INTRODUCTION

And the automaton has no other destiny than to be ceaselessly compared
to living man—so as to be more natural than him, of which he is the ideal figure.
A perfect double for man, right up to the suppleness of his movements, the
functioning of his organs and intelligence.[1]

"Don't we wait anxiously throughout the film or novel for the revelation of cyborg identity? How will the separate parts be combined? What signs will serve to mark its human nature? How are these mechanically assisted creations still human?" asks Anne Balsamo in "Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism" (Balsamo 147). Balsamo's questions tap into the anticipation, excitement, and wonder that fans of science fiction share upon viewing or reading about artificial intelligence. Science fiction scenarios of the future often focus on the development of artificially intelligent beings known by many terms including robot, cyborg and Replicant just to name a few. Whatever the name, humanity's attempts at creating "life" open up many areas of discussion regarding the ethics, the purpose, and the limitations of artificial intelligence. One topic often raised by science fiction films dealing with artificial intelligence centers around the question that while these forms are capable of simulating "humanity," are these simulations of human beings also capable of giving and receiving "real" love? This question is one of the major ideas explored by director Steven Spielberg's 2001 film <u>AI: Artificial Intelligence</u>. Referred to in <u>AI</u> as mechas, artificial life forms exist for just about every

[1] Jean Baudrillard, <u>Simulations</u> 93

purpose, but the creation of a boy mecha who loves is the catalyst for a compelling examination of post-modern theories about the existence and effects of simulation.

As if envisioning the scenario that Spielberg portrays in <u>AI</u>, Jean Baudrillard, in his book <u>Simulations</u>, states that "illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" (38). Simulation becomes paradoxical according to Baudrillard's view, because even the surrounding so-called "reality" is called into question. The reality of the humans who create, manufacture, and use the mechas, the actions of the mechas, and the responses of the world are, in Baudrillard's world, just parts of one huge simulacrum, "never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. (10-11)

Baudrillard's ideas tie in neatly with the themes explored in <u>AI</u>, mainly the conflict between reality and the appearance of reality, a struggle that spans humanity's existence on earth: Was Christ really the son of God or merely a disciple? Did man really land on the moon, or was that just a perfect simulation? In <u>AI</u>'s case, the need to establish the reality of the mecha characters, their appearances, thoughts, and emotions, is the major driving force of the plot. Spielberg, working from Brian Aldiss' short story "Supertoys Last All Summer Long" and having inherited the project from the late director Stanley Kubrick, confronts some of the same issues as Baudrillard. However, Spielberg, known for sentimental films like <u>Close Encounters of the Third Kind</u> (1977) and <u>E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial</u> (1982), is nowhere near as nihilistic, nor as absolute as Baudrillard is. In <u>AI</u>, Spielberg develops the idea, seen in films such as <u>Blade Runner</u> (1982) and <u>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</u> (1991), that even though mechas like David, the main protagonist, are not "real" in the sense that they are not the same as humans, the emotions

and feelings they have are no less valid, nor can they be easily dismissed as the mere workings of technology simply because of their origins.

Given the film's subject matter, we can also recognize the usefulness and applicability of cyborg theory towards understanding AI. Simply put, cyborgs are humans bodily enhanced by technology. Although David is technically a mecha, his human side comes in his appearance and his emotions; defining David as just "artificial intelligence" would not do him justice. Bringing cyborgs into the discussion opens up interpretations regarding humanity in relation to artificiality. Many cyborg theorists maintain that the co-existence of human and cyborg is complex; for example, famed theorist Donna Haraway, in her landmark essay "The Cyborg Manifesto," claims that "the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction and imagination" (292). Although talk of a border war seems extreme, Haraway positions her manifesto as "an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (292). Likewise, Claudia Springer, in her essay "The Pleasure of the Interface," sees the intermingling as a positive, not to mention an inevitable, necessity: "cyborgs incorporate rather than exclude humans, and in doing so erase the distinctions previously assumed to distinguish humanity from technology. Transgressed boundaries, in fact, define the cyborg, making it the consummate postmodern concept" (Springer 37). It does the world little good to resist the innovations that serve to bring humans into the realm of the cyborg; it would, in fact, be a violation of our human nature, our "free will" to resist transgression of boundaries.

From the elderly man with a hearing aid to the patient with a heart transplant, cyborgian innovations have enhanced the world in ways only imagined centuries ago, yet science fiction often emphasizes the downside of the human/android co-existence. Scott Bukatman, in his

introduction to <u>Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Post-Modern Science-Fiction</u>, states that the rise of artificial life coincides with "the loss of power over the form of the human, the visible sign of our being," as well as with "the absence of the moral certainties that once guided that power" (17). Perhaps the greatest fear is that, sooner or later, humans will give way to a civilization entirely run by cyborgs. However, in the opinions of critics like Haraway, such a scenario would not be the end of the world. Instead, it would be the catalyst for a whole new way of life.

Mechas, as they are presented in Spielberg's vision of the future, are still considered "second-class citizens" and depicted as subservient to the humans. As <u>AI</u>'s plot unfolds, however, the audience is shown how even "artificial intelligence" can transcend its mecha limitations. By using the theories espoused by Baudrillard, Haraway, and other writers, I will explore the many facets of simulation in <u>AI</u>, from the psychological issues to the sociological impact on race, gender, class, to the very meaning of reality itself in an increasingly artificial world. Ultimately, I find what makes David a cyborg more than a mecha is his human appearance, characteristics, and emotions. Although cyborgs are humans enhanced by technology, David is a representation of technology enhanced by humanity, a "more-than-mecha."