitly, through digital marketing, algorithms, and various statistical trackers. And, most importantly, these systems are infinitely mutable in their programmability and impermanence. The platforms never stop tracking and the feeds never stops scrolling. It is in this way that real technological systems *do* ask us to send them our fantasies, and that these systems *do* aim to realize them by representing real people as if they were models for the purposes of the most inhuman entertainment.

The user-generated Internet is, in this way, a space through which everyone can accomplish each other’s fantasies, just as much as it is an index of requests for fantasy representations. Unlike the mind-matter omnipotence of “From Beyond” and *Videodrome*, in the ‘real’ world, mind *is* made matter, but not automatically. We ask for it, and others make it happen. We vote on what we want to see with seconds, minutes, and hours of our lives spent looking at this particular image, this story, this account over another. It is in this way, and not by some nefarious manipulation, that our visual representation of reality continues to be staged for the purposes of entertainment and fantasy. We do it ourselves, and we are nudged along by the nature of the technologies we have placed at our own disposal.

This gets at the heart of what is expressed, regarding technology, in all three of these narratives. Technology is always partially imagined, un-invented, and incomplete. It is the sublimated fulfillment of an attempt at reclaimed omnipotence, a partial regression which negotiates with the renunciatory demands of civilizing progress. From the first cave paintings to the written word, all the way to film and its distribution through the Internet – technologies of representation have always been dream-makers, have always been the imagination-made-machine. They are modelled on minds that do not fully know themselves. As such, these technologies take what is inside of us – familiar and other, human and monstrous – and turn it inside-out.

Immateriality is made material, but not as automatically as the unconscious, infantile wish of narcissistic omnipotence would have it. *Demonlover*, unlike the human/machine permutations of “From Beyond” and *Videodrome*, exposes the necessary impossibility of fantasy-made-flesh. Instead, in *Demonlover*, we find that structures of technological and social artifice – technological networks, machines, and the people who establish and sustain them – are the underlying forces which direct the reification of unconscious fantasy through technological images. In *Demonlover*, technology negotiates with the ultimate regressive aim of our

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>45</sup> Although my focus, here, is on the broader tradition of techno-horror and how psychoanalysis enriches our understanding of its relationship with unconscious fantasies, *Demonlover* – as early as 2002 – offered a rich avenue for exploring the tangible place of new media, contrasted with traditional cinema, in relation to viewers’ fantasies.

unconscious wishes: the elimination of technology itself, as the middle between fantasy and flesh, and a revived instantaneity in the transition between the two.

#### 4. “Where id was there ego shall be:” Imagination and Autonomy

“Desires, drives – whether it be Eros or Thanatos – this is me, too, and these have to be brought, not only to consciousness but to expression and to existence. An autonomous subject is one that knows itself to be justified in concluding: this is indeed true, and: this is indeed my desire.”

- *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cornelius Castoriadis<sup>46</sup>

Imagination is the extension of a fundamental capacity for fantasy, one which orients itself towards the sublimated fulfillment of unconscious desires and instincts. And an instinct – or drive, *Trieb* – is, significantly, a *frontier* phenomenon. It is an interface, as Freud elaborated, between the mental and the somatic [*Seelischem und Somatischem*]. Drives function “as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, imagination operates as an interface between mind and body, between fantasy and flesh; falling into neither of these categories fully, yet simultaneously encompassing both.

For psychoanalyst and critical theorist Cornelius Castoriadis, the world itself is, ultimately, rooted in the processes of imagination and projection.<sup>48</sup> He describes society as an imaginary institution, instantiated from out of the underlying, infinite potentials of an undifferentiated magma of significations. Just as unconscious fantasies are anacletic in relation to reality – they “lean on” and crystallize around real experience in order to evoke inner fantasies – so too, the social imaginary is instituted and continues to institute itself through processes of demarcating social logic (*legein*) and through practices of social action (*teukhein*) which lean on real experiences.<sup>49</sup>

This is why, as Castoriadis argues, the demarcations and distinctions which govern a social logic of difference and sameness, groups and ensembles, self and other, are not essentialized forms into which human subjects fall. They are, instead, sustained by a social imaginary which, itself, institutes and is instituted by its subjects. Although imagination is, for psychoanalysis, always partially regressive – partially engaged in an uncanny, infantile wish for omnipotence, always located on the border of where monsters threaten to emerge – it nevertheless possesses the ability to institute the individual and the social as something *new*. This is what is understood, by Castoriadis, as the subject’s capacity for *creative* imagination, the ability to break through the fixed logic of an imposed social order towards new forms of thought, new identities, and new experiences.

The monstrous forms of technological imagining, which I have examined, intersect with the creative potentials of imagination in their collective emphasis on a human ability to imagine, and in so doing, effectively *create* new realities and categories of existence. Whether monstrous,

<sup>46</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 104.

<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XIV (London: Vintage, 2001), 122.

<sup>48</sup> Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 303-305.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 289-291, 370

future-human, or both, this process invariably acknowledges an investment of power in the human imagination, even as it resolves in its own self-deconstruction and dissolution. Similarly, a significant insight of psychoanalysis is that irrationality – a dynamic and dialectical relationship of the repressed unconscious with consciousness – is the avenue through which new forms of thought and the capacity for self-reflective transformations can emerge. Irrationality, the capacity to think beyond the limits of the subject, is the central engine through which new thought becomes possible – through which the subject can reconstruct and reorganize their identity in relation to themselves and their world.

Castoriadis clarifies that Freud's famous dictum – "where id was there ego shall be"<sup>50</sup> – is not calling for unconsciousness to be merely replaced with consciousness, for the unconscious to be intellectualized and flattened. Instead, Castoriadis places this often-misread quote into its appropriate context.<sup>51</sup> The work of psychoanalysis is, as Freud continued in the same paragraph, "a work of culture"<sup>52</sup> – like the draining of a dam in order to provide more self-reflective living space. For Castoriadis, "where id was there ego shall be" – or more precisely, and in a far more active sense, "shall become" [*werden*] – is an acknowledgement of one mode of being by another. It is an active recognition in which the unconscious, as a site of non-thought and a lack of autonomy, is replaced with autonomous agency and a capacity for critical thinking. And this capacity is, itself, by no means a stable thing: it is an ongoing process marked by a shift in the relationship between the unconscious and consciousness.<sup>53</sup>

The unconscious is thus realized by the subject to be a part of itself – the ego, encountering the id, in this scenario, proclaims 'this is me too.' And in so doing, autonomy is achieved through recognizing that the discourse of the other, the unfamiliar and alien, is a discourse which speaks through what is familiar – what is me.<sup>54</sup> It is only through processes of imaginary investment that the other, the unconscious, is given its own autonomous existence, is thus able to hijack the conscious subject and terrorize it through encounters with an external monstrosity. This monstrosity, however, is really the projection of the subject's own internal experiences – it already belongs to it, though the subject does not recognize it. In this sense, techno-horror – such as the narratives of Lovecraft, Cronenberg, and Assayas – evokes a ruptured form of fantasizing in which such a recognition fails to occur.

Augmentations of human senses, as sites of horror, are thus moments of failed responsibility and abrogated autonomy. Within them, the contents of one's mind are given free rein to terrorize, to become reified as external monsters. The other is not the other-in-me – which would be no less terrifying, but at least an other that I am *responsible* for. The other is, instead, the other from beyond – unconsciously imagined, and only imagined, to be autonomous, to answer for itself, so that we do not have to answer for it.

The technologically-augmented eruptions of fantasy which I have examined underscore a primal, monstrous inhumanity – the other which, upon mature reflection, is found to be no less other, but also no more distinct from the self. The pineal eye, for Lovecraft and Bataille, is a monstrous organ of sight that literalizes Freud's description of the unconscious mind,

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<sup>50</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XXII (London: Vintage, 2001), 80.

<sup>51</sup> Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 102-103. Also see Cornelius Castoriadis, "Psychoanalysis and Politics," in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>52</sup> Freud, "Dissection," 80.

<sup>53</sup> Castoriadis, "Psychoanalysis," 128-129.

<sup>54</sup> Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 102-103.

desublimated and unrepressed beyond all human recognition. The pineal eye is, in this sense, a guarded, vestigial organ which purports to ‘see’ things beyond the world of appearances, as they really are. But – as with the dynamic nature of the Freudian psyche – the pineal eye is not really an organ of regressive wish-fulfillment, merely reinstating an unrestricted, infantile narcissism. It is, instead, an organ of projection which forgets its own functioning. Just as gods, demons, and spirits receive our omnipotent ideals while obscuring their origin in human desires and experience, the monstrous visions of this augmented organ offer a mirror while foreclosing the potential for recognizing oneself in its surface. So too, the pulsating bio-mechanical television set of *Videodrome* and the omnipotent molding of reality depicted in *Demonlover* seem to ask, as well as occlude, an answer to their questions: what old fantasies and desires are being awakened alongside new augmentation of inner sight? What regressive dimension of experience erupts alongside the creative capacity to remodel our understanding of ourselves, to re-make the world as we might imagine it to be?

The dual nature of remembering and forgetting which characterizes the traditionally religious imagination is perpetuated in these techno-horror narratives. The capacity for self-reflection is sustained, as well as collapsed under the weight of its own horrific revelation. This occurs at the moment in which the subject fails to realize that its monstrously othered imaginings are, in fact, the projected contours of the cracks and breakages of its own being. The confluence of regression and progress, transcendence and technology, permeates narratives of techno-horror. This confluence sketches out a map of the very real experiences bubbling beneath the surface, as the human subject strives to realize – whether through practices of transcendence or advances in technology – its own prosthetic deification.

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