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AESTHETICS OF THE BRINK: ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND THE SUBLIME IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* AND PHILIP K. DICK'S *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?*

By

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Thesis

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Aesthetics of the Brink: Environmental Crisis and the Sublime in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Chairperson: Louise Economides

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is today remembered as the progenitor of the science fiction genre, the first major literary work to link a long history of fictional narratives concerning the origins of life – notably drawing itself from the stories of Prometheus and Milton's *Paradise Lost* – to the scientific rationalism of the enlightenment. Of the science fiction stories that would follow, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* perhaps remains one of the closest to Shelley's novel in terms of its concerns and themes. Dick's text is concerned with the thematic of the creation of human simulacra, but its interests are more involved with the ethical implications of technological advancement on society than the fantastic technologies he writes of. Given these similarities, notions of nature and the environment might seem ancillary to an analysis of these texts. These issues, however, are precisely what my thesis claims to be central to a proper understanding of Dick's and Shelley's novels.

The aesthetic categories of the beautiful, and most importantly the sublime, are essential to this research. Both classic works of aesthetic theory – namely Burke and Kant – as well as mobilizations of the sublime that account for contemporary cultural trends – such as those of Fredric Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard – are utilized so as to track an epistemological shift in both conceptions of the sublime, as well as the relationship between humanity and its environment. This shift, from viewing the natural world as a space wherein humans immanently dwell, to a positivist notion of nature as resources for human manipulation – documented in Caroline Merchant's *The Death of Nature* – can be linked to what Leo Marx describes as the movement from a natural to a technological sublime, and is both chronicled and critiqued in *Frankenstein.* Dick's *Androids* picks up where Shelley's novel leaves off, carrying an absolute ideological positivism to one possible conclusion, environmental and *social* crisis, inaugurating, interestingly, a return to a bizarre, and textually ironic spiritualism in the form of the religion Mercerism.

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Introduction

The sublime is about as elusive a concept as one can evoke. Even when one considers the multitude of affective responses individuals can have to their environment, the sublime seems to uniquely generate an excess of conceptual content, just as the movement it instills in the subject appears to dwarf those of other emotions. This content, the mapping of theories attempting to account for its existence and effects, its mobilization to artistic, political, and even exploitative ends, however, ultimately seems ancillary to the experience itself; complexities no less important than the existence of what we term the sublime, but nonetheless what we as individuals and societies, both intuitively and reflectively bring to an experience that exists first and foremost as a human potential for a very particular nexus of sensations. The primary aim of my project is to detail a modern history of the interconnected, and often overlapping, articulations of what we term the sublime, as reflected through two science fiction novels: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Both of these texts contain complex critiques of modernity centering, as I will argue, largely on notions of technology and the environment. The sublime is one of the primary vehicles these critiques, which are conveyed as much through the textual atmospheres of the novels, as they are the philosophical pontifications of their authors. Not only do these novels possess striking articulations of what one might characterize as both a natural and a technological sublime, each seems to depict a pivot-point in the relationship of these differing experiences to one another; an exchange between a dominant and subordinate epistemology, beginning with *Frankenstein's* depiction of a movement from a natural to a technological sublime, and ending with *Android's*[1] desperate return to a naturalistic form of spirituality in response to social and ecological crisis.

The sublime in *Frankenstein* – due in part to Shelley's affiliation with the romantic literary movement – has received a fair amount of critical attention. Comparatively, little has been done with the sublime in the context of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* though much has been made of Dick's depictions of modern cultural trends. Interestingly, despite their similarities, and the canonical status afforded to both texts in their respective traditions, intertextual work with these novels has largely circumvented Dick's *Androids* in favor of Ridley Scott's 1982 film adaptation, *Blade Runner.* Jay Clayton, for instance, has written on the connections between Shelley's novel and the film *Blade Runner* for *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*. Other research has addressed the thematic relationship between *Frankenstein* and *Androids* only tangentially. Calvin Ritch's essay "The French Dick: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Philip K. Dick, and the Android," for example, is primarily concerned with the similarities between Dick's work and that of 19th century French writer Jean de Villiers. Despite the lack of scholarship linking Shelley's novel to Dick's, however, a nexus of common tropes and concerns manifests itself in the critical traditions surrounding them. Ritch addresses not only the most prominent commonality between the novels – namely the social effects of technological advancement – but also the ambiguity each author places upon the moral status of creator and creation; the question of whether the "monster" or its progenitor is the true abomination. Analysis of this theme has been taken up with considerable rigor by scholars of both Dick and Shelley, as have the critiques of social progress associated with both authors.

Gender issues are also of interest to Ritch, who notes the misogynistic paranoia of both Dick's and Villiers' depictions of artificial "others," as well as Victor Frankenstein's oft criticized cooptation of the apparatus of female reproduction. Questions of gender are also addressed in David Dresser's essay, "The New Eve," which analyzes *Frankenstein's* and *Blade*

Runner's numerous allusions to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. His research observes a common theme of marginalization linking the major figures of these works, Victor Frankenstein and *Blade Runner's* Rick Deckard, to their "monstrous" counterparts – the Creature, replicants, and Milton's Satan. According to Dresser, all of these figures are cordoned off from society, either through a privileged social prospective (Deckard/Frankenstein) or societal alienation (the Creature/replicants/Satan), in a manner that informs a sort of liminality. This liminality serves to complicate the epistemological binaries inherited from what – during the time of their respective compositions – were considered to be their more canonical/literary forbearers: biblical scholarship for Milton, *Paradise Lost* for Shelley, and *Frankenstein* for *Blade Runner*. Inherent to this process is a deconstruction not only of power hierarchies based upon notions like genius and authenticity but, intimately connected to these, those of gender as well. Notions of hybridity have often been used by feminist scholars – Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" for instance – to describe female subject positions. These themes of hybridity and marginality not only resonate with *Frankenstein*, but also find an interesting correlative in Dick's ambivalent depictions of both android *and* female others.

Though many of the interests of these critics intersect with my project, approaching both *Frankenstein* and *Androids* – either directly or through the lens of *Blade Runner* – from an aesthetic/ecological perspective is, I believe, unique. The advantage to such an approach is that it affords an impression of cultural motion surrounding these issues that otherwise might be lacked when addressing these texts individually. The following two chapters mobilize numerous theories of the sublime in order to track the history of this aesthetic experience I believe to be contained in these novels; these works include both classical treaties – i.e. Burke and Kant – as well as more contemporary works – in particular those of Fredric Jameson's and Jean-Francois

Lyotard. The purpose of detailing how each of these interpretations of the sublime can be applied to *Frankenstein* and *Androids*, is to depict not merely how conceptions of the sublime have changed over time, but also to show the complex ways in which these discourses overlap with and inform one another, as well as the larger social and environment issues facing modernity. If, however, there is to be intellectual coherence between the theories of the scholars addressed herein, many agreeing but others contradicting the ideas of their predecessors and peers, I feel that this idea of sublimity must have some sort of grounding.

To this end I have chosen to map the sublime, and the aesthetic to which Edmund Burke first notably contrasted it, the beautiful, in spatial terms. If, as Burke, Kant and others have asserted, the beautiful is responsible for generating certain social norms – whether they be tied to notions of a nurturing domesticity (Burke), or an appreciation for the universality of aesthetic appreciation (Kant's purposive purposelessness) – then the sublime can be conceptualized as a limit to this socialization; either in terms of a threat to this order (Burke and Lyotard's privation), or a horizon of possibility (the appreciation of the rational mind Kant defines as a hallmark of the mathematical sublime, or the American ebullience for innovation notably explored by Leo Marx, Rob Wilson and David Nye). What I find helpful about this model is how it ties both of these aesthetic categories directly to conceptions of place, and thus the political and environmental concerns intimately connected with notions of dwelling. A number of oft theorized binaries manifest themselves through this rough categorization: feminine and masculine; humbleness and ambition; construction and deconstruction. The most important of these, however, seems the contrast between civilization and the wild: spaces cultivated by humans and those yet to be.

The sublime can thus be concretized first and foremost as an experience defined by the uncertainties of limits: the spatial, cultural, and technological horizons around which the

concerns and aspirations of a society form. Whether fostering ambitions about possibilities unrealized, or fears of the unknown, societies are often defined by their complicated and, at times, contradictory relationships to what is perceived to be exterior to them. This relationship between interior and exterior seems to take on an interesting and unique twist in the modern era, localizing the unknown not in the outside world, but rather within the potentialities – positive and negative – immanent in the society itself. American fascination with both the practical and ethical possibilities of technological innovation, as well as the cultural malaise Fredric Jameson argues is an effect of postmodern culture, are examples of the sublime's colonization of society. The result is not merely the sense of alienation from civil and social institutions described by Jameson, but also an alienation from the environment, as day-to-day human life seems to depend more on these institutions than the physical world that surrounds us.

A sense of immanence within one's environment is thus something – arguably – lacking in the modern/postmodern era, as these economic and bureaucratic abstractions increasingly become the substrate of everyday life. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, despite its numerous descriptions of idyllic planes and striking mountain vistas, in many ways marks the inauguration of these concerns into the novelistic medium. Her text, much like those of her romantic peers, is concerned first and foremost with notions of genius. She differs from these writers, however, in that her novel is as much a critique of the possibilities of unrestrained intellect as it is a celebration. Victor's aspirations, rather than reflecting the libratory potential of the imagination, lead inexorably to social myopia and woe, harming the very world from which the romantic genius supposedly drew his inspiration. As Anne K. Mellor notes, figures like Victor and Robert Walton – the explorer who rescues Frankenstein in the Arctic – represent a sort of vanguard of progress within the novel; pushing the bounds of European society into the wilderness of both

uncharted territories and the human intellect. Though the materiality of the novel's natural landscapes presents a compelling imagistic contrast between pastoral centers and sublime peripheries, the novel seems to localize the true nexus of these forces within the imagination itself, Victor's mind seemingly colonized by the demons of his own inspiration.

Though addressing questions of humanism in a world of rapid technological advance, a theme that would become the hallmark of the science fiction genre, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is still very much a product of romanticism; high cultural aspirations concerned with the imaginations of great individuals moving society forward, while leaving the everyday of lives of average citizens – for the moment – relatively unchanged and in supposed comfort. Though the novel notably marks the movement of the sublime Leo Marx describes in *The Machine in the Garden*, from its localization in objects exterior to the subject, to immanence within the intellect itself, the sublime in Frankenstein is still kept at an aesthetic distance, juxtaposed to poetic descriptions of the domesticity the novel prizes so highly[2].

Do Androids Dream fails to afford its characters or readers this sort of tranquil space. According to Fredic Jameson the essential difference between high modernist literature – arguably the heir to romanticism – and Dick's chosen genre, is that "the latter can show us everything about the individual psyche and its subjective experience and alienation, save the essential – the logic of stereotypes, reproductions and depersonalizations in which the individual is held in our own time, 'like a bird caught in cobwebs'" ("Dick, In Memorium", 348). Put simply, the one addresses the neuroses of the individual, the other the neuroses of the society. What is different about the sublime of *Androids*, fitting with Jameson's own theories of postmodernism, is that it seems to permeate everyday domestic spaces. Responsible for this colonization, according to Jameson, is capitalism and its linking of day to day human life to the

increasing complexity of artificial institutions. The resulting mystification of these institutions, a product of the average citizen's inability to comprehend their intricacies, is what he terms the postmodern sublime: a cultural obsession with conspiracies that seemingly hold within their grip the entirety of human civilization. Jameson's interest in *Do Androids Dream* – and Dick's work in general – stems from his conviction that these works constitute both an affectation and a diagnosis of these difficult to understand/articulate cultural issues stemming from modernity. As Dick moves the locus of the science fiction genre from the subject of the inventor and his astounding creation, or the epic hero and his fight to save civilization, to the domain of the everyman – Deckard, the morally ambiguous bounty hunter and Isidore the hallowed repair truck driver – the unease evoked by the unwanted and unforeseen by-products of technological and cultural advancement subsume the novel. No harmonious status-quo exists to be disrupted, and no moments of beatific reprieve ease the harshness of the narrative. *Androids* opens with domestic conflict, the plot then spiraling out into pontifications on cultural and environmental ruin.

The invasion of this unease into the cultural space of the novel imposes the sublime upon everyday life. The wilds of *Do Androids Dream*, the limits against which individuals and the societies test themselves – supposedly pushed back by the incredible technological and social complexity of civilization – come again to be the manifest reality of human life, with one difference. Survival in marginal environments, where the moment-to-moment existence of the subject is constantly called into question, ostensibly closes out the possibility of sublime experience. In order for this aesthetic category to manifest itself the fear inducing object, the boundary between ease and comfort, and whatever expands before humanity as a space for new horizons or the foreclosing of these possibilities – to which the sublimes is a reflection – must

have the intellectual breathing room Burke and Kant were among the first to describe as a proper aesthetic distance from the dangers of the natural world. On the post-apocalyptic, postmodern Earth of *Androids*, however, the technologically mediated lives of Dick's characters – whose very emotions are often controlled through consumer appliances – provide them with a facile reprieve from their marginal environment, even as its decay increasingly threatens to shatter this illusion. Thus the human subject is returned to a recognition of his or her own immanence within the environment from which s/he felt humanity had, through cultural advancement, escaped. The space of the beautiful, and more importantly the protection it implies, is no longer required for sublime experiences to constitute themselves. Instead, electronic devices provide an impression of cultural order, while on the couches of dilapidated city apartments John Isidore and Iran Deckard silently reflect upon the disintegration of material being beating against the walls of their own existence, while proving incapable of removing themselves from either this reality or their recognition of its imminent end.

The novel's recourse is perhaps the only logical one left in such a world; the development of sublimity into a reflection of human thought, narrated in the story of Frankenstein, returns to the seat of the spiritual in the form of Mercerism. This cultish religion seeks to instill in the natural world exactly what it was Victor Frankenstein and the manufactures of Dick's androids denied it; a sense of agency and purpose inherent to the object in-and-of itself. The following two chapters will track the evolutions, convergences and divergences, of both mobilizations of sublime discourse, and their relationships to larger cultural narratives surrounding questions of humanism and the environment. The objective of this research is to note both developments in the science fiction genre as it has grown out of Shelley's romanticist project, and the generality of cultural currents immanent within these trends, laying out what might not be *strictly*

considered a dialogical account of history, but an impression of the movement and interconnection existing between these two novels and their shifting representations of the sublime; these representations in turn inform one's understanding of the complex cultural milieu in which each texts was written as refracted through the novelistic medium – itself an expressive map of the human intellect.

Chapter 1

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is replete with a vast array of complex and often disparate depictions of nature. The concept of nature, the natural world and what it means to us – humanity as a species, and humans as individuals – is about as nebulous a term as one can evoke. Yet despite the word's epistemological density, *Frankenstein* seems to encapsulate a great number of the connotations spiraling about this contentious signifier. The themes of Pastoralism, nature as mother, nature as destroyer, and finally nature as helpless victim all find voice within Shelley's novel. Despite its prevalence, however, or perhaps because of it, the idea of nature has not traditionally been what readers thematically take from the text – both in terms of analytical interpretations and the numerous adaptations made of the work – but rather nature's negative: the artificial, the human endeavors of science and technological advancement.

Marilyn Butler argues in her essay, "*Frankenstein* and Radical Science," that the most common interpretation of the Frankenstein myth – for the story has unquestionably taken on mythic proportions in modern society – posit Shelley's narrative as a cautionary tale about the dangers of scientific hubris: the co-optation of nature or God's power of creation. It is exactly this reading of "don't get too clever with technology" that Butler seeks to disavow (302). She does so by positioning the narrative within the debate between William Lawrence – Percy Shelley's physician and a close friend of the family – and his chief intellectual rival in the vitalist debates of 1814-19, John Abernethy. The topic of these debates was the relationship between Christianity and modern secular science; a contentious issue Butler feels directly impacted the writing of *Frankenstein*:

> Frankenstein the blundering experimenter, still working with superseded notions, suggests the position of Abernethy, who proposes that the superadded life-element is analogous to electricity – particularly when he uses a machine, reminiscent of a battery, to impart the spark of life. Frankenstein's other procedures are made unpleasantly anti-life, recalling Lawrence's unfavorable comparison of inorganic with organic methods. (307)

In Butler's eyes, rather than having too much scientific knowledge, Shelley's protagonist in fact has too little. Frankenstein's obsession with occult figures, such as "Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus," ground his early thought in specious and outdated notions, spoiling his later up-to-date schooling in the contemporary natural sciences (Shelley 23). Butler argues the incredible eloquence of the Creature – especially when compared to his creator – and the reversal of roles between "father" and "offspring" late in the novel as "the Creature slowly emerge[s] as the dominant partner" during the pursuit through the Arctic, imply a more complex figure than the monster's reduction to mere scientific abomination could allow (311).

Radically contrasting Butler is Warren Montag's Marxist reading, which attributes to *Frankenstein's* 'mystification' of the scientific process a need to obfuscate the very social anxieties silently driving the action of the novel: "[the] internal contradictions and antagonism… that every work, no matter how apparently coherent, embodies and perhaps transforms but cannot resolve" (390). For Montag the Creature, and lack of scientific detail mobilized to describe his creation, paradoxically symbolizes the textual "unrepresentability" of the proletariat and the industrial processes that inaugurated its inception into 19th century European society. The text turns away from this "workshop," reflecting instead upon idealized depictions of aristocratic pastoralism and natural fecundity. The ever present specter of the "Monster" thus represents the

inability of the text to fully retreat into a prelapsarian past – before the industrial process began – to solve the problems of the present, the antagonisms of which, at the time of Shelley's writing, were seemingly insurmountable.

Both scholars compellingly stake out contradictory critical ground. Butler's analysis of *Frankenstein* successfully contrasts two disparate views of science – the mysticism of the vitalists (Abernethy) versus the more empirically sound research of the materialists (Lawrence) – in order to deconstruct the notion of *Frankenstein* as a sharp criticism of technological advancement. Her essay largely fails, however, to fill the space it creates with a meaning outside of this distinction. Montag mobilizes this ambiguity in the novel's representations of science to construct an acutely political reading of the text; modern science and technology are precisely what *Frankenstein* is concerned with because of its inability to properly represent them. This chapter will elaborate what I see as a complex critical space existing between these positions. Though it is true that Shelley's novel extends beyond a simple critique of modern science, it is also reductive to regard Frankenstein's folly as a mere fetishistic fascination with the occult. Alternatively, the concerns immanent within *Frankenstein* about the progress represented by Enlightenment thinking possibly running amok is more nuanced than Montag's suggestion of textual repression.

Here another distinction between the modes of scientific inquiry, posed by Anne Mellor, proves instructive. She argues the novel contains a "feminist critique of science," distinguishing between "good science," striving to understand the intricacies of the natural world, and "'bad' science, the hubristic manipulations of the elemental forces of nature" (Mellor, Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fictions, Her Monsters 89). From Mellor's prospective there is something fundamentally conservative in Shelley's writing: skepticism of the progressive powers of not

only scientific experimentation but, perhaps more profound, the romantic imagination itself. Indeed, this seminal science fiction novel seems to have more in common with dystopian skepticism than utopian ideals, arguably making Mary Shelley's novel a rhetorical counterpoint to her husband's socialist politics. Timothy Morton makes a similar assertion in *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste*, arguing the novel strives towards the exact realization of the Romantic ideal espoused by her husband, only to plunge this ideal into ruin:

> [Marry Shelley] sets up a reformist plan, deconstructs it, and finds the set of determinants which will render it hopeless… the novel is not about the sin of presumption, the Promethean theft of fire… but about the internal failure of a Promethean project" (51).

The "reformist" plan of which Morton writes is Percy's Utopianism, a political sanguinity Morton elsewhere contends implies an almost dialectical union between romanticist notions of naturalism and faith in the progressive potential of the human intellect, even the ostensibly ironic libratory potential of technology itself[3]. What both of these writers posit, however, is less an absolute rejection of progressivism than a tentative argument for its limitations: seeking scientific knowledge is good, scientific hubris is bad; Utopian impulses might have the potential to envision more egalitarian futures, but circumstances can often derail their potential for realization. Thus the binary between interpreting the Creature as either symbolic of the specious, outmoded scientific concepts of the vitalists, or the specter of technologic industrialism seems reductive. In order to escape the critical gravity of these types of readings, this chapter will attempt to recontextualize the Creature as indicative not of scientific experimentation itself, but rather – as previously stressed – humanity's relationship to nature, of which science proves but one of numerous lenses.

Rather than representing technological advancement I contend the Frankenstein Creature is symbolic of a sublime, chaotic, and most importantly displaced nature. Exhumed – quite literally mined from the earth – Frankenstein's Creature, or at least its constituent parts, are subject to an extreme objectification indicative of the radical subject object divide engendered by Cartesian dualism, and critiqued by modern philosophers across the ideological spectrum. The type of complexity Butler, Mellor, and Montag – among others – have elucidated in the novel's depiction of science can be read in terms of the nebulous yet progressive shift from what Caroline Merchant describes in her book, *The Death of Nature*, as an "organistic" society to a mechanistic one; a move from seeing nature as something human beings are connected with, to viewing it in terms of what Martin Heidegger termed "standing reserve": resources distinct from the human subject, and purposeless until acted up by that subject. This shift, inexorably tied to the progression of capitalism, is as much about the epistemological changes in western culture as it is technological advancement, though the development of advanced technologies certainly helps facilitate and define this process. Mellor's assertion that Frankenstein replaces "his scientific research for normal emotional interaction" is indicative of the type of cultural changes Merchant describes, as well as reminiscent of Jurgen Habermas' articulation of reification,[4] which he argues is inaugurated by the invasion of systemic values into the lifeworld of human interaction (Mellor, Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fictions, Her Monsters). In each case the concern articulated by these scholars – though somewhat different in tenor, critical focus and conclusions – is the development of an absolute epistemology of what Habermas terms "norm free" rationality; a positivist ethos which prizes efficacy (economic, industrial, social) above, and – if unmediated – to the detriment of, all else. Frankenstein does exactly this when he makes scientific pursuits the prime driving force of his life. Though couched in what might have been a

mild conservative reaction to her husband's radical politics and libertine lifestyle, Shelley's *Frankenstein* speaks to the concerns of systemic visions of society and nature that would occupy thinkers for generations to come, and into the present.

The text's mobilization of the sublime, as well as conceptions of the beautiful and pastoralism to which it is contrasted, are key to this critique. Frankenstein's utopian aspirations and follies are attributable to the breathless enthusiasm Leo Marx describes as indicative of a freshly emerging 19th century technological sublime. This ebullience for the seemingly endless possibilities of human rationality, is complemented by the almost solipsistic turn Kant describes in his *Critique of Judgment*; the rational mind astonished by its own powers of conception folds in upon itself creating a sort of epistemological totality. Running counter to this totality is the commonality of conception attributed to the beautiful by Kant, with its potential to serve as the foundation of a communal ethic. Frankenstein's lack of foresight about the possible ramifications of creating his Adam is the result of this myopia. Mellor makes a similar observation when she argues a sublime conception of nature and a beautiful one, one that evokes hostility for the natural world versus one that evokes compassion, is the pervading theme of Shelley's novel[5]. This analysis may itself, however, go too far. Though occasionally hostile, the sublimity of the Alps is also described as having rejuvenating and potentially normative qualities. Sublime awe is thus not irredeemable in *Frankenstein*, particularly if tempered by what Shelley seems to exemplify as the supreme normative ground of familial affections. What is problematic is when this experience becomes a reaction to human thought itself, the mind no longer reflecting upon the outside world for inspiration but instead turning inward, exaggerating the alienating effects of the sublime.

Returning to the question of the Creature, it is exactly this ambiguity, contained in the novel's evocation of the sublime, that is important to an analysis of the text. The technological sublime is more about the ability of the rational mind to manipulate, to bend to its will, the natural world, than it is a celebration of that mind in and of itself. The textual similarities connecting Shelley's descriptions of the Creature to those of the sublime Mount Blanc are fundamental to this interpretation. This connection between Creature and landscape links the former with a chaotic, uncontrollable nature, harnessed by Frankenstein and thus re-coded in terms of a technological sublime, but never truly losing its association with a natural complexity that defies Frankenstein's ability to anticipate fully the ramifications of his experimentation. Marx comments that the development of the technological sublime during the 19th century was part of a progression: "the awe and reverence once reserved for the Diety and later bestowed upon the visible landscape is directed toward technology, or, rather, the technological conquest of matter" (197). Merchant's dialectic between an "organistic" and a mechanistic vision of nature provides a natural bridge between the themes of familial affection pervading Shelley's novel, and its depictions of the rejuvenating qualities of the sublime. Tempered by a proper social grounding – the family, a reciprocal and respectful regard for the natural world – the exuberance, ambition, and even fear represented by the sublime need not always be destructive. Instead, as instanced by the romantic imagination of Shelley's husband, and notably herself, it can be generative. Though Frankenstein ultimately ends in tragedy, this turn is, as Morton points out, as much about genre as it is a critique of progressivism; depicting how Utopic visions can go wrong rather than arguing they absolutely will.

I.

The organistic cultural paradigms Merchant describes do not merely stand as simple oppositions to the positivism/capitalism driving modern societies. She notably problematizes the concept of a clean break between these two modes of thought, arguing instead for an uneasy coexistence between dominant and subordinate ideologies. Though organized by seemingly antithetical conceptions of human relations to nature, Merchant claims organisitc and mechanistic societies never truly exist without the shadow of their ideological other. Even when grounded by similar relationships to nature, the "organistic" ideologies she analyzes often espouse radically different socio-economic orders. Merchant writes that in particular, "three variations of the organic theory of society are important to the transition from organism to mechanism" (Merchant 69). She describes these modes:

> The body politic was metaphorically modeled on the organic unity of the human body, and, as a hierarchy of status groups…The second variation tended toward a leveling of the hierarchies and was based on the actual experiences of the village community. The third, a revolutionary form of organic theory, advocated the complete overthrow of social hierarchies. (Merchant 70)

Though each of these models advances a very different social order, ranging from feudalism to utopian socialism – Percy Shelley's political ideal which *Frankenstein* critiques – they share an important commonality; each was based upon a framework derived from the macrocosm of the natural world. The body politic was founded upon the organization of the human body – the division of labor and symbiosis of differentiated organs – the village community on the ecological sustainability of communal living, and the millenarian utopia on the idea that "God

was imminent within nature, that all matter was alive," fostering a holistic view of creation founded upon divine law (Merchant 80). Despite their differences, however, each of these social models viewed the human "microcosm" in terms of the natural "macrocosm," naturalizing an ecologically friendly attitude to the non-human world as disunity between humanity and nature would imply the disunity of civilization itself (Merchant 100-1).

Important to each of these philosophies was their assumption of a vivifying force animating nature, affording it autonomous agency and movement. Whether the immanent presence of God in every object, or the natural order of "the great chain of being," a normative grounding calling for ethical conduct not only between humans, but between humanity and the objective world was, according to Merchant, an important part of medieval and early Renaissance Christian ideologies. As European society began to shift to a more mechanistic brand of thinking, however, the idea that "force was external to matter rather than immanent within it" gained sway (Merchant 102). This concept de-emphasized the interconnectedness and agency of the natural world, allowing humanity to more radically disassociate itself from its environment. Combined with a freshly invigorated urge to produce surplus goods (i.e. capital) this "mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature" (Merchant 193). This was not a simple process, however, but a multifaceted cultural shift taking place over generations; the product of a number of social forces, including the rise of the capitalist market and religious warfare; additionally, the "tensions between these two perspectives of nature continue to be influential ever since the Scientific Revolution" (Merchant 103). Thus, unlike Foucault's concept of an episteme – the totalizing ideological discourse that defines the thought of an era – the move from organistic to mechanistic thinking is more a tension between center and periphery than an utter replacement of one ideological mode by another.

Though not absolutely totalizing, the idea of the ideological crisis point implied by the episteme does not seem entirely out of place within the history Merchant describes: a period of intense ideological tension which Shelley's artistic vision strikingly portrays. As Butler implicitly argues, expressions of both organic and mechanistic thought can be found throughout *Frankenstein*, though not necessarily along the lines she describes. For instance, Merchant contends Cornelius Agrippa, one of the occult figures Butler associates with 'pre-scientific' thought, actually presupposes the mechanistic views of modern science. Though Agrippa's holistic ideologies unquestionably share certain commonalities with vitalists like Abernethy – particularly their attempts to reconcile a more traditional Christian world view with secular science – Merchant notes the natural magic of Agrippa can easily be linked to Lawrence's strict positivism. She argues Agrippa's mysticism was:

> based on assumptions such as the manipulation of nature and the passivity of matter; these assumptions were ultimately assimilated into a mechanical framework founded on technological power over nature for the collective benefit of society (109).

Although based upon a defunct world view more commonly associated with pre-scientific thought, Agrippa's efforts to manipulate nature can be linked to the ideological foundations of modern society: a conviction about and fascination with humanity's ability to control the natural world. These ideas find their manifestation not only in the hegemony of positivist rationalism, but also in Mary Shelley's text as – what Montag notes is the strangely 'unscientific' – exuberance driving the creation of Frankenstein's "Adam," which in turn is linked by Morton and Mellor to her husband's own political idealism; the notion that 19th century social and technological advances would necessarily bring about a better future for humanity.

Another compelling connection between Frankenstein's work and Enlightenment faith in modern science is the link between descriptions of his research, the rhetoric of Francis Bacon – often regarded as the father of scientific rationalism – and Merchant's analysis of the mining practices of the mechanistic age. Frankenstein states that he "pursued nature to her hiding places" in his fevered endeavor to create new life (Shelley 32). This rhetoric bears striking resemblance to Bacon's own sentiments about the need for the "disclosure of nature's secrets" in the pursuit of human advancement (Merchant 188). Despite one quote belonging to the supernatural endeavors of a fictitious character and the other to the venerated progenitor of modern science, the sentiments of both statements are the same. Nature is a helpless object whose secrets must be unearthed through the efforts of a probing humanity in the name of progress. Like Bacon, who espoused both the idea and necessity of exercising control over the objective world, Frankenstein seeks to dispossess nature of her secrets by excavating both the earth – the digging up of graves – and the inner depths of the corpses he dissects. These act, and the attitudes that inform them, mark Frankenstein as a step closer to the mechanistic rationalism of Bacon than the natural magic of Agrippa. Though similar to Bacon's scientific rationalism in its basis on an ideological framework of manipulating the external world, Merchant argues that there are a number of crucial differences between Bacon's vision of nature and Agrippa's. Most important of these was that the power of medieval sorcerers was restricted to individuals, emphasizing limited personal control over the environment rather than a cultural notion of progress predicated upon the ever increasing domination of nature: the Enlightenment ideal of rational thinking bringing about a new age of human prosperity (Merchant 109). Additionally, figures like Agrippa ultimately considered themselves bound to the higher authority of God, manipulating an animate – rather than inanimate – world linked by the great chain of being.

Contrasting Agrippa's recognition of this authority, Frankenstein envisions breaking the bonds of life and death so as to "pour a torrent of light into our dark world," harnessing the power of creation for the collective benefit and advancement of human kind (Shelley 32).

In pursuit of this goal Frankenstein procures the objects of his experiments in a manner comparable to the practice of mining. The passage detailing his efforts reads:

> Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?…I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house… I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation. (Shelley 33)

It is in this self-disclosing manner that Victor Frankenstein seeks out nature's secrets, an endeavor he himself portrays as unethical. This manner of investigation, and the retrospective moral indignation of its author, resembles the view of mining Merchant describes as common in both ancient Roman and during the Renaissance. The despoiled inert corpses Frankenstein interrogates for their secret inner workings are similar to the organistic "image of Mother Earth, and her generative role in the production of metals," which man then toils to unearth in a form of rape; a vision of the inner workings of nature that "continued to be significant well into the eighteenth century" (Merchant 30). The wording used by Frankenstein, "disturbed, with profane finger," to describe his interrogations of inanimate human bodies mirrors the sentiments of

Roman compiler Pliny about mining the Earth, which he describes: "We penetrate into her entrails, and seek for treasures." In both the case of mining during the age of mechanism and Frankenstein's research, this idea of despoiling or raping a vital world is replaced with notions of reclaiming inert matter to be put to more practical human use; though for Frankenstein the ethical implications of his actions become troublingly apparent upon reflection. The passage from Shelley's novel describes him animating the "lifeless clay" of human flesh, temporarily forcing Frankenstein to subdue his "human nature." The ethical imperatives implied in the passage – and which disparage his actions – are akin to the normative modes of thinking that made mining unethical.

Merchant asserts this concept of a living, organically productive Mother Earth naturalized an ethical interdiction against the invasive processes of mining, an ideological imperative that would have to be overcome for capitalism to flourish. The new market economy, rather than being based upon the resources of wood, water and wind – which drove medieval societies – was fueled instead by coal and "an inorganic economic core – metals: iron, copper, silver, gold, tin, and mercury," necessitating wide-scale excavations to acquire in sufficient quantities (Merchant 63). In Shelley's novel, Frankenstein himself disparages the practice of mining, describing his work: "I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favorite employment" (Shelley 33). Victor not only chastises his own endeavors in this passage, but also provides a metaphoric link between his actions and the "unwholesome trade" of mining. The use of living animals is also described as part of his experiments, expanding the mechanistic view of nature as an object domain for human manipulation beyond the inanimate, as a strong dividing line is drawn between 'thinking' subjects and other living creatures, which are often reduced to a utilitarian use value. This is

comparable to the ethos which drove unrestrained mining practices, the residual effects of which, water contamination and swaths of despoiled land, emanate outward in unpredictable and harmful ways, symbolized in the sublime complexity of Mount Blanc. Just as Frankenstein's "mining" creates a rift between humanity and nature, this rift reflects back upon Victor's fractured social life – much like Merchant's microcosm/macrocosm model – implying a strong interconnection between the two.

II.

Though Victor Frankenstein's work adheres to a mechanistic view of nature, the presence of organistic ideas and practices can also be found in Shelley's novel. In her essay, "Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*," Anne K. Mellor draws a strong dividing line between the Frankenstein family and the De Laceys, from whom the Creature learns his speech. Mellor's essay focuses largely on Romantic-era conceptions of domesticity: the separation of the duties ascribed to men and women into distinct spheres of influence, the public and the domestic respectively. Both Victor and Captain Robert Walton – whose narratives of his encounter with Frankenstein bookend the novel – are placed firmly in the public sphere. In contrast, Victor's cousin and intended Elizabeth, as well as Walton's sister Margret, are kept in the relative solitude and safety of domestic life – a role Elizabeth at least professes to Frankenstein that she regrets; lamenting "that she [does] not have the same opportunities of enlarging her experience and cultivating understanding" when Victor leaves for England (Shelley 106). Mellor posits a particularly radical divide in *Frankenstein* between the public and the domestic, pointing out the extent to which Victor distances himself from his family during the course of his research, and the extreme incarnations of "a patriarchal ideal of female self sacrifice" realized in the figures of Elizabeth and Frankenstein's mother (276, "Possessing Nature"). The result of this divide,

Mellor claims, "is the separation of masculine work from domestic affections [which] leads directly to Frankenstein's downfall" (275). In her reading it is Victor's radical separation from his family that allows him to so grievously defy the laws of nature and produce his creature.

Mellor's analysis references the early capitalist trend described by Merchant wherein "as the trades and crafts began to adopt the capitalistic mode of employing wage workers, the wives of master craftsmen had less opportunity for participation" (Merchant 152). As mechanism took hold women, who were often more closely associated with nature, were increasingly marginalized by a society which felt that in order to progress it needed to distance itself from and control the material world. Mellor claims the novel upholds the De Lacey family as an ideal counterpoint to this rigid conception of domesticity. In the De Lacey family, she writes, "all work is shared equally in an atmosphere of rational companionship, mutual concern, and love" (277). The communalism Mellor emphasizes in the De Lacey family not only provides an alternative social structure to that found in the Frankenstein family, but also shares a number of similarities with the organistic village communities described by Merchant, harmoniously sharing labor throughout a community of relative equals.

Though the De Lacey family certainly reflects an organistic or pastoral[6] ideal within Shelley's novel, Mellor seems to dismiss the possibility of the Frankenstein family – its unfortunate patriarchal structure aside – also serving as a counterpoint to Victor's experimentation. Frankenstein comments of his childhood, "no youth could have passed more happily than mine," his early family life described as harmoniously as that of the De Lacey's (Shelley 20). Indeed, it is the disruption of this idyllic home that makes Victor Frankenstein's story so tragic as the kind, gentle lives of his family members and friends are cut short by the creation of his monster and his inability or unwillingness to sate the creature's own desires for

companionship. Thus, like the De Lacey family, the Frankensteins can be seen as providing an alternative to the mechanistic world view that drives Victor's research and leads to his – and their – eventual ruin.

Though Mellor is right to point out the self-sacrificing aspects of Elizabeth's character, whose wants and drives are often subsumed by those of others in the novel – particularly Victor's – she is not entirely without an air of individualism. Frankenstein contrasts his childhood temperament with Elizabeth's: "I delighted in investigating the fact relative to the actual world; she busied herself in following the aerial creations of the poets. The world was to me a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy; which she sought to people with imaginations of her own" (Shelley 20). Though lacking her cousin's interest in the natural/scientific world, Elizabeth's imagination is her own. Despite being deprived of many of the opportunities enjoyed by Victor, a university education and world travel, this passage as well as Elizabeth's ardent defense of the unjustly executed Justine, in the face of the maid's near universal condemnation, complicate – to an extent – Mellor's interpretation of her as the iconic docile woman[7].

In fact, Elizabeth is comparable to another arguably submissive literary figure, Cordelia, King Lear's youngest daughter from the Shakespearian play. Merchant describes Shakespeare's Cordelia as representative of a "utopian nature, or nature as the ideal unity of opposites" (Merchant 7). This dialectical ideal, though capable of espousing the type of progressivism indicative of mechanistic world views, appeals to the notion of a holistic balance within nature more representative of organistic thought. Similarly, Elizabeth can be seen as providing a holistic union of antitheses, contrasting the sharp subject/object divide guiding Victor's experiments. Her polyvalent status as cousin, surrogate daughter, and intended wife of the family's eldest son

position her within a system of opposites: she is at once exterior and interior to the nuclear family, sister and potential lover to Frankenstein. Additionally, she stands as a bedrock for the family during difficult times, expressing simultaneously an air of both weakness and strength. Thus, akin to Cordelia, she can be seen as representing a more holistic vision of nature in contrast to Victor's mechanistic one –though this role itself is problemitized somewhat by the extent of Elizabeth's willingness for self sacrifice.

Mellor's own aesthetic observations about the sublime and the beautiful in *Frankenstein* outline Elizabeth's importance to the text. She writes of this distinction: "the sublime appeals to the instinct of self-preservation and rouses feelings of terror that result in a lust for power, domination, and continuing control. But the beautiful appeals to the instinct of self-procreation and rouses sensations of both erotic and affectional love" (137). According to Mellor these differing aesthetic experiences have a profound impact upon how characters in the novel confront nature, and thus their disposition towards it; the sublime leading to a need to dominate and the beautiful one to coexist and nurture – though for the sake of her argument she perhaps delineates too strongly between the two. In Mellor's model it is obviously Frankenstein who approaches the world through the category of the sublime. It is not so much the DeLacy family, however, as Elizabeth, and Victor's childhood friend Clerval[8], that she directly associates with the beautiful, the power of this aesthetic mode ascribing considerable significance to these characters through its capacity to offer a counter ideology to Frankenstein's positivism.

Indeed, Kant's own work with the beautiful proves illuminating in this context. Kant's primary distinction between the beautiful and what he terms the "agreeable," is that the charm of the latter need only apply to individual subjects. The beautiful, in contrast, elicits what Kant describes as "purposive purposelessness," meaning that though the rational mind can define no

logical telos for beautiful objects based upon transcendental concepts, an impression of causal logic inheres in the object through the interplay of sensations and rational understanding facilitated by the imagination. This means that for Kant, beauty adheres to a universal standard, which is instructive in the context of *Frankenstein* as the refinement of a conception of beauty symbolizes the height of socialization in the *Critique of Judgment*: unlike rational thought or experiences of the agreeable, the beautiful requires the subject to override "the private subjective conditions of his judgment… and [reflect] on his own judgment from a universal standpoint" (Kant 161). The cultivation of an appreciation for beauty thus requires the subject to take the prospective of others into account, attempting to see the world through their eyes.

Not only are both Elizabeth and Clarval predisposed to experiences of the beautiful, both are artists, concerned with the production of beautiful objects. For Kant an impression of beauty is always elicited by the "form" of an object, in the case of the art object its composition or construction. When Frankenstein describes himself in his work as more like a miner than an artist, the analogy works on two levels, drawing attention to the similarities between the 'sculpting' of the Creature and artistic production, while simultaneously closing out the possibility of a harmonious conceptual union between the two. This mentality is mirrored in Frankenstein's childhood drive to unearth the "facts relative to the actual world." Victor's ideological inclination towards utilitarian materiality guides his experimentation, an intellectual method that notably adheres to a rationalist process that, though honed through the socialization of education, is nonetheless allowed to function independently of the social world. No place is this better represented than in Victor's own description of his completed creature: "I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God!... now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley 34). Frankenstein's

utter failure to create a being appealing to the commonality of human conception – in following with Kant's model – displays his inability to account for the prospective of others. Though he describes the process of picking features as based upon the principle beauty, Victor in fact chooses what he finds to be "appealing," failing to account for the totality of his composition and thus the aesthetic harmony of the Creature: how it will be perceived by the generality of human subjects. This failure serves as an analogy for Victor's greater failure, to account for the possible social, and just as important ecological implications of his research. In contrast, Elizabeth's – and Clarval's – endeavors to construct objects "to fill the vacancy of her own imagination" inherently carry with them – according to Kant – careful attenuation to the perceptions of others.[9]

Elizabeth, however, is arguably not without her own ties to the sublime. Indeed, Rob Wilson's theorization of a space of textual vacancy which drove a sublime aesthetic defining the American poetic tradition – though describing United States artists – resonates with Elizabeth's own need to "fill the vacancy" of her imagination. If Victor is largely motivated by sublime experiences it is worth noting that Elizabeth seems almost as driven, if in a different capacity, as her cousin. Her desire to become a traveling subject in particular evokes the Enlightenment ideal of developing knowledge as an end in and of itself. Elizabeth is thus no more an articulation of an absolute pastoral ideal – the receptivity to nature defined by beauty which Mellor claims is a major theme of the novel – than Victor. Here the idea of dialectic again proves fruitful; Elizabeth no doubt represents the "domestic affection" the novel prizes so highly, her own unrealized ambitions in no way impeding this symbolic role. As Merchant points out, organistic and mechanistic ideologies are not entirely antithetical to one another, most societies contain elements of both. It is the dominance of the mechanistic, with its tendency to produce unrestrained ambitions and hubris, which proves dangerous. Elizabeth seems to possess a healthy

combination of both lofty flights of intellectual fancy, and a 'commonsense' fidelity to familial duty. It is her grounding, first and foremost, in the sociability of a close knit family life which tempers the unchecked drives that ruin Victor.

This reading may seem a bit thin given Elizabeth's lack of access to the opportunities that ultimately devastate Frankenstein. Contrasted to Victor's single minded exploitation of the material world, however, Elizabeth as a healthy – if unrealized – alternative to Enlightenment or Romantic idealism seems more compelling, especially given Mary Shelley's own ambitions as a writer, and the common association of Percy with Frankenstein – the latter's Utopian politics both Mellor and Morton claim to be critiqued by the novel. Mellor states that at "every level Victor Frankenstein is engaged upon a rape of nature" (281). This characterization, if a bit sensational, is largely accurate. Frankenstein's lack of a sense of community causes his misfortune, and the misfortunes of those around him. He refuses to accept responsibility for his Creature – initially after its creation, and later when he breaks his promise to create for it a mate – forcing it to seek companionship elsewhere. Frankenstein also neglects his familial duties, cutting off ties to his father and Elizabeth while pursuing his research, and is arguably complicit in Elizabeth's death; so caught up is he in his own hostile relationship with his creation that he proves incapable of conceiving the threat it poses to his fiancée. This critique espoused by Mellor in her essay, however, neglects an essential aspect of the Creature's story: his anger comes not merely from the specificity of being spurned by his creator, but humanity in general. It is the inability of humans of all genders, creeds, and walks of life to acclimate themselves to the existence of the Creature that is central to understanding the anxieties he evokes: anxieties intimately tied to the novel's complex representation of the sublime.

III

Leo Marx's brief description of the displacement of sublime awe from the deity, to nature and finally to the technological intellect of man, is a compelling model to apply to *Frankenstein*. The novel is full of often interconnected iterations of both natural and technological sublimes. The flash of wonder young Victor experiences when a lightning bolt demolishes a tree on the family estate is described in sublime terms: "the thunder burst at once with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens… I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak" (22-3). This bolt, exciting Victor's "extreme astonishment," is a compelling example of the power of the natural world, which is quickly reigned by Victor's imagination through his father's scientific explanation and subsequent replication of Benjamin Franklin's kite experiment, "which drew down that fluid from the clouds" (Shelley 23). It is this event, and the potential power it evokes to be harnessed by the human mind, that finally expels the antiquated ideas of Cornelius Aggrippa from Frankenstein's thoughts. This development outlines the movement of sublime inspiration from nature to the seat of the technological mind described by Marx. The incident, however, also contains a veiled suggestion of humanity's limited ability to control this power. Though harnessed by Frankenstein senior, electricity in the form of lightning is still capable of inflicting the chaotic destruction visited upon the oak. This ultimate lack of control over natural forces foreshadows Victor's own inability to control the cascade of effects his manipulation of nature sets forth: the monster he creates with the potential to tip the ecological balance of the natural world into chaos.

Mellor refers to ecology in her analysis of *Frankenstein*, writing of a "system of interdependent organisms" (284). This comment, however, has more to do with how human beings should act towards one another, emphasizing the community over the individual, the

wants of others before those of the self, than it does humanity's place within an ecosystem. This omission is of particular note, as the possibility of the Creature filling an ecological niche other than, or in competition with, humanity seems of considerable importance to the text. As addressed earlier, the constituent pieces of the Frankenstein monster were quite literally mined from the earth, a process that in and of itself garners considerable rhetorical criticism within the novel. Viewed in this manner, the Creature can be seen as a metaphor for the industrial process. These raw materials, however, defy the intentions of their procurer, the Creature becoming something altogether distinct from its constituent parts, and recalcitrant to its master's control. Despite implying a 'rebellion' of nature, the Creature's construction nonetheless represents the developing trend of systematic assembly. This power and will to mass produce artificial products is – if not unique – central to modern capitalism and mechanistic views of nature. Victor's chemistry professor M. Krempe speaks to the glorification of the human mind driving these processes: "The labours of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to solid advantage for mankind" (28). Krempe is here reclaiming the legacy of mystics like Agrippa, arguing for the benefits of their work even though the foundations of their research were suspect. The sentiment contained within his defense, however, is concerned more with modern institutions than medieval sorcerers; he believes modern science has imbued thinking men with a boundless potential to understand and alter the material world, and that ultimately nothing but good can come of it. Ignored by jubilant prognostications such as this are the issues of sustainability and ethics: the impact of procuring materials for experimentation and industrialization, the social changes that will be the product of this innovation, and the moral obligations one might have to limit or prevent these unintended effects. The inability of characters throughout Shelley's novel to reconcile themselves to the existence of Frankenstein's

Creature implies an inability – either morally or functionally – to accept the implications of such a Creature's presence, a problem not born of poor socialization, or the usurpation of God's power of creation, but rather the complex ramifications the existence of such a Creature will have upon the ecosystem in which he lives. The ends of innovation in this case, contrary to Krempe's hypothesis, might not benefit humanity at all. Thus fear of the Creature can be seen in terms not of humanity's ability to manipulate nature, but the inability for humanity to fully anticipate the effects such manipulations will have, a product of nature's own unpredictability.

The idea of Frankenstein's Creature representing a chaotic nature is not entirely new. Bill Philips, in his essay "*Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley's 'Wet Ungenial Summer,'" claims that the weather caused by the eruption of the Tambora volcano had particular impact on the writing of *Frankenstein.* He argues the inordinately tempestuous effects of this eruption persisting "throughout 1816 and 1817, when the novel was being written is… of great assistance to our understanding of the work" (62). The weather, the caprices of nature, certainly play an important role in *Frankenstein.* This combined with knowledge of the volcano leads Phillips to pose the idea that "rather than representing the horrors of the Industrial Revolution, Victor Frankenstein's monster symbolizes the capacity of nature to instigate environmental crises of biblical proportions" (59). He supports this claim by pointing to how storms are often concurrent with appearances of the monster and the extreme environments he chooses to inhabit. He also brings up the creature's relative indifference toward many of his victims, and the natural desolation visited upon mainland Europe during the novel's composition. Ultimately, however, the essay leaves the issue somewhat nebulous, setting up a potential link between the Creature and the devastation caused by weather, while leaving the exact nature of this connection vague.

Though a direct allegory between the weather and Creature of Shelley's novel may be difficult to substantiate, the text does draw a strong connection between the monster and environmental extremes. The "flash of lightning" that coincides with Victor's sighting of his creation following its murder of his brother, William, is but one example of the creature's association with chaotic nature. Additionally, there is a striking resemblance between Frankenstein's initial descriptions of the monster and those of Mont Blanc. He describes the Creature's contradictory appearance:

> His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxurances only formed a more horrid contrast with the watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips. (Shelley 34)

In a similar fashion the harsh physical majesty of Mont Blanc is described: "The sea, or rather the vast river of ice, wound among its dependent mountains, whose aerial summits hug over its recesses. Their icy and glittering peaks shone in the sunlight over the clouds" (Shelley 65). Between these two passages the vivid description of how the myriad features of Victor's creation contrast one another mirrors the material complexity of the mountain. The flowing arteries and hair of the Creature are like the ice flows snaking through the range, and the pearly white teeth of the monster are comparable to Mount Blanc's icy peaks jutting into the sky. Additionally, as the constituent pieces of the Creature were "mined" from different locations, the comparison between creature and mountain implicitly evokes the vanes of minerals contained within the peak. The idea of anyone scouring either the Creature or Mont Blanc for resources, however, is unthinkable; both possess a power seemingly beyond that of mortal man. The majesty of the

mountain range is described: “white and shining pyramids and domes towered above all, as belonging to another earth” (62). Similarly the Creature is described as being be of “gigantic stature… the deformity of its aspect” too hideous to belong to a human (48). Both the Creature and the Alps possess a stature that dwarfs humanity, the monster adapting itself to environments humans never could: “he bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution” (Shelley 65).

Reading Percy Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” also proves instructive in the context of *Frankenstein*. The poem describes the mountain as symbolizing “the naked countenance of earth,” the face of a primal nature whose power seemingly resides in a tranquility beyond the rhythms of biological life to “revolve, subside, and swell” (98, 95). This impression of an almost transcendent majesty evoked by the natural sublime takes on greater significance for the reading of *Frankenstein* when one considers the similarities between the sublime, if lesser, features that surround the peak, amplifying one’s experience of it, and the face of the monster itself. The mountains and ice flows surrounding Mont Blanc are described by Percy as “rude, bare, and high, / Ghastly, and scarred, and riven” (70-1). In much the same fashion Mary writes of the surrounding scenery: “The surface is very uneven, rising like the waves of a troubled sea, descending low, and interspersed by rifts that sink deep” (65). In both passages the verticality and cracked asymmetry of the surrounding landscape is emphasized. The ocean-like movement described in Mary’s novel is also evoked in “Mont Blanc”: “Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion” (32).

Mary’s descriptions of the Creature’s face mirror this cracked and riven façade: “His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks” (35). Even during the innocence of his infancy, the Creature’s face is distorted through its

gesticulations, foreshadowing his eventual physical and emotional deformity: “His countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes” (65). The novel’s emphasis on this visceral malformation, caused in part through the Creatures affect, reflects the scared, otherworldly landscape of the Alps, which both Mary and Percy notably contrast to a more beautiful countryside tractable to everyday human life. Additionally, the Creature’s stature is described as “gigantic,” and he is more than once found “hanging among the rocks of [a] nearly perpendicular ascent,” paralleling how Mont Blanc towers over both its surrounding landscape as well as human observers (48).

The animation of the Creature, and perceived animation of Mont Blanc, is another notable point of comparison. Anticipation of the movement of that which should intuitively be motionless, much like the almost perceptible churning of the rock and ice of the Alps, is what Victor experiences as the lifeless flesh before him suddenly “breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs” (34). This is an important part of what makes the Creature so unnerving. The depiction of Mont Blanc as emotive – in both Percy’s poem and in the novel – is what infuses the natural world with an impression of agency, an impression which seems to be lost in the fever of Victor’s experimentation, only to resurface as the inanimate materials used to construct the Creature lurch to life, its erratic motions metaphorically setting forth the initial stones of the avalanche which will inevitably consume Victor’s life – as well as the Creature’s own. Thus, the transcendent/superhuman attributes ascribed to both peak and creature imply a greater force lying behind them, yet one that is assessable through their physical incongruities. It is this power that Percy Shelley reveres and – in line with Mary’s critique of her husband – Victor comes to abhor.

Percy goes so far in his reverence for the awe Mont Blanc evokes as to politicize it, arguing the Mountain contains truths "to repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood / By all, but which the wise, and great, and good / interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel (80-3). Though an ardent atheist, Percy nonetheless here appeals to a higher order to ground his political socialism, finding inspiration in the sublimity of the material world and its capacity to commit an "unremitting interchange" with the human mind (39). Mirroring the force, if not the tenor, of this exchange is the face of Frankenstein's freshly animated creature, "No mortal could support the horror of that countenance," transforming the power of this natural sublime into a moment of terror rather than reverence [10](35).

Indeed, additional support for the connection between Victor's world altering aspirations and Percy Shelley's politics can be found in the passage from "Mont Blanc" detailing how the mind, quickened by the sights and sounds of the mountain, comes to reside "in the still cave of the witch Poesy" evoking images of ghosts and phantasms to represent the ephemeral and capricious workings of the imagination (44). Given the textual similarities between "Mont Blanc" and *Frankenstein*, and the ambivalence Mellor and Morton – among others – have noted Mary as feeling for her husband's politics, as well as those of her parents, it seems more than a small coincidence that the fruit of Victor's own fevered labors would yield not metaphorical phantasms, but a real one: the Creature, which – as Montag observes – is rich with its own political connotations. In both cases the striving to do good through the modeling/studying of the natural world – the inspiration Percy draws from Mont Blanc, and Victor's devotion to the natural sciences – arguably distances them from their own immanence within this world. Frankenstein, the mechanist, strives erroneously to assert absolute dominion over nature, and

Percy distances himself from his "familial affections" – and Mary in particular – to intellectually pursue his own grandiose aspirations for society.

The judgment implicit in this textual connection, however, is far from absolute. Not only does Mary's description of the sublimity of Mount Blanc carry with it a recuperative connotation – Frankenstein seeming to draw strength from sight of the mountain – it also impresses upon the imagination a raw power that confronts the human subject, unnerves it. This experience of awe, a vastness that induces both pleasure and pain in the viewer, evokes the untenable fact of humanity's fantasy of maintaining control over nature; whether that control be the types domination seen in the industrial revolution, or simply the ability to maintain sole influence over the course of one's life. Though certainly capable of fostering human ambitions – for instance Romantic poetry and experimentation – the natural sublime also tends to limit this bolstering of the ego; the ability of the rational mind to assert itself against the threatening power it perceives, continues to be haunted by this power external to the self. It is only with the development of a technological sublime – concomitant with industrialization, and often politicized[11] – that the awe traditionally ascribed to nature fully loses its normative potential, and human ambitions are allowed to roam unchecked.

This fear of a chaotic nature is addressed by Merchant – though she merges it with more beneficent views of a holistic nature – and also by William Cronon when he points out traditional notions of wilderness were those of a place "to which one came only against one's will, and always in fear and trembling" (Cronon 71). This conception of wilderness would transform in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into notions of a "pristine sanctuary" where one finds reprieve from the corrupting influences of civilization (69). It is no coincidence that this idea of nature as a sanctuary developed alongside the faith in humanity's ability to control the material world

expressed by Frankenstein and Dr. Krempe; wilderness can only be invitingly quaint once it seems possible for humanity to dominate it.

Victor's visit to the Alps is motivated by the very drive Cronon describes. Urged to travel to the Alps by family members he readily agrees due to his hidden desire to recover from the rigors of his studies, the creation of the monster, and his secret complicity in the deaths of William and Justine. Just as Victor appears to have derived some solace from this mountain retreat, however, the Kantian move inward perhaps steadying him against the difficulties of his recent experiences, the creature bounds back into the narrative, the return of the natural sublime now articulated as the inescapable specter of his inability to fully account for the ramifications of his actions. This connection between the Creature and a capricious, uncontrollable nature is essential to the text. Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Inhuman*, riffing off the work of both Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, localizes this sense of unease in a moment of what he and Burk term "privation": "the threat of nothing further happening… privation of light, terror of darkness; privation of others, terror of solitude;… privation of life, terror of death" (Lyotard 99). In the traditional (pre 20th century) sublime this moment of privation is inevitably followed by a moment of recovery, a re-establishing or stabilizing of the self or ego whose existence was implicitly threatened by the impression of privation. For Lyotard's postmodern sublime, however, this second moment of reconciliation does not exist, a change in the theorization of sublime that will be further tracked in my second chapter. This change is worth noting in the context of *Frankenstein* though, precisely because it reflects back upon the transition from a natural to a technological sublime. Unlike the natural sublime, which implies an order external to the human world, even as this external world threatens the subject, the technological sublime begins to conceive of the observing mind as the absolute organizing principle. When order is no

longer seen as deriving from God or the natural world, the potential failures of this mind become a sort of abject; the privation of order is the fear of chaos, loss of control, helplessness. Victor in his eagerness to create a new species fails to consider the cascade effects the existence of such a creature will have upon the tightly ordered world in which he lives. This is the veiled anxiety the creature represents: the unpredictability of nature, the ever present possibility of biological/material systems, whether through direct human influence or not, to produce something new threatening one's existence, a threat no longer attached to the impression of a transcendental order to creation. This fear extends beyond Frankenstein to the rest of humanity, whose celebration of the Enlightenment seeks to disavow, even as it overwrites, the "organistic" conceptions Merchant describes as presenting an alternative impression of purposivness in which to take solace.

Though natural formations like the Alps or the great ice sheets of the arctic evoke this fear of a chaotic nature, and thus a similar sense of the sublime, it is the closeness of the Creature to the human subject that belies the potential for a recuperative moment. Frankenstein describes the comparative horror of the Creature animate and inanimate: "I gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (Shelley 35). It is not until the creature begins to move, attaining its ultimate uncanny similarity to man that Frankenstein realizes the full extent of what he is doing, what he has done, and horror is allowed to set in. The intractability of nature takes on an aspect that the human subject cannot distance itself from. Like the technological sublime, the Creature is too close to humanity to allow for the process of aesthetic recuperation to take place, and yet too different to be empathized with as a fellow member of the species. For its part, all the Creature desires is a place, the ability to find relative

equilibrium within its environment and to procreate; both of which are categorically denied the Creature by Frankenstein and humanity as a whole.

Chapter 2

Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* possesses a striking if bizarre ecological consciousness. From descriptions of the surreal, "almost funny" extinctions of the owls and their avian kin, to the dilapidation of San Francisco's urban environments and the wastes that surround them, Dick's Earth is a site of rapidly accelerating environmental ruin. Paired with this spatial disintegration is the psychological and ontological confusion Dick is well known for amongst Science Fiction readers for creating in his texts. The connection between these phenomena should not be overlooked. Just as the natural grandeur of the romantic sublime permeates many of *Frankenstein's* landscapes, a similar awe emanates from Dick's nearly vacant San Francisco. *Androids* reflects, however, a very different sublime. Rather than representing the majesty of a natural world which, even as it rebukes humanity's hubris, presents a profound and meaningful existence beyond the human, Dick's environments seem to negate exactly this possibility. Not only does the novel present the potential extinction of humankind, but even greater a conceivable end to all life. Dick's fictions are, however, never without potential horizons and, as Fredric Jameson has observed, any apocalyptic reading of Dick's work misses the fact that the "inveterate reader gradually comes to the conclusion that Dick revels in the misery and impoverishment of these landscapes" (Jameson "History and Salvation" 381). Thus if one is to read a disparaging iteration of the sublime as the central aesthetic of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* one must also account for what balances this aesthetic out; what opens the possibilities seemingly denied by a dying Earth, and just as discouraging as the possibilities contained the colonization of a dead Mars?

The answer to this question, I believe, is rooted in the same potential found in Shelley's *Frankenstein*: a human capacity – however differently articulated, and tinged with nihilistic

sentiments – for community. The deep-seated concern symbolized by the recurrent figure of the android in Dick's fiction is the negation of this potential, a negation seemingly immanent within the current direction of human history. The philosophical dilemma posed by the android has been theorized in a number of ways. Jameson compares it to Cartesian doubt, with what he terms the "android cogito," or the doubting not of one's senses, but the integrity of one's consciousness as human: "I think, therefore I am an android" (374). Similarly Carl Freedman sees the androids as representing a justifiable paranoia linked to the development of capitalist institutions in his Psychoanalytic/Marxist reading of Dick's *Ubik*, and Rric Rabkin links the androids to the dehumanizing rationalization process of industrialization[12]. Common to each of these interpretations is the specter of corporatism, a force the androids are indelibly tied to and which I, in the context of my overarching aesthetic theorization, would like to link to Jameson's own conceptualization of the postmodern or technological sublime. This aestheticization of conspiracy and imagistic superficiality both permeates the text of *Androids* and is linked to another form of the sublime: Lyotard's theory of privation, realized through a vision of entropic infinity and symbolized in the destruction of Earth's ecological systems. The presence of a void or silence, both aggressive and pervasive in the novel, is indicative of this privation: an entropic vision of the universe wherein everything must eventually submit to decay. Premonitions of this inevitable material ruin emanate not only from the novel's decimated landscapes but from the androids themselves, who, even as they attempt to make a place for themselves on Earth prove – at least for the time being – incapable of forging the types of communities necessary for generating long term forms of cultural meaning: the traditions and ethical institutions which define human civilizations.

The connection between this ecological/entropic sublime and its postmodern counterpart in the novel is complex. The paradox of the postmodern sublime, or more specifically the bureaucratic and economic institutions that inaugurate its inception into the collective consciousness, is that they simultaneously create a system of meaning that covers up the scientifically established universal tendency towards decay, while hegemonically reinforcing the positivism which makes the terms of this ruin ontologically absolute – the purpose of life becomes the pursuit of goods and commercial gains supporting an ostensibly boundless culture of consumerism that is, nonetheless, founded upon principles that prefigure its eventual destruction. The locus of these postmodern aesthetic experiences notably contrasts theories of an American Technological Sublime articulated by scholars like Leo Marx, David Nye and Rob Wilson, all of whom describe a cultural sublime markedly distinct from its European counterparts in its capacity to create a collective ebullience for the possibilities of technological and social progress largely devoid of the terror or ego diminution described by Burke and Kant. According to Wilson, the inspiration drawn from the vast expanses of tractable land in the Americas was ideologically matched – until the modern era – only by the "New World affirmations of power, excess, newness, wildness, that sublime 'influx' whereby nature was fast transfigured into the makings of self-possibility and the market" (25). This story of American progressivism, however, culminates in the production of its own Frankenstein monster; its ideological immolation in the nuclear age. The post-apocalyptic world of *Do Androids Dream* evokes not so much the terrible and ultimate semiotic articulation of the atomic mushroom cloud, but the confrontation with scientific entropy such a conflagration implies. The landscapes of *Androids* evoke neither the technological sublime, defined by expansive tracts of exploitable wilderness and inspiring generations of American inventers and poets, entrepreneurs and

explorers, nor are they the terrible yet rejuvenating visages of *Frankenstein's* Romantically Sublime Alps; rather they symbolize the utter negation of human possibility, a postmodern privation which seemingly forestalls any recourse to an egotistical turn inward for individual deliverance.

Against the threat of these landscapes, and the chaotic infinity they evoke, stands the cultish religion of Mercerism, a spiritual unity realized through a mechanically facilitated experience of communal suffering, joy, and hope for redemption. This redemption, however, is not transcendental like Christianity's – though Mercerism does possess a number of Christian overtones – but rather facilitates the spiritualization of the process of corporeal living, providing life with meaning beyond positivist rationalism. This chapter will argue that *Androids* posits this "spiritualization" of life as being necessary to the foundation of an ethical society, which must look to the maintenance of a long term vision of community even as this community faces impending destruction[13]. This spiritualization of life is akin to the holism described by Carolyn Merchant as an "oganistic" vision of nature, and theorized in Murry Bockchin's anti-hierarchical social ecology – both of which ascribe meaning to the physical world beyond mere instrumentalism, while attempting to remain free of transcendental spiritual idealizations. Though ephemeral, this type of biologically – and perhaps mechanically – inspired meaning drives the dim hope of new possibilities in the novel.

I.

Any attempt to theorize Dick's androids, especially in the context of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, must address Lejla Kucukalic's insightful essay "Mechanical Universe and Its Discontents." Though she is not the first critic to problematize interpretations of the android

as humanity's sinister alter – Aaron Barlow has written another notable essay on the subject entitled "Philip K. Dick's Androids: Victimized Victimizers" – her work on the subject is by far the most comprehensive and compelling. Rather than seeing the android as part of a nexus of deprivations facing a harassed humanity in Dick's novel, Kucukalic reads them as inextricably aligned with their creators against the inevitability of ruin:

> the general tide of nothingness, of deserted radiation-devoured landscapes, is reflected in the existential crisis of both Rick Deckard and the androids, who teeter on the disconcerting edge between life and death but also have a limited expiration date (Kucukalic 87)

Kucukalic reads the imminent mortality of the androids as linking them to the concerns of their human creators. She also detects echoes of science writer Norbert Wiener, who she establishes as an inspiration for Dick's fiction. Wiener's writings on cybernetics and entropy both presuppose the potential development of a slave-like race of machines – Dick's androids – and the ability of these machines, like humans to "counter act the disorder of entropy" (Kucukalic 85). This common alignment of both human and machine against entropy, argues Kucukalic, makes the subjecthood of the androids just as important as those of the novel's human characters. She bolsters this conclusion by pointing to Deckard's conflicted role as "killer," humanity's responsibility for the lack of empathy possessed by the androids, and finally the movement of Deckard's redemption, eventually leading him to adopt a simulated toad accepting that, "electric things have their lives, too" (Dick 239). Ultimately, Kucukalic argues Dick's derisive statements in interviews about what his androids symbolize – often mobilized to interpret the novel – apply not to these human simulacrum, but instead symbolize " human beings who do not care what happens to their fellow human beings," androids ostensibly included (Kucukalic 88).

Kucukalic's essay is a convincing and well-researched response to numerous less nuanced interpretations of *Androids*, a set of responses that I cannot hope to fully summarize here. I would like to argue, however, that her reading of the novel is somewhat selective, marginalizing many of the more ambivalent scenes about the androids. To begin with, the androids, though occasionally presented as sensitive to the environmental ruin visited upon Earth – and the inevitability of decay it evokes – are themselves often semiotically clustered with entropy; for instance being described as reflecting the lifeless void of space. Additionally, though Dick's human simulacra unquestionably make moral demands upon both his human characters and readers for collective and individual recognition, the complexity of the androids as textual symbols rests in their ambiguity as moral subjects. Arguably victims of a dehumanizing manufacturing process which circumscribes their identities, the androids and their interests, as often as not, seem to be tied to these corporate mechanisms. The titular conceit of Aaron Barlow's essay, "Victimized Victimizers," implies that the androids are simultaneously merciless predators and hapless prey: victims of the system that created them and the prejudices of the public they were made to serve. What both Kucukalic and Barlow – who also takes a sympathetic stance on the androids – fail to acknowledge, however, is that while the novel constantly presents both horizons and demands for the subjecthoods of the androids, it almost immediately problematizes or closes out these possibilities. For example, Rachael Rosen's capricious murder of Deckard's goat is incomprehensible to the novel's human characters, but, as Deckard observes, was "not needless" as it was motivated by "an android reason" (Dick 225). This scene importantly draws a dividing between humans and androids – though this simple binary is constantly problematized throughout the novel. Rachael's actions were motivated by selfish revenge, either for the murder of her fellow androids, or perhaps more compelling – given

her ostensible lack of concern for her compatriots – the fact that, in her words "you love the goat more than me" (Dick 200). Though these motivations are far from inconceivable in humans, they do belie the ideal of "humanity" put forth in the novel by faith in Mercerism: an abiding respect for all living things, though excluding – at least for Deckard – androids. The murder is thus considered inhuman in the context of the novel – both for its characters, and readers who have bought into the distinction between man and machine the text outlines – foreclosing any feelings of sympathy readers previously felt for Rachael; sentiments already confused by her calculated, if purpose driven, seduction of Deckard in order to inhibit his ability to hunt other androids. The killing of the goat, and the alien motivations behind it, evoke an oft felt mood of paranoia in the novel; a motif commonly noted in Dick's fiction by critics like Christopher Palmer, Carl Freeman and Kucukalic herself.[14] Fostering this atmosphere is the recurrent inability of readers to rationally comprehend the motivations of the novel's antagonists.

Behind Rachael's actions stands the shadowy figure of the Rosen Association, the manufactures of the Nexus 6 android – the model to which Pris belongs – and whose vague presence can be felt throughout the narrative. Rachael speaks of her mission to demoralize Deckard as planned by "the association." This is reflected in the following passages wherein she refers repeatedly to the company as a nebulous "we:"

> We tried to stop you this morning, before you started out with Dave Holden's list. I tried again, just befor Polokov reached you. But then after that I had to wait." …"Oh, so Phil accompanied you back to the opera house. We didn't know that; our communications broke down about then. We knew just that she had been killed; We naturally assumed it was you." …"The association," Rachael said, "wanted to reach the bounty hunters here and in the Soviet Union. (Dick 197)

Though charged with protecting her fellow androids, Rachael speaks of their deaths conversationally, and in particular comments on the recent murder of her professed friend, Luba Luft, "we just knew she had been killed; we naturally assumed it was you," without a hint of agitation or sorrow. To Rachael the protection of her fellow androids is simply a job given her by the association; in manifesting this attitude Rachael displays the lack of empathy Dick's androids are notorious for. Not only is Rachael in contact with the rogue androids, so too, it appears, is the manufacturer that created them. The constant and ambiguous use of the pronoun "we" as Rachael explains her motivations to Deckard, seemingly referring to the Rosen Association and rogue androids interchangeably, obfuscates where the reach of the company ends and the independent actions of their creations begin. This confusion has wide ranging effects upon the reading of the novel. This inability to distinguish between creature and company implicates the association in incidents like Deckard's apprehension by a fake police agency made up of escaped androids who accuse Deckard himself of being an impostor; a moment designed to ontologically confuse the reader who momentarily questions the fidelity of the prior narration.

The direct role the Rosen Association plays in Rachael's actions, and her lack of concern for her fellows, push Kucukalic's reading beyond its ability to disassociate the androids from the sinister corporation that created them. Though it is unquestionably human designs, and "deliberately built in defects" – particularly their lack of empathy – that defines the evolution of the androids, and in many ways curse them, it is difficult to disassociate these creatures – as both Kucukalic and Barlow attempt – from the interests of the global and interplanetary conspiracies of the novel (Dick 183). Eldon Rosen, the Association's lead researcher, makes the driving force behind the increasing complexity of androids clear: "the time-honored convention underlying every commercial venture," dedication to the whims of the market, and little else (Dick 52). The

androids are inextricably connected to these economic forces, that define not only their manufacture and development, but whose interests also seem indistinguishable from their own. This cabalistic network of economic and bureaucratic entities, nebulously intertwined with the androids, evokes Jameson's conception of the postmodern technological sublime: a powerful aesthetic sense of artificiality combined with a fear of conspiracies. These feelings, according to Jameson, are the product of the difficulties individuals have comprehending the "totality of the contemporary world system," that of late capitalism (Jameson, "Postmodernism" 218). The Earth's destruction was ostensibly brought about by these systemic forces: the "Pentagon and its smug scientific vassal the Rand Corporation" that sang the praise of inevitable American triumph in the impending war with the Soviet Union (Dick 13).

Jameson's postmodern sublime, however, is more than classic aesthetic notions like the terror of Edmund Burke's "obscurity," or a Kantian insufficiency of representational "comprehension," applied to an inability to understand modern institutional systems. A pervasive sense of artificiality, the product of everything from modern art, to architecture, to mass media, informs a glossy and prepackaged superficiality:

> The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not in its own right, but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp – namely the whole new decentered global network of the stage of capital itself. This is a figural process presently best observed in a whole mode of contemporary entertainment literature, which one is tempted to characterize as "high-tech paranoia," in which the circuits and networks of some putative global computer hook-up are narratively mobilized by

> labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but often deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the capacity of the normal reading mind (Jameson, " Postmodernism" 218).

Dick's fiction, which so fascinated Jameson, was a precursor to this "entertainment literature." *Androids* presents a bottomless pit of deepening paranoia, accentuated by the ontological confusion of scenes like the one where readers suspect Deckard himself of being an android, or when the discredited religious figure Mercer – in reality out of work television actor Al Jarry – pops messianicly out of the ether to provide spiritual guidance. In conjunction with this conspiratorial mode comes the mindless consumerism of the novel's human characters: the recreational use of the affect altering mood organ, Iran Deckard and John Isidore's seemingly constant consumption of television, and arguably the existence of the empathy boxes through which fusion with Mercer is achieved. All of these mediums are indicative of the type of representational malaise described by Jameson, behind which stands the hegemony of an as yet unrecognized power.

The most compelling example of the artificiality of these mediums, and the ways in which they are tied to the androids, is the television comic Buster Friendly. Buster, and his tirelessly rotating cast of witty and sexually provocative guests, is revealed by Irmgard Batty to be "one of us [an android]…And nobody knows. No humans, I mean" (Dick 209). Here again an ambiguity is presented as to the full extent of android duplicity in, and perhaps even control over, the novel's events. Even Isidore's boss, the cantankerous and wise Hannibal Sloat, has "never been able to determine… for sure" Buster's identity (Dick 74). If, as Barlow asserts, those "behind Buster Friendly – and not the androids – are the real "evil" force in the novel," it is notable that the narrative makes no effort to disassociate Buster from these forces. Indeed, for

readers they are ostensibly one in the same; Buster becomes yet another signifier for the mass of global conspiracies seemingly operating behind the text.

Whether puppet or puppeteer, the novel makes it clear that Buster is fighting with Mercerism "for control of our [humanity's] psychic souls" (Dick, 74). Buster, the "forty-six hour" a day television comic, is the ultimate fetishization of the image in this devastated future (Dick 74). Friendly and his guests are always funny, always vivacious, and most importantly always young: "Buster is immortal, just like Mercer," Sloat shrewdly observes (Dick 74). Despite the androids' four year lifespan, a problem of the inability to achieve artificial "cell replacement," the Buster show has run for years, non-stop, producing more content than any human could ever conceivably watch (Dick 195). Android copies, "stamped out like bottle caps," produce this facile image of eternal youth. "The Buster Friendly Show" is not the product of a particularity but a sinister multiplicity, the endless duplication of identical facsimiles simulating eternal youth and masquerading as an unachievable fantasy invading humanity's collective consciousness. In a world where decay has become an inescapable truth of everyday life, Buster Friendly beams to audiences the perpetual image of its antithesis – a boundless and self possessed vitality.

Immortality is also ascribed to Mercer. The connections between Buster Friendly and the religion of Mercerism are many. Both Mercerism and "The Buster Show" rely upon mechanical mediums – televisions and empathy boxes respectively – both play a large formative role in defining the consciousness of society, and both are predicated upon falsehoods – Buster's identity as an android and Mercer's as Al Jarry. These similarities, however, belie an important distinction; while television is a one-way experience – broadcasting information to passive viewers – the empathy boxes constitute an active connection between participants who share

their emotions (positive and negative) with one another in a form of collective catharsis. This collectivism facilitates community formation – the ability of biological systems to hold off the inevitability of entropic ruin, and the ethical institutions that provide a normative grounding for society despite this universal inclination towards decay. Conversely, experiences like "The Buster Show" offer an imitation or alternative to this type of community: the reflection of commodified wants as defined by commercialism and continually rebroadcast back to viewers through their televisions, or the use of the mood organ, which produces a self-referential feedback of wants and desires mediated through the emotion generating device.

Television and the mood organ notably mimic the inward turn necessary for ego recovery in Kant's dynamic sublime, both allowing for the recourse to an interior ideal in response to an external threat. In the case of the Kantian sublime this appeal is to the cagegorical imperatives: the recognition of a higher moral order to which the corporeal existence of the individual is secondary. For the characters of *Androids* this recourse is to the self-referential textuality of television narratives, creating a simulacrum of lived experiences that is ostensibly boundless and self perpetuating. This comparison is all the more compelling when one considers the themes of escapism that surround these devices in the novel, as instanced by Iran Deckard's description of silence after turning off her television: "although I heard the emptiness intellectually, I didn't feel it" (Dick 3). Iran fails to feel this emptiness because she is at this moment under the influence of the mood organ which, like the television she shuts off, provides a means though which to escape having to respond directly to the material world[15]. Rather, proscribed sensations, and by extension responses, are fed into her. The sensory tools through which beings typically enter a dialectical relationship with objects – making judgments about, and reacting to their environment – are duped into responding to content negative stimuli, to

emotional signs to which there are no real world referents, what Jean Baudrillard would term the "hyperreal." Though operating differently from the sublime moment of ego recovery – in the face of a terror inducing object (in Lyotard's terms the possibility of nothing further happening) the recourse of the subject is not to reflect upon its own ethical superiority, but instead to affectively disarm the experience entirely – the results are the same, the individual inevitably, and in extreme cases nearly exclusively, reflects upon their own interior experience, withdrawing from the material/social world. Alternatively, Mercerism, though a similar pre-manufactured experience, directs the attentions of its practitioners outward. Not only is fusion a communal experience, encouraging users to recognize and understand the wants and drives of others, it also transforms the human devastation of the Earth into a parable constantly reflecting the dire state of nature.

Kucukalic erroneously clusters these experiences together – Mercerism and "The Buster Show" – arguing they collectively display both the redemptive potential of technology, and its capacity to achieve the same ethically driven agency which defines humanity in the novel. The closed, one way relationship between viewers and Buster, however, denies the possibility of progress. This passive, anesthetizing relationship belies the dialectical capacity of communities to deal with ever evolving social and environmental issues, the ability of communicative actors to mediate between differing perspectives in order to progressively reach a common understanding/agreement – as per Habermas' "ideal speech community". Instead Buster offers a prepackaged commodity that simultaneously distracts its viewers from the devastation surrounding them, while speciously reinforcing ideas of the sustainability of the status-quo. Though the ethical horizon Kucukalic envisions for the androids is indeed implied in the novel – the Rosen Association's efforts to create androids indistinguishable from humans, narrating a

process slowly blurring the line between humanity and machines – it seems more of a distant possibility than a realized truth. If, as Kucukalic suggests, technology stands as what Jurgen Habermas would term a "norm free block of sociality," neither good nor evil but deriving its ethical content from its relationship to society, then it is the fine distinctions in its conceptualization and usage that ultimately define technology's ethical valence. Thus, when comparing "The Buster Friendly Show" to Mercerism – both of which signify a blending of human and machine – it is essential to note that the evolution of the latter has unquestionably been perverted by the systemic institutions from which the android seems – if not irredeemably – inseparable.

Mechanistic thinking – to use Merchant's terminology – is what leads to this perversion. Bookchin addresses much the same issue when he contrasts different cultural notions of what he terms "technice" – the current mode of capitalist production versus a more holistic vision of the labor process supposedly found in tribal societies and antiquity, as does Theodor Adorno with his critique of instrumentalism. Each of these thinkers, along with countless others, attempt to isolate what they perceive as a lost ethical dimension (animism for Bookchin, oganistic perspectives for Merchant, and mimesis for Adorno) in the relationship between subjects and objects engendered by the efficacy of scientific and technological progress. These forces, they argue, have become nearly absolute paradigms in the modern world. That is not to say, however, that the "promise" of technological advancement and historically driven progress are necessarily irredeemable in their eyes. Rather, Bookchin argues that "the grim fatalism [regarding technology] slowly permeating western humanity's response to technics derives in large part from its ethical ambivalence toward technical innovation" (Bookchin 220). According to Bookchin, Capitalism controls the direction of 'innovation' – not technology itself – and is thus

the vector of modern ethical decline: "The state is not merely a constellation of bureaucratic and coercive institutions. It is also a state of mind, an instilled mentality for ordering reality," one that insists upon domination of, rather than a communal sensitivity to, nature. (Bookchin 94). That Bookchin establishes this vision of "technice" as a mode of thought, rather than something immanent within technology itself is a notable difference between him and other ecological thinkers. David Watson, for example, argues "technological arrangements themselves generate social change and shape human action," directly linking technology to the ecological and social problems of modernity (213). Bookchin believes human interventions in the environment can be positive if driven by the 'evolutionarily normative' order of the natural world to which humanity belongs – and 'primitive' societies were more in tune – whereas for Watson these interventions are themselves the problem.

The distinction between these views is important to an ecological analysis of *Androids,* given the novel's ambivalent treatment of technology. A sinister rationality typifies the androids and their manufactures, as well as the war profiteers and superpowers of the novel – progenitors of nuclear holocaust. This destructive potential is contrasted by the androids' own capacity for redemption – the possibility that the efforts to make androids indistinguishable from humans will lead to their development as ethical subjects – and what Jameson observes is a distinct lack of dystopian edge in Dick's fiction; never do his novels, despite their often bleak themes and settings, foreclose humanist possibilities. No matter how bad this mechanically driven world seems, there is always a capacity for hope, hope that, given the Earth's barren state will likely involve some sort of technological innovation, perhaps even the potentially harmonious bridging of man and machine Jameson notes at the end of *Martian Time-Slip:* here "Dick's salvational instinct finds its raw material and its nourishment in the most depressing of his novelistic

‘realities:’” the fusion of the autistic Manfred to a network of mechanisms keeping him alive “all tubes and hoses trailing behind, into the alternate dreamtime of another History and another present” (Jameson, History and Salvation in Philip K. Dick 383). Though perhaps not the most sanguine image of humanity’s future, Jameson’s interpretation of Manfred evokes Donna Haraway’s assertion in her “Cyborg Manifesto” that changing conceptions of human materiality/reality represent new libratory possibilities for humanity as much as the potential for repression, or the closing out of traditional ways of knowing/being. Regardless of whether moments like this represent possible salvation, or simply a stoic maintenance of sentient existence carrying on a little longer no matter the form, it is clear that if one is to read Dick’s fiction as an attack upon advanced technologies, this attack must be upon those that are institutionally bound to a corrupt social system.

Watson’s concerns about technology, however, do find voice in the novel. The idea of certain technologies having innately ill effects upon those that use them certainly resonates with Deckard’s moral conundrums about the androids. A product of ethically neutral economic forces, the androids seem to instill in the bounty hunters who pursue them an ethically neutral mandate to kill, suggesting that it is the very utilitarian processes of usage and production that created the androids, necessary for realizing advanced industrial states, which are fundamentally dehumanizing. The government’s role in nuclear proliferation and war heedless of its environmental impacts, the Rosen Association’s dedication to market forces, and the personification of the androids as purely analytical creatures are all indicative of a systemic flattening of ethical/ecological considerations in the name of positivist efficacy. Whether this flattening-out is ultimately the product of technology, and whether these same technologies could play a role in the production of a more harmonious future is left unresolved; if as Deckard

suggests mechanical things have their lives too, it is worth noting – whatever horizons they may have – for now it is still considered a "paltry" existence (Dick 239).

II.

Though Dick's androids may very well elude easy categorization or condemnation, his economic and bureaucratic institutions are not so complex. Sacrificed by these entities are more holistic and ethically fecund ideologies like those espoused by Bookchin and Merchant: the concept of normativity being immanent within nature and not simply a product of human society – the latter of which Bookchin terms "second nature." These ideas are symbolized by the communalism of Mercer's empathy boxes, and the religion's high regard for all life[16]. The ideologies critiqued by Bookchin and Merchant tend to reduce existence (human or otherwise) to nothing more than a set of material relations, a concept that is particularly problematic in *Androids* where material reality is no longer capable of supporting life. The logic of this particular brand of rationalism[17] is clustered with the privation elicited by the entopic and social decay menacing humanity on both Earth and Mars. This brand of positivism has brought about the ecological disaster, denying meaning to the natural world beyond its capacity to be measured and put to industrial use. Though not the origin of these ideologies, the androids are a reflection of the mentalities they represent.

The most troubling aspect of the androids is not their potential for violence, as humans notoriously possess much the same capacity in Dick's fiction. Rather it is their inability to see beyond their own survival, manifesting itself not only as a tendency for selfish behavior – another trait common to humans – but as a willingness to give up living once their destruction is assured. This resignation is described in Luba Luft:

> Her eyes faded and the color dimmed from her face, leaving it cadaverous, as if already starting to decay. As if life had in an instant retreated to some point far inside her, leaving the body to its automatic ruin. (Dick 129-30)

This retreat or winking out of life force is one of the things that troubles Deckard most about the androids; their willingness to give in to the entropic inclinations of the universe. Though this defeatism has begun to manifest itself in the novel's human characters, as instanced by the fear of genetic mutation leading to a precipitous decline in birth rates on Earth, Luba Luft's disturbingly comical switch between being an ostensibly vital creature to a lifeless mass serves as an exaggerated reflection of humanity's own existential crisis. This resolution towards death defies the human need to create a space of belonging within the environment that transcends one's immediate existence. Long term ethical and moral institutions are difficult to maintain within communities not capable of surviving the individual, and in this regard – despite whatever aspirations Roy Batty might have to foster a similar sort of communalism – androids prove entirely lacking. The threat of cultural ruin posed by nuclear devastation forces an inevitable crisis point in the process of human reproduction, the android simultaneously representing both the abject reality of humanity as an ephemeral occurrence, and the systemic cultural processes that exacerbate this threat of mortality, making the terms it is predicated upon ontologically absolute.

Kant's dynamic sublime is founded upon much the same anxiety; the awe inspired by an outward threat to one's corporeal existence is overcome as the subject reassures him-or-herself of the superiority of the categorical imperative: the ethical principles upon which their existence as a moral being is founded and which – deriving from God – will continue to exist even as the light of one's material existence is expunged. What is so disturbing about Luba Luft's

willingness to die is not her ability to approach mortality with relative insouciance – indeed this capacity is often revered in humans – but the fact that this willingness is not grounded in ideological principles that transcend her being. Her death does not serve a practical purpose within her community, nor does it affirm her own moral superiority as proof of her adherence to a higher ideal. Rather, the terror of the dynamic sublime is allowed to proliferate unchecked. Luft does not derive moral strength from her encounter with mortality, but psychologically shuts down, suffering what might be described as a death of ego, before an almost atavistic fight or flight reflex kicks in. Deckard's aversion to this characteristic of the Androids, however, is not founded upon revulsion towards an utterly alien epistemology; it is a reaction to just how close this response comes to the current state of the human condition as it is found in the novel.

The transcendental ethical grounding which defines the experience of Kant's dynamic sublime becomes less stable as western society distances itself from Judeo-Christian models of creation, moving towards an existentially harsh scientific rationalism. As David Nye points out in *American Technological Sublime,* for the United States this sort of ethical grounding was displaced only to become immanent within the will to technological innovation itself, the progress of society seemingly linked to a boundless moral and cultural fecundity found in the interface between an expansive wild and the seemingly endless technological process of harnessing this wilderness for human betterment. Even if it did not entirely destroy this faith, the nuclear age problematized this American conception of technology as a positive moral force; it seemed no good could come of the atomic-bomb[18]. Though immediately a response to the dissolution caused by atomic power, the existential fatalism expressed by *Androids*' characters ultimately reflects what Bookchin argues is the tendency of science to claim a measurable "orderliness in the form of a scientific logic" but to abstain on the possibility that "logic and

reason inheres in the world itself," implying that no meaning worth recognizing exists beyond the subject's ability to perceive it (Bookchin 235).

This almost solipsistic vision of nature – denying meaning to objects outside of their ability to be measured – finds a disparaging mirror in the novel as Phil Resch and Deckard contemplate Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream:"

> Twisted ripples of the creature's torment, echoes of its cry, flooded out into the air surrounding it; the man or woman, whichever it was, had become contained by its own howl. It had covered its ears against its own sound. The creature stood on a bridge and no one else was present; the creature screamed in isolation. Cut off by – or despite – its outcry… 'I think,' Phil Resch said 'this is how an andy must feel.' (Dick 128).

The novel's interpretation of "The Scream" first emphasizes the anguish of the painting's androgynous subject, physically manifested as the ripples produced by the figure's tortured cry. These vocal emanations envelop or "contain" the subject, implying its inability to extend itself into the world surrounding it. Finally, the scene describes the attempt of the "creature" to shield itself from its own pained articulations, along with its social "isolation." The association of the androids with this tortured being implies a disconnect between them and the world that surrounds them.

Though it is Phil Resch – a less than trustworthy speaker – who comments on this connection, the sentiment seems sincere to the novel. A similar scene is described in Dick's *We Can Build You* as an android Lincoln first awakens to consciousness in a comparable moment of existential terror:

> It was fear as absolute existence: the basis of its life. It had become separate, yanked away from some fusion that we could not experience – at least, not now. Maybe once we all had lain quietly in the fusion (72-3).

Here again in this earlier work, Dick depicts existential existence as particularly difficult for androids. In this passage the creation of a self differentiated from the rest of being seems as much a process of alienation as affirmation of a unique identity: the birth of consciousness is likened to getting "yanked" from a more holistic state of being – presumably the natural order governing physical relations in the universe – and forced to violently turn against that holism so as to substantiate individual identity. Humans and other organic beings seem to have adapted to such deprivations, "two billion years of pressure to live and evolve haranguing it" (Dick 198). A sense of organic community seems as good an explanation as any for this adaptation – a biological support system for our radically differentiated matter. Isidore acknowledges as much when he realizes the importance of community after having long lived alone: "You have to be with other people, he thought. In order to live at all" (Dick 202). The significance of the empathy boxes also reinforces this idea, as they foster a network of understanding and caring in the novel just as this biological infrastructure – earth's ecology – is breaking down.

Communication may be a key word here, and Jameson makes an important observation in this regard about another of Dick's novels, *Dr. Bloodmoney*. The novel's plot, Jameson argues, pits two competing social orders against one another:

> For it seems clear that the basic event envisaged by *Dr Bloodmoney* is the substitution of the realm of language for the realm of things, the replacement of the older, compromised world of empirical activity, capitalist everyday work and

> scientific knowledge, by the newer one of communication. ("After Armageddon" 360)

Jameson points out that the overthrow of the mega-maniacal Bluthgeld by the psychokinetically gifted Hoppy represents a process wherein one despot is inevitably replaced by another, Hoppy taking Bluthged's place as the novel's antagonist. Both of these characters, according to Jameson, are part of a semiotic cluster in the novel representing instrumentalism. Thus the triumph of one over the other is ultimately the exchange of one form of domination for another, following a sort of social Darwinism. As Jameson argues, it is only when representatives of the second node of meaning within the text – linguistic communication – disarm Hoppy, that an appropriate resolution can take place. In all three cases, *Androids, We Can Build You* and *Dr. Bloodmoney*, a notion of community is raised from which subjects representing instrumentalism – the artificially constructed androids or the machinations of the self serving Bluthgeld and Hoppy – are excluded.

The distinction Jameson and Dick's novels draw between language and materialism reflects the social theories espoused by Jurgen Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action*. Habermas conceptualizes modern rationality as existing in several innately differentiated spheres. The most important of these consist of "instrumental" and "communicative" rationality, which correspond to the larger social spheres of "system" and phenomenological "lifeworld" respectively. The reification of systems takes place, he argues, when the instrumental rationality of what he terms "steering media" – money and power – begin to override linguistic communications in the lifeworld, the lifeworld necessarily originating first in order for societies to exist[19]. This form of reification seems particularly apt in the context of Jameson's reading of *Dr. Bloodmoney* insofar as the instrumental control Bluthgeld and Hoppy assert over material

reality allows them to destroy or conquer large sections of society, making power the dominant form of social interaction in the novel. This model is also relevant to *Androids*. A central aspect of Habermas' philosophy is his replacement of the monological conception of self inherited from Decartes, with a dialogical/linguistic theory of identity formation. Grounded in a theory of human evolution that argues linguistic cooperation must necessarily presuppose strategic actions – those directed towards self-serving purposes – Habermas argues for the possibility of a universal ethical grounding for humanity predicated upon the ability for speaking subjects to move towards common ground, as well as generate new ethical content, through discourse. Notably, though created by humans, the androids do not necessarily possess the same capacity for reaching mutual understanding, the process of their "evolution" differing substantially from humanity's, and having been circumscribed by the systemic forces of the marketplace and the necessities of the military industrial complex. The difference between humanity and the androids can thus be defined by their lack of inclusion in a phenomenological lifeworld; they truly are monological subjects who must face reality without this social support system.

The comparison between the androids and "The Scream" illustrates this exclusion from the lifeworld: androids are purely analytical beings cut off in Cartesian fashion from the physical world – as expressed by their cruel, scientific dissection of the spider late in the novel, considered a heinous act by human society – and lacking the divine spark (which Decartes as a Christian presupposed) to tie them to one another. The novel describes this as a lack of empathy – or in Habermas' terms communicative rationality – which would connect them to the world in a manner other than observation: the horror of the figure in the painting who cannot perceive meaning beyond his own ephemeral consciousness. Resch uses this comparison to assure himself that he is not an android – which Deckard believes him to be – as he does not feel this way. The

rapid "evolution" of the android, however, driven by the Rosen Association's efforts to create new models indistinguishable from humans, opens exactly the possibility Kucukalic and Barlow suggest – the android as an ethical subject. The novel's constant invitations to both Deckard and readers to sympathize with the androids represent an ethical conundrum: as feeling creatures they seem to demand moral consideration, yet as beings still existing inextricably outside the bounds of the human lifeworld, harmonious coexistence with the androids – at least in their current state – seems an impossibility.

The difference, however, may only be a matter of degrees, or a few eons of evolution. The scene of Lincoln's awakening suggests it is exactly the solipsistic terror represented in "The Scream" that humanity's distant ancestors overcame; an acclamation to being that does not appear absolute. The desperate loneliness of "The Scream" is felt emanating from the androids by the novel's human characters. John Isidore's first impression of the android Pris Stratton is tinged with a sense of sublime privation:

> Something else began to emerge from her. Something more strange. And he thought more deplorable. A coldness. Like, he thought, a breath from the vacuum between inhabited words, in fact from nowhere (Dick 65)

An impression of a 'coldness' or 'vacuum' is common to descriptions of the androids throughout the novel. This void, expressly existing between "inhabited" words, contrasts the discreet points of order which living creatures and biomes inherently produce according to Wiener's writings on entropy. The elements of Burke's sublime – in particular obscurity, privation, and scale – are decidedly at work in this description of cold and empty space. This impression extends quite literally to the androids as well. Not only is the android an alienated subject, it is a subject that

Deckard and Isidore, narrator and reader are all distinctly alienated from. Not only is the narration never allowed to penetrate the psyches of the androids, the novel often holds their very words suspect, circumlocution and subterfuge proving powerful tools in their attempts to evade Deckard. Thus the androids become just as mysterious a force as the chaos they are associated with.

Isidore instinctively denounces this lack of belonging or receptiveness to a living, natural world as "deplorable." Despite the power of his 'gut-reaction,' however, Isidore still feels he has found a friend in Pris. Though other characters have similar reactions to the androids, this scene is unique. Unlike both Deckard and Resch – the two other human figures who have direct contact with the androids – Isidore is not a bounty hunter, and does not possess the same prejudice toward the androids displayed by these characters. His reaction thus contradicts Barlow's suggestion that this revulsion might have little to do with the androids but "may be something [socially wrong] in humans instead" (Barlow). If aversion to the androids were merely a culturally conditioned prejudice, then Isidore should not have been affected, as he is unaware that Pris is an android and ultimately rejects the aversion this revelation should bring. Indeed, despite his 'gut' reaction Isidore is able to look past his initial impression of Pris, seeking companionship from her, and later from her compatriots Roy and Irmgrad. Isidore's unconditioned response to meeting Pris, despite not having been influenced by these negative preconceptions, reflects upon what makes her seem out of place as a living being.

As much as Isidore has in common with the androids (facing discrimination for his radiation induced mental and physical degeneration) he also serves as a contrast to their cold, analytical nature. Lacking what is considered standard human intelligence, Isidore possesses a surplus of compassion, particularly for those who seem weaker than himself. He is eager to

protect the androids from Deckard, who he envisions as "a thing without emotions, or even a face; a thing that got replaced immediately by another thing resembling it" (Dick 156). This striking image underlines Deckard's own fear that he is becoming too much like the androids, a characterless killer, replaced like a cog in a machine. It also displays a unique wisdom contrasting both Deckard's zeal for his work and the androids' own troubling detachment: an ethical appreciation for all beings. This is instanced by Isidore's horror at Pris and Imrgrad's scientific dissection of the spider in order to find out whether or not it could "get by on four" legs (Dick 204).

It is fitting, then, that Isidore also seems the most in touch with Earth's ecological devastation. What is most often described as a "void" or uncanny "silence" is a tangible and ever present companion to the characters of *Androids.* This sensation seems immanent within the very environment of the novel, waiting for any moment of quiet reflection to make it prescience palpable; such as Isidore turning off his television set before going to work:

> Silence. It flashed from the woodwork and the walls; it smote him with an awful total power, as if generated by a vast mill. It rose from the floor, up out of the tattered gray wall-to-wall carpeting. It unleashed itself from the broken and semi-broken appliances in the kitchen, the dead machines that hadn't worked in all the time Isidore had lived here. From the useless pole lamp in the living room it oozed out, meshing with the empty and wordless descent of itself from the fly-specked ceiling. It managed in fact to emerge from every object within his range of vision, as if it – the silence – meant to supplant all things tangible. Hence it assailed not only his ears but his eyes; as he stood by the inert TV set he experienced the silence as visible and, in its own way, alive. Alive! He had often

> felt its austere approach before; when it came, it burst in without subtlety, evidently unable to wait. The silence of the world could not rein back its greed. Not any longer. Not when it had virtually won. (Dick 18)

This spatially invasive silence, reflecting the larger issue of the growing inability of Earth to support human life, is the same sublime elicited by contact with the androids, magnified to a global scale. Isidore experiences this reified silence not only as alive, tangible to both the auditory and visual faculties, but as pressing in from all directions, surrounding him with what could almost be described as a paradoxical cacophony. An "awful and total power," the silence of *Androids* is the ultimate articulation of Lyotard's privation: the possibility of nothing evoked by the impression of the universe quite literally unmaking itself, until no "things tangible" are left, only entropic "kipple" – refuse lacking any discernable organizing principle. Though wide scale ecological devastation is a root cause of this sense of privation, the systemic institutions Jameson attributes to the postmodern sublime also factor into this process. Lyotard helps elucidate this connection in *The Inhuman* when he postulates the difference between what he describes as a techno-scientific notion of time, contrasting his more humanistic prospective. The former are positivist models, he claims, which flatten out linguistic modes and actors, creating a homogenized set of exchange values that allow systems to optimize themselves against the possibility of unwanted or unforeseen events; the ability of the system to maintain its own existence against the specter of catastrophe. To this end, techno-scientific thought treats time in a highly teleological fashion, cataloging and storing as much information as possible so as to control the flow of time. According to Lyotard, this positivist mode closes out the possibility of other ways of knowing in modernity – and postmodernity – which embrace the uncertainty of the event as an important part of living:

> What counts in their manner of questioning is not at all to determine the reply as soon as possible, to seize and exhibit some object which will count as the cause of the phenomenon in question. But to be and remain questioned by it, to stay through meditation responsive to it, without neutralizing by explanation its power of disquiet. (Lyotard 74)

In essence Lyotard is writing of the human capacity to be moved, of the affective and ethical processes that seem to be lost when positivist rationalism becomes the absolute arbitrator of truth, and the concept of time is organized around the principle of forestalling events through the ever accruing complexity of the monad. Capitalism, according to Lyotard, is the ultimate vehicle of this process in the modern era, an organizational principle that so defines the course of human history it becomes nearly impossible for the individual to conceive of something outside its totality[20]. Privation in this context takes on two aspects, first capitalism tends to homogenize experience to the extent that any possibility of an unforeseen event occurring is so forestalled it seems to the subject as if nothing occurs at all, and secondly, the possibility of the unscripted event actually coming to fruition becomes an abject, threatening subjects ill equipped to deal with such an eventuality.

Returning to Isidore's experience of silence, one notes, again, that it is the shutting off of his television that sets forth the terror of privation. Though the system (capitalism) is itself tied to human materiality, and thus threatened by the same entropic forces destroying Earth's ecological systems, it nonetheless maintains an almost hegemonic hold over human conception, as it is only in the absence of television – one of the most vivid manifestations of consumerism at the time of Dick's writing – that a sense of privation is allow to accost the ill-prepared subject, Isidore. Despite this recourse to television, both Isidore and Irene's experience of this medium is tinged

with a sense of ennui; a quiet distrust of the propaganda narratives put forth by the powers that control their entertainment. Lacking a robust alternative to this system – Mercerism representing an imperfect one – they return, however, again and again to these mechanical mediums. Pervasive in these scenes, most importantly is a lack of meaning: the 'natural' order of Bookchin's social ecology, the organistic holism that allowed humans to perceive the Earth as a living, breathing "mother" described by Merchant, and finally the seemingly boundless fecundity – terrifying yet inspiring – in the descriptions of *Frankenstein's* landscapes, are faced with what seems an inevitable ruin.

The loss of the unforeseen event is one reason for this lack of meaning; an inability of *Androids'* characters to contextualize themselves through the ambiguities of unmediated lived experiences. If it were not for the postmodern "programming" of modern society, living in these types of extreme environments would most likely foreclose the possibility of a sublime moment, for as Nye observes, those forced by circumstances to live in a marginal environment, rarely experience this environment as sublime, for they are too busy striving to survive it. It is only through the safe distance described by Burke and Kant, allowing for a space of intellectual and affective reflection, that sublime experiences are allowed to manifest themselves. The world of *Androids* – and perhaps modernity – is therefore unique, as it draws out a space for this type of reflection even while environmental and systemic forces immediately threaten the existence of the subject. Iran and Isidore are in essence caught in a sort of limbo, perversely kept alive and passively attentive to decay as their world collapses around them. Ultimately what is being articulated by Isidore's experience of silence, the apartment appliances described as "dead," the "greed" of the final silence threatening to spread across the entirety of the planet, is the

breakdown of what Lyotard – among others – would describe as the human spirit: an inability to perceive meaning outside of positivist rationalism.

This inability to detect "meaning" in the environment, and more broadly to find an ecological niche, is endemic in the novel. *Androids* elevates this breakdown to an almost ontological level; the moment a character's focus glides off an immediate object of interest – Isidore shutting off the television – the experience of the void does not simply seep into a space of intellectual reflection, but permeates the character's very consciousness. *Androids'* characters are thus incapable of psychologically distancing themselves from the silence of a ruined earth – despite attempts to do so through artificial means. This entropic privation is the realization at both an intellectual and sensational level of the inevitability of material decay, an experience of the sublime forced upon the subject by the environmental damage visited upon the Earth, and the inability to foresee truth outside of techno-scientific thought. Man-made nuclear disaster has destroyed the biological systems which Wiener argues temporarily kept this natural dissipation of energy in check. The result is existential crisis as humanity is faced with its mortality as a species, turning away from this devastation in a perversely therapeutic fashion to the consumerism proscribed by the very culture that brought about the nuclear holocaust.

Though Pris describes a similar experience on Mars – "you feel it in the stones, the terrible old age" – the androids seem as much a product of the forces that brought about these lifeless environments as they are victims (Dick 148). Subject to the technical practices and selfish drives that created them, the androids reflect these systemic processes. The same military industrial complex that led to nuclear conflagration between The United States and Soviet Union also created the first euphemistically named "Synthetic Freedom Fighter" – the precursor to the android (Dick 14). These massive corporations were slaves to the notion of positivist efficacy

reflected in what Merchant calls a mechanistic view of nature, and Bookchin the "technice" of modern society. What is lost in this pure instrumentalism, despite its vast and proven capacity to manipulate the natural world, is the possibility for the object to have meaning in and of itself: Merchant's Earth as mother, Bookchin's animism, Adorno's mimesis. In turn this leads to the oft theorized problem of reification; these institutions, unhindered by ethical concerns for the natural world – or ostensibly even those of human communities – and capable of drawing a picture of mass prosperity, take on a life of their own. A process that is perhaps best symbolized by the silent infiltration of the androids – representative of an instrumentally rational humanity – into the media, and the extent their interests are tied to those of the Rosen Association. The social effect of this reification is Jameson's postmodern sublime; unease generated by a market driven artificiality and a pervasive, often miss-directed sense of paranoia. Even more terrifying, however, is what these systems presuppose: a universe that is truly meaningless and, as instanced by earth's decay, rapidly spiraling into chaos.

Helping to stand against this chaos are the potential redemptive qualities of technology – the communalism fostered by fusion with Mercer, implying that technology can soothe suffering as well as create it. Interestingly, the development of the android in the novel contradicts Lyotard's theories about the logical conclusion of techno-scientific thought. If, according to Lyotard, humanity is to escape the confines of its terrestrial home, it will do so – according to the techno-scientific mode – only through the complexification of a monad that has lost any semblance of what we would recognize as humanity. The android, however, though serving as a definition of what is decidedly anti-human, also, and through economic forces, appears to be approaching a conceptual singularity with its creators. Humans like Deckard become more androids-like, and the androids themselves, in order to better blend in with humans, slowly

become – one imagines – more communal and ethical beings. Mercerism as a faith seems to typify this ostensibly contradictory development. The religion's decidedly ironic character, its conflation of the biological with the mechanical, its parody of Christian mysticism, and its absurd spiritualization of ostensibly even the smallest microbe, all speak of a religious movement that could exist only in a postmodern age. A combination of what one might describe as a "rational" and an "irrational" ethos; the dialectical conflation of enlightenment thought with spiritualist extrapolations, seemingly contrary, but the only way in which this world can rectify the cruel reality which it has been given.

Mercerism, and the technologically-mediated community it fosters, notably represents many of the same values espoused by social ecologists. A care for all living beings, and an understanding of human immanence within its environment – a "return to nature" that may very well have only been possible after wide scale ecological disaster. The story of Mercer, experienced through the empathy boxes, begins with his ability as a youth to resurrect the animals driven to extinction by nuclear war. This ability is taken from him by the "killers," who then throw him into the "tomb world," a wasteland that seems to mirror Earth's dilapidation. He is only allowed to emerge from this world when, "the bones strewn around him grew back into living creatures; he had become joined to the metabolism of other lives, and until they rose he could not either" (Dick 22). This linking of human destiny to other biological creatures is an important tenant of Mercerism and, as much as their scarcity, seems to inspire the hollowed importance animal husbandry takes within the novel – manifesting itself as more of an attempt to recapture the past, rather than allowing these animals to take their place within a complex ecosystem. Mercer is then tormented by the "killers" through a sort of purgatory until he reaches the apex of a mountain, where he is presumably martyred and the process starts over again.

Though Mercerism mirrors a number of Christian tropes – a suffering messiah, a purgatory like climb towards redemption and a similar symbolic use of animals – it differs from the religion it supposedly replaces in two important ways. The first is its lack of a transcendent realm where salvation is to be achieved. There is no Heaven for the Mercerite. Learning to live as a moral subject in this world has its own rewards: the sense of purpose humans derive from their duty as stewards of Earth's last reaming life forms, and the distant hope for the rebirth of a material Eden as represented by Mercer's ability to resurrect dead animals. The second is the novel's parodic treatment of the religion from the prospective of readers – a form of Christian-like faith mediated through television screens, and whose savior is a doddering old man – and the ease with which it is discredited by the androids. Despite the impression of parody surrounding the religion, and its inability to remove its practitioners from their ruined world, Mercerism is not discarded as a source of inspiration and solace for the novel's human characters. In the world of *Androids* it seems the force of scientific rationalism has becomes so dominant that spiritual alternatives can only exist in ironic form. The story Mercerism tells, however, that of death and hope for redemption, of "empathy" and "killers," never loses its significance.

The identity of the killers, symbolic of the forces that brought about Earth's destruction, is left vague, a Mercerite being "free to locate the nebulous presence of the Killers wherever he saw fit" (Dick 30). Interestingly Buster Friendly fits this categorization rather well, his attempt to scientifically discredit the religion missing entirely its greater social significance: the truth it espouses about the importance of community. Similarly, Deckard identifies the androids as the Killers, as Isidore does with Deckard, both of whom – Deckard and the androids – have their capacity for empathy (and hence community) called into question. Deckard and the androids are creatures of abstract necessity, killing not out of instinct, but as a calculation to achieve ends;

money for Deckard, and scientific understanding with the dissection of the spider. Though publically discredited, the significance of Mercerism – to the confusion of the androids – if anything paradoxically grows in textual importance after the revelation of its leader as a fraud. After his exposure, Mercer appears and speaks directly to Deckard, urging him to complete his assignment to "retire" the rogue androids:

> You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity. At some time, every creature which lives must do so. It is the ultimate shadow, the defeat of creation; this is the curse at work, the curse that feeds on all life. Everywhere in the universe. (Dick 177)

This message given Deckard at the hands of a prophet – even if a discredited prophet – is the secret of existence: the ultimate negation of self is the process of living. The entropy gripping Earth in the form of Dick's kipple is "the defeat of creation," made absolute by a positivist vision of reality that cannot see meaning beyond human interests. This is the same vision that drove the bureaucracies leading to nuclear holocaust, and the economic institutions that produced the androids. Without some sort of grounding principle, the ideal of life generating meaning cannot resist the impinging necessity to close out such meaning: the realization that life thrives on and can only exist in the context of death. This paradox is immanent within ecological systems: biological beings are always in competition with one another to survive, a process that must at once be accepted from a practical prospective and rejected from a moral one in order for ethical communities to exist. Life's paradox is brought to the forefront of humanity's collective consciousness by the seemingly imminent end of this process. The androids reflect this truism by not only embodying an analytically driven tendency to kill, but by virtue of this tendency,

seemingly necessitating their own extermination. They thus symbolize humanity's own self-destructive potential. It is only through a return to what has been lost in the hegemony of positivist epistemologies, an impression of 'spirit' adhering to the process of living itself, that some form of solace can be found in Dick's novel. This can be seen in the text's recourse to the communal potential of Mercerism. It is only through the religion's cyclical yet ironic narrative of life and death, and its dimly perceived potential to inject its own ethical imperatives into the techno-scientific process – the bridging of man and machine making Mercerism possible – that a future can be conceived in the world Dick has created. Though tentative, the faith ultimately provides the ethical ground ecological critics like Merchant and Bookchin call for, even if this ground was achievable in the novel only at the end of time itself.

Conclusions

Though sharing many of the same concerns and themes, *Frankenstein* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* are markedly different literary projects, expressing vastly diverse reactions to the existential problems inherent to the processes of Western rationalism and secularization. The resolutions of these two works are, as much as anything else, emblematic of this difference. *Frankenstein*, the novel, the creature and the man, all find conclusion with somber finality. With Victor gone and his creation soon to follow – if not in the end of his material being, than at least in his movement beyond the bounds of human society – all which is left is for Walton to carry the legend of Frankenstein back to civilization. This legend, however, leaves a space to be filled, new content to be generated, new lives and stories to be told. Though a man/humanity may die, there never seems to be a question as to the presence of some purposive element beyond their continued or truncated existences. The Alps and the Arctic symbolize other worlds, inhospitable for sure, but alive in their own right. Though the presence of God is suspect in the novel, the energies Percy Shelley reveres in "Mont Blanc," and after which he would model a foundation for human society remain. Despite the tragedy visited upon his alter-ego, Victor, this natural world itself remains pristine, is never suspect, only the human aspirations abstracted from it.

Contrasting this muted, but potentially fecund ending, is Deckard and Iran's resolution to continue living. Rather than being a tightly woven plot, *Androids* embraces the ambiguities of its postmodern age. The narrative's rough telos, vaguely maintained through the haze of its paranoia and conspiracies unravels in the novel's final act. Given the immutable nature of certain scientific truths – such as that surrounding entropy's inevitable decay – sensing meaning in the material world is no longer a given, and thus something to be striven for. Mercerism, as

much as anything else, seems to embrace what Lyotard would describe as the event: the moment-to-moment living of the subject, concerned with unraveling the mysteries of existence immanent within the process of being itself. Thus, there is no tight resolution to the novel, as such a resolution would give in to Lyotard's notion of a positivist conception of tightly order time, and by extension the abject threat to this system, entropy, which the novel can neither entirely disavow nor accept.

The cyclical nature of the cultural trends contained within these novels should not be overlooked. Bookended is the opening and closing of a gulf between humanity and the environment. Though certainly not the beginning of the Enlightenment, Shelley's novel narrates the process of its ideological tenants taking hold in the mind of her protagonist, as well as her own unease about a reckless idealization of rationality. *Androids* represents the tail end of this process, ebullience for intellectual advancement has burnt out in this futuristic society, if not for its technocratic titans of industry. The result is a desperate return to nature, and the rebirth of the spiritual institutions that seems commonplace to humanity in crisis. This return, however, comes about only on the brink of destruction, and even then the systemic forces humanity has set in motion – the market and its continued refinement of products like the androids – continue unabated. The tensions contained in these novels, between ambition and duty, progress and sustainability, played out in the interactions between sublime and beautiful spaces – physical and intellectual – seem commonplace to human civilizations. In an age, however, of mass industry and nuclear weapons, when devastation can be wrought upon a global scale, this interplay, and the frictions it can create appear particularly dangerous.

Notes

[1] For both stylistic reasons, and the sake of brevity, I will often abbreviate *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* as *Androids.*

[2] This should not be confused with the recuperative moment Kant describes in both the mathematical and dynamic sublime wherein recovery from a threat imposed upon the subject is reconciled through an appeal to either the concepts or categorical imperatives respectively.

[3] See "Shelley's Green Dessert"

[4] My use of Habermas' ideas are somewhat liberal, as the systemic values he refers to are what he terms the "steering media" of money and power, which replace language as the primary driving forces of everyday human interaction. Scientific inquiry, however, carries with it a similar capacity – in my mind – to become a norm free form of rationality, especially when entangled with economic concerns. It should also be noted that, though the reification of systems into the life world is considered a problem by Habermas, he finds the existence of these institutions in and of themselves unproblematic as long as they are properly moored to the liveworld through a legal infrastructure.

[5]See "*Frankenstein and the Sublime"*

[6] It should be remembered that the pastoralism represented by the DeLacey's is a decidedly aristocrat ideal.

[7] The marginality of Elizabeth in some ways seems similar to that of the DeLacey Family, who we are introduced to through the lens of the Creatures narration. In both cases an ideal counterpart/point is viewed from the prospective of a compromised other, whose disunion with the object(s) of their affection proves disastrous.

[8] Mellor it should be noted associates Clerval with what Mary Shelley saw as her husband's positive characteristics – the inspired poet and passionate lover – where as Victor, she argues, personifies many of Percy's less attractive qualities – his radical ambitions and tendency for spousal neglect.

[9] For Kant the beautiful, though capable of being associated with affective responses, is ultimately in its purest form unbound from emotionality, thus distinguishing his aesthetics from the theories put forth by Mellor – and Burke – in her reading of *Frankenstein.*

[11] See David Nye and Rob Wilson's work on the American Technological sublime (bib.), as well as the ways in which it contrasts common European modes – also addressed in my second chapter.

[12] See "Irrational Expectations; or, How Economics and the Post-Industrial World Failed Philip K. Dick," and "Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick."

[13] In this chapter a fine distinction must be made between "scientific" entropy (the dissipation of energy within a closed system) which is both ultimately unavoidable and functions in the novel as signifier inviting a sublime experience of privation, and the social disintegration that is the result of this experience of privation.

[14] See *Exhilaration of terror and the Postmodern*, "Towards a Theory of Paranoia," and the Introduction to *Philip K. Dick: Canonical Writer of the Digital Age*.

[15]That Iran notes her reaction to privation and entropy to be "wrong" implies some higher function ethical imperative is indeed in effect…

[16] Though Bookchin has ardently attacked deep ecology and its attempts "spiritualize" the theories outlined in his social ecology, I believe the hard and fast distinctions he draws to be

problematic. In particular his theorization of a rational – rather than rationally understandable universe – poses an ontological foundation for reality which seems to be predicated upon an "animate" universe that belies the type of "hard rationality" Bookchin would like to attribute to his social theories.

[17] I am indirectly deploying Jurgen Habermas' idea of the differentiation of rationality – as well as his focus on communicative rationality – which he utilizes to clarify what he feels is Adorno's somewhat miss-directed attack upon rationalism. Though I agree with Habermas' move to differentiate types of truth, I tend to agree with the latter's more problematic interpretation of the ill-effects of a hegemonic instrumentalist thought. See Habermas' first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* for these critiques.

[18] Nye notes governmental attempts to foster a more congenial relationship between nuclear weapons and the public imagination – even the notion that atomic bombs could be put to civil engineering purposes. These efforts, however, seemed to fail as the public became increasingly acquainted with the destructive potential of the technology (See Chapter 9 of *American Technological Sublime*).

[19] Importantly, Habermas does not see the development of wide scale economic and bureaucratic systems as a negative, as he believes these "norm free blocks of sociality" are necessary to rationally organize large 'enlightened' societies. It is only when these systems take a dominant role in society that he sees problems arising. Though I like the way in which Habermas' theories – unlike many poststructuralist accounts – leave room for positivist accounts "truth," I disagree with how clean he makes these types of distinctions; both those between system and lifeworld, and those between truth, rightness, and aesthetic considerations (adequacy) the last of which he relegates to a significantly lesser status.

[20] Capitalist manufacturing, according to Lyotard, is what allows for the physical manifestation of thought stored within the system, the development of new technology not simple providing a new means to generate surplus value, but more importantly – in his mind – allowing it to better catalog, homogenize and control information.

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