

Chapter One

Introduction

I. Are Humans Controlling or under Control?

In the modern era, technology has a tremendous influence on human beings.¹ The modern thinker Jacques Ellul, for example, offers the observation in *The Technological Society* that “the pressure of these mechanisms is today very great; they operate in increasingly wide area, and penetrate more and more deeply into human existence” (xxix). Every moment in our daily lives, we are surrounded by technology and, even more, invaded by it. Technology occupies our lives; whatever we do or think, wherever we go, we are incapable of escaping its influence. “Technoculture,” the term which can best describe the contemporary phenomena, indicates a new way to understand our culture in the modern age. The term suggests that now culture is not defined by our heritage from ancient times, as was traditionally the case; instead, it is created by modern technology. As Constance Penley and Andrew Ross observe in their book *Technoculture*, “Our own cultures, it is [...] assumed, have already been fully colonized by the cultural logic of technological rationality and domination” (xi). That is, no matter how we live or what we think, we are always within the frame that technology provides for us. One may argue that people seem to possess the ability to criticize or respond to political events or social experiences. Nevertheless, this is actually the illusion technology sets up: technological rationality makes us believe we still have free will to choose, but in fact the choices are all carefully controlled. We think we can choose whatever we like, but the truth is that technology has intervened and influenced our decisions. Furthermore, advanced-

¹ The Industrial Revolution has brought seeming prosperity to human beings. However, the explosion of WWII has shaken the utopia that humans dreamed of achieving through the assistance of technology. Here, the modern period mainly points to the period after WWII when technology begins to become omnipotent and humans have found some problems about technological surroundings.

technology products now have invaded our lives totally, to the point where expensive television sets are needed in bathrooms so that one can watch while taking a bath. Commercialized technology does not give up any chance to control human beings—even bath time is taken into account. Thanks to technological rationality, people are eager to enjoy their digital lives, which means having technological gadgets available all the time. However, it is very difficult to determine whether humans control technology or it controls them by controlling how they live.

However, even though technology has changed our lives enormously, very few discussions about it can be found in the history of philosophy. Not until the later half of the twentieth century did thinkers begin to be concerned about the effect of technology on human beings. According to Carl Mitcham and Robert Machey, different historical periods have different problems, which may need different theories to interpret them. In the modern era, we are desperate for a philosophy to respond to the reality of technology (xi). However, since the philosophy of technology belongs to new philosophical approaches developed in the modern age, there is still a lack of a coherent approach to the new problems technology gives rise to. Various essays or books concerned with technology exhibit different approaches to the problem, including seeing it from the perspectives of epistemology, ethics, anthropology, or sociology.²

Besides philosophical discussions, movies also have taken note of the technological influence on human beings. For Pappas, film is the most influential medium to analyze the technoculture because it has “particular cultural and historical importance, as it is both embodied in technological development and of social value (41). Furthermore, science fiction films, which can be said to relate to the topic of technoculture directly,

² Technology has been analyzed in various approaches, such as Friedrich Rapp’s epistemological perspective (*Analytical Philosophy of Technology*), Hans Jonas’ ethical studies (*Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on the New Task of Ethics*), Martin Heidegger’s article of philosophical–anthropological studies (“The Question Concerning Technology”), Horkheimer/Adorno’s sociological approach (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*). My thesis is more concerned about Heidegger and sociological perspective to understand technological effects on humans.

have always continued “to shape our concerns about the present and our fears and fantasies about the future” (“Film” 165). These films are able to reflect what is going on in the world. For example, *The Comet*, released in 1910, which is about a comet crashing into the Earth, shows the concern with the coming war (“Film” 167). After World War II, the great confidence in technology gave way to paranoia. Science fiction films released in 1950s again reflected people’s fear of technology aroused by the war and by nuclear weapons. An example might be a film like *Godzilla* (1954) (“Film” 168-9). In the years following WWII, the science fiction genre added Gothic and horror elements, trying to stimulate the viewers’ sensations still more. After these blended modes, it is difficult to distinguish the sci-fi genre from horror. As the sci-fi films carry spectators to the brink of apocalypse, the genre begins to horrify audience. The term “horror in Science Fiction” is particularly intended to portray the catastrophe caused by science or technology: “its medical research might unleash new diseases, its robots run amok, its intellectualism generate a race with huge brains and withered bodies, its physics create death rays or atomic bombs” (“Horror in SF” 586). Along with the horror element, the science fiction genre is able to stimulate more intense responses by reflecting the contemporary state of science and its technological applications.

II. Why Cronenberg?

David Cronenberg, Canadian auteur director, is the director that I particularly want to investigate in the thesis. He is one of the directors whose keen observations on the relation between technology and human beings suggest sophisticated ideas of presenting the images to inspire the viewers. His films are never merely entertainment. On the contrary, they always present certain philosophical reflections on the actual condition of modern society. Critics have distinguished him from other popular film directors and have tended to respect him as an “auteur director” or a “philosopher/artist” (“Horror in

Science Fiction” 587, Costello 8). The critic Adam Lowenstein situates Cronenberg as a philosopher and a critical intellectual by claiming that “He is not merely a director, but a radical philosopher” (38). With the term “radical philosopher,” the critic points out the salient characteristics of Cronenberg’s style: the use of visceral or erotic images to present philosophical ideas concerning humans and technology.

Besides the philosophical element in his films, Cronenberg uses the technique of “body horror” to manifest the relation between humans and technology. Many critics have noticed the themes in his films which are generally categorized as “the body horror.” Cronenberg’s body horror mainly focuses on how external technology invades the inner body and opens the inner to the public gaze. Doug Saunders states that the Cronenbergian style is “trying to actually say something about the human body and technology and the strange interstices between those two things” (D’arcy). Murray Smith also notices, “for Cronenberg the convergence of machine technology and the human body only seems to highlight the difference between the two” (75). By showing the technological invasion of the human body, Cronenberg is able to concentrate on the effects on the individual under the technological world. Jonathan Crane contends that “Cronenberg always registers the threat and examines its meaning at the level of the personal” (51). Furthermore, Scott Bukatman notices that what Cronenberg reveals in his films is the human body invaded by technology and thus transformed into the other, the monster. The human body becomes the site that technology alters the most that humans can hardly retain their subjectivity. Carrie Rickey marks that the director is “a visionary architect of a chaotic biological tract where mind and body [...] are so vulnerable as to be easily annexed by technology” (qtd. in Bukatman 82). The director also admits that his films have their particular concern the relation between technology and the human body, so that there is a consistent tone and a feeling in his works. He remarks, “I started to notice that what I was doing was also creating a world that had its own very specific

dynamic” (Rodley 19). Indeed, it is this dynamic that makes his films worth discussing.

Nevertheless, though presenting technology as something that penetrates the human body, Cronenberg himself claims that he sees technology as a neutral object without positive or negative affects on human beings. In Richard Porton’s interview, Cronenberg explains his attitude towards technology:

I’ve never been pessimistic about technology—this is a mistaken perception. It’s probably the audience’s fears that are being tapped, but I think that I look at the situation fairly coldly—in the sense of neutral. [...]. I think that there is as much positive and exciting about it as there is dangerous and negative.

(6)

Cronenberg claims that he stands in a neutral position to examine technology. In other words, Cronenberg does not see technology as a threat to human beings at all. In the other interview, Cronenberg explains, “if it is at times dangerous and threatening, it is because we have things within us that are dangerous, self-destructive and threatening, and this has expressed itself in various ways through our technology” (Blackwelder). If the viewers have certain feeling of horror and fear after seeing Cronenberg’s films, he believes that it is because something in their minds are dangerous. Therefore, technophobia presented in the films does not result from technology itself but from humans’ disturbed minds.

Furthermore, his films are able not only to reflect and predict the human future but to stimulate the viewers’ to pay more attention to what is going on in the world. Cronenberg himself explains his purpose in making films. He wants the audience to be stimulated and to develop some responses and opinions toward the world suffused with the modern technology. Cronenberg has confidence in the viewers’ responses, and he is assured that once the viewers see his movies, they can be taken to someplace else (Rodley 131). His films are able to change people’s ideas into a new awareness of

contemporary problems. Furthermore, Cronenberg denies that he is a horror genre director, since his purpose is not to horrify people but to arouse some discussion about human condition in the technoculture. Thus, he explains “often you’re putting things up on the screen that you don’t want in your real life. You’re not saying, ‘I love this. I want everybody to experience this.’ You are saying, ‘This bothers me; I am a little disturbed about this and I want to discuss it on screen” (D’arcy). His films are not going to comfort and tranquilize his audience; rather, they intend to disturb and to wake people up.

Critics have also noticed the disturbing element which stimulates the viewers’ nerves in his films. Michael Grant believes that his films can provoke the viewers to challenge existing values (17). Jonathan Crane notices that Cronenberg’s imaginative world indeed troubles the inner equilibrium of the viewers (65). Other critics like Stuart Klawans, Pablo Kjolseth and Andrew Burden have similar opinions after seeing the director’s movies: deeply reflective, cerebral and punchy. Danny Leigh also asserts that “the confounding preconceptions have always been his [Cronenberg’s] trademark.” Through the sophisticated philosophical ideas and the particular images of body horror, Cronenberg successfully stimulate the viewers’ sensations and reflections. As Steven Shaviro argues, Cronenberg’s films “relentlessly articulate a politics, a technology, and aesthetics of the flesh. They are unsparingly visceral; this is what makes them so disturbing” (126).

In my thesis, I would like to examine Cronenberg’s films, with particular focus on *The Fly* (1986), *Videodrome* (1982) and *eXistenZ* (1999). My purpose is to argue that the three films, which can be seen as an epitome of modern technological society, provide a warning to human beings to be aware of the danger of technology. I do not intend to closely discuss and analyze the details of these three films; rather, I would like to consider how the films represent the chronological development of technology. Each theme in the movies not only reflects the director’s philosophical concerns in the different

periods but also corresponds to the different problems that technology has caused in the modern world. Rather than examining these three films from the perspective of their chronological order of their release, I will analyze them in relation to technological events in the world: the belief in the supremacy of science, the development of mass media, and the invention of virtual reality. These appear respectively in *The Fly*, *Videodrome* and finally, *eXistenZ*. These three movies separately represent different periods of technology: the primitive machine-like technology of the early twentieth century, the mass media of the period after World War II, and then the contemporary period of virtual reality.

Thus, these three films are able to represent the technological development of contemporary society. *The Fly*, presenting the absolute value of science and scientific reason, is the reflection of the modern culture that sees scientific research as the only way of comprehending the world and as the best approach for dealing with everything. The director is able to show the consequences of regarding science and reason as the primary criterion for thought and action. The film is a parable warning us about the danger of these ideas. The following two films are *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*. If we note the year of the films' release, we see that Cronenberg was actually predicting future problems instead of merely reflecting current ones. The second film, *Videodrome*, released in 1982 when the system of mass media was not as developed as now. The film not only shows but predicts the phenomenon of people becoming addicted to mass media and as a result losing their thinking ability. Noticing the powerful effect of mass media on human beings, Cronenberg wrote the script himself to show the threat metaphorically. The third movie, *eXistenZ*, released in 1999 fully demonstrates Cronenberg's concern about how the new technology, virtual reality, is going to influence on human beings. The director portrays the actual condition and foresees the kinds of virtual reality that may be generated in the near future. The ideas of technology in the three films demonstrate a

chronological development in human history. By presenting the progress, the director invites the audience not only to examine the accepted conceptions given or derived from the tradition or the society but also to contemplate the technology which people are so used to. I believe that, by presenting the threatening technological images which may become real in the future, people's fear of technology can be visualized and the director's purpose of arousing people's awareness can be achieved.

III. Literature Review

In the thesis, three films are juxtaposed to present a continuous process in which humans become more and more helpless under the increasing power of technology. Among the critics who discuss Cronenberg's films, there are still none who see his films as interrelated works expressing a consistent historical development. However, the critic Mark Irwin has noticed that "Probably the sum total of his works will be more impressive than any single film" (qtd. in Rodley 18). In my opinion, I think Cronenberg's three films epitomize his oeuvre—*The Fly*, *Videodrome*, and *eXistenZ*. Most critics have noticed the fear and horror images manifest in the three movies. In *The Fly*, Seth Brundle creates a womb-like machine aiming to transfer objects without movement. Unfortunately, during the process of transferring himself, a fly accidentally flies into the pod and disrupts the experiment: Seth's body is fused with the fly's genes. The protagonist's body now becomes a new medium of technological experiment. Towards this new-created body, the critics hold opposing views. In Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* published in 1993, he states that the mixture of the scientist and the fly has not produced a stable subjectivity so that there is no possibility for Brundle to escape his fate of death. Most critics have an opinion similar to Shaviro's, though they take different approaches to analyze the film. Adam Knee and Marty Roth both compare *The Fly* filmed in 1958 by Kurt Neumann and with Cronenberg's 1986 version. They both believe that after the accident, Brundle is

unable to retain his own subjectivity and falls into the endless transformation process between the pods he invents. Helen W. Robbins uses a psychoanalytic approach to examine the film and regards it as an expression of the idea that the reason why men keep their creative energy comes from womb envy. It is “a feeling of impotence clearly stemming from their jealousy of female reproductive power” (135). Since the scientist suffers from the underlying problem, the tragedy occurs in the end of the story. Murray Smith also notices the disappearance of human integrity from the relation between the horror genre and sex.

In contrast, there is the other opposing idea arguing that what technology brings to humans is liberation. Steven Shaviro in his later book called *Doom Patrols* published in 1997 states that Brundlefly is the manifestation of a postmodern transcending figure. He adopts Donna Haraway and Friedrich Nietzsche’s ideas to argue that Brundlefly is the new embodiment of creature to break through the limited human species. He quotes Haraway’s concept of cyborg, “no objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language.” The human body, not an organism but a space for hybridizing, is ready to fuse with other creatures or machines to generate a new differentiated structure. Moreover, Shaviro in the essay suggests that the fusion with insects or arthropods is emancipated from the limit of postmodern limits: the hybrid is able to revolt against the tyranny of the organism. The critic sees that Brundlefly is able to break through the limit from human species and embrace more possibilities. On the other hand, Brundlefly is the “postmodern realization of Nietzsche’s prophecy of the Overman” since he is always in a process of “perpetual becoming, an ungrounded projection into unknowable futurity” (Shaviro, 1997). For Shaviro, the hybrid Brundlefly is just a body to experience continual transformation without any stable identity. The scientist in *The Fly* is seen as Nietzsche’s hero overthrowing the

human limits.

In the thesis, I would like to follow the former critics' analysis which sees the intrusion of technology as a negative force for human beings. Though Shaviro in his 1997 essay argues that the character Brundlefly is a representation of cyborg which overcomes the function of human species; however, he neglects the ending of the scientist. Brundle becomes helpless to save himself from the predicament even though he has the new cyborg body. Also, I choose not to emphasize the gender problem of womb envy and phallic anxiety, since I would put more focus on the relation between technology and human beings. *The Fly* is the first movie of the development of technology. Science and the distance between humans and technology are two ingredients in the film I am eager to discuss. Science is the technological rationality that persuades people to believe it is the supreme knowledge that humans have. Furthermore, in *The Fly*, there is a distance between the humans and technology; that is, humans are not yet technologized and technology remains machine-like. Compared to *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, Brundle in *The Fly* still possesses certain degrees of human identity.

As for the second film, *Videodrome*, most critics are obsessed by the highly-controversial masochistic images. The critics remark that the protagonist, Max Renn, loses his own consciousness and identity due to his addiction to the televised images. Linda S. Kauffman is the critic who expresses this idea; moreover, she explains that human beings do not have any power to shape television but on the contrary, it shapes humans' concept and constitutes their subjectivity (128). Scott Bukatman believes that *Videodrome* represents Jean Baudrillard's idea that "society becomes the mirror of television as television becomes the new reality" (91). The human subjectivity is completely destroyed by technology since even the final refuge, the human body, is penetrated by technology. Bart Testa uses Michel Foucault's theories of the body to argue that the postmodern body has become the site for videotapes to play inside. The

television signal “rewrites Max, rewrites the text of his body” (62). Fredric Jameson in *Geopolitical Aesthetic* asserts that *Videodrome* is more realistic than any documentary or social drama because the audience can glimpse “the grain of postmodern urban life” from the film (32). Also, by analyzing from an economical, political, and religious perspective, Jameson points out Cronenberg indeed presents a fear of reduction of body under the influence of television/mass media.

However, in contrast to the opinions above, Steven Shaviro in *The Cinematic Body* again holds a positive view towards technology. He notices that the new flesh formed by video-technology can stimulate humans’ sensations and strengthen their bodily experience. He believes the technology’s body, the body transformed by technology, is “less rigidly determined, more fluid and open to metamorphosis, than we generally like to think” (128). He affirms Cronenberg’s creation of Max’s “the new flesh” in the film since it broadens our ordinary imagination of the human body. Moreover, Lin Wen-chi, when seeing the film also responds to Shaviro’s idea and regards the technology’s body is able to subvert master-slave relationship between humans and technology. He does not see technology as the master to control people’s thinking; on the contrary, he believes that the television is sexualized to satisfy Max’s sexual desire. However, in the end of Shaviro’s article in *The Cinematic body*, he also notes the feeling of anxiety and fear in the film. He admits that even though Max has transformed into the new flesh, the mutation does not promise any desirable existence after the death of Max’s old flesh. The mutation of Max’s body becomes “the site of fear” which brings merely death (143).

Unlike the critics above who see technology as the medium to emancipate people’s bodily sensations, my focus is also on the side effects of technology: the decreasing subjectivity in the film. I believe that Max’s human identity and subjectivity in *Videodrome* and are much less than Brundle’s in *The Fly*, as the second film, *Videodrome* depicts a person who believes that technology would create a greater future but gets

trapped in the fatal technological hallucination. Following the former movie in emphasizing the formation of technological rationality and its effect, *Videodrome* further manifests that the humans possess less and less freedom under the influence of this kind of ideology and increasingly powerful technology.

Regarding *eXistenZ*, most critics are obsessed with its extraordinary way of blending reality and virtual reality. Grant notices the filming technique is quite amazing: Cronenberg fuses the film with the game, so that no one can be sure when it starts: “the past and present are called into question” (19). Furthermore, besides the striking technique, the critics also mark that the heroes are in unprecedented crisis that humans may encounter in the near future. Ziauddin Sarder and Jonathan Romney express that the players in the film “seek total dissolution of their selves in the object of their love—their goal is to become one with their machines” (35). The human identity dissolves under the continuous technological invasion. David Lavery, after seeing the movie, believes that the body is the easiest site to betray human beings because it can be manipulated and altered in numerous ways. Because of the susceptible body, humans are captivated by endless simulations. Li Xueying tries to find out the existential meaning for humans in *eXistenZ* but concludes that it is impossible to grasp the meanings since the human subjectivity and free will are swallowed by the game. Matthew Ryan contends that the body is no longer controlled by themselves but by the machines.

By contrast, two critics like Bruce Reid and Vanessa Pappas see the technology in the film as a positive force to transform the self into postmodern humans. Though Pappas does not focus on the film *eXistenZ*, but she believes that in the posthuman age, the technology is able to assist humans to shift subjective positions and multiply the space. The other critic, Bruce Reid, also remarks on the transcending parts in the film. He believes that technology “can provide the kind of transcendent experience that alters a person’s reality and opens him or her up to those possibilities” (3). Reid stands on the

optimistic side, believing in the bright future technology can bring to us.

eXistenZ represents the final step in the process of current technological development. In addition to the negative aspects of technology the critics observe, I would see the total convergence of machines and human beings as the terminality of the development. The machines in the film are completely flesh-made, and the humans are encircled in the technological reality without any hope of escape. Human beings are overwhelmingly convinced by technological rationality and technology, so that they undoubtedly think that the human bodies after the alteration by technology are far better than natural human beings. The critic, Reid, who holds the optimistic view regarding the relation of humans and machines has fallen into the trap of scientific rationality so that he is unable to see its danger. The third film, *eXistenZ*; therefore, presents a closure since the convergence is complete.

From the critics' viewpoint, it is noticeable that Cronenberg's films always create a tension for the audience, prompting technology in social world from a new perspective. The critics mentioned above also state the syndromes on the effects such as the loss of identity, the lack of subjectivity, and the absence of the organic human body. It is not humans who can control themselves anymore; on the contrary, humans now yield to the dominance of technology. Besides the characteristics of technophobia, in the thesis, I would argue that a process is presented in the three films: technology becomes more and more powerful; humans are more and more helpless to confront the overwhelming power of technology.

IV. Philosophical Background

In order to understand the film underlying intentions better, I would like to adopt a philosophical perspective, inspired by Martin Heidegger, Jacques Ellul, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, in order to understand the relationship between technology and

people. Some key questions I would like to investigate from those philosophical thoughts: How powerful is technology? What are its influences on human beings? How are humans going to react when confronted with this force? By viewing these questions from a philosophical perspective, the relationship between technology and modern society can be clarified. In addition to the discussion of the intrinsic character of technology, a sociological perspective brings forward the new modes of thinking which deal with its effects on society, or on people's thoughts and actions in modern society (Mitcham and Mackey 2). Among the critics who are concerned with these issues, I would like to concentrate on Horkheimer/Adorno's and Jacques Ellul's reflections on technology's effect on human beings and the society.

However, before I undertake this philosophical approach to analyze modern social phenomena, I would like to adopt Martin Heidegger's analysis of technology. Although it is difficult to classify his ideas as part of the sociological school mentioned above, his argument starts from his concern about the relation between humans and technology. Attempting to figure out the essence of technology, Heidegger tries to disclose the meaning of the technology itself: What is its purpose? What is its effect on human beings? Heidegger writes, "Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alētheia*, truth, happens" (295). That is, technology is an apparatus for human beings to explore, to reveal hidden truth. Nevertheless, Heidegger does not stop merely with this philosophical definition; he desires to find out the essence of technology. "Enframing" (*Ge-stell*) is the concept he develops for this purpose. It is Heidegger's contention that human beings are all in the position of enframing, which drives us to dig out the actual and to attempt to disclose the truth ceaselessly. Therefore, this prompts humans to explore whatever they can—from outer space to the core of the earth. The impulse also offers us infinite possibilities of searching for the truth. Besides the unlimited positive possibilities that technology brings,

Heidegger notes the negative side. Enframing indeed gives us continuous strength to reveal the unknown, but it is this essence of technology which causes the danger. Heidegger notes, “Placed between these possibilities, man is endangered by destining. The destining of revealing is as such, in every one of its modes, and therefore necessarily, danger” (307). Hence, technology itself cannot bring harm to human beings but rather it is the essence of technology, the desire for ceaseless exploration of the unknown, which creates problems.

Seeing Heidegger’s analysis of the danger of technology, it is understandable that the sociological thinkers have been so concerned about the side effect that technology may have for human beings. As Marxist scholars, Horkheimer/Adorno tend to associate technology with capitalism. Adorno believes that the combination of technology and capitalism forms an ideology that may control people’s mind, developing a conformity which “has replaced consciousness” (1975, 17). In capitalist and technological society, people think and behave within the frame according to the limited ideology which preoccupied with technological rationality. Therefore, Adorno implies that what technology brings would remove “all participation on the subject’s part and all anthropomorphism from the object” which would cause a kind of schizophrenia of one’s consciousness (Gibson and Rubin 279). Not only is the society under the control of technology but also individuals would lose their subjectivity. Individuals do not have any autonomy (i.e. critical reason) to exercise their choice of living style but, instead, they are trapped in the great omnipresent mass cultural machine. To characterize people’s situation, Horkheimer/Adorno use the term “Pseudo individuality,” which means that the “peculiarity of the self is a monopoly commodity determined by society” (1972, 154). Even as individuals claim themselves as particular or autonomous persons, they are unable to escape the framework of digital culture.

The other sociologist, Jacques Ellul, in his foreword of his book *The Technological*

Society, specializing in the relation between technology and society, expresses a similar observation with the term “social realism” (xxviii). Ellul emphasizes that human beings are all involved in technological civilization. That is not to imply that human beings lose all capacity for having any individual free will, but rather to suggest that there is a sociological reality which contains all decisions. It is not possible for human beings to behave or to think outside the framework of the social realism. It is Ellul’s contention that technology is one of the sociological realities which may limit people’s lives. That is to say, the invention of modern technology does not render human beings free but invades “people’s mental, moral and emotional lives, and thus has rendered them incapable of desiring social change” (Modleski 155). Therefore, people do not have any power to defend themselves against this force. Actually, Martin Heidegger in his article, “The Question Concerning Technology,” also remarks on human’s passivity when facing technology. He observes that “man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any given time the actual shows itself or withdraws” (299). Though humans are in the mission of revealing the newness, it is not the human power that can decide what or when to disclose the thing. Heidegger suggests that human beings can only perceive the call from technology passively since it is technology which has the capacity to control the appearance of the truth: humans can “merely respond to the call of unconcealment” (300).

However, in view of this passivity and loss of subjectivity, how can we tolerate this inferiority to technology? Is there any possibility that humans are conscious of this predicament? According to Ellul, technology has an uncanny ability to produce an illusion that human beings still have domination over it. It is Ellul’s thesis that technological society is forming the organic being which has the “uncanny ability to instantiate itself in the thought of the individuals who naively believe they have power over it” (Mitcham and Mackey 5). Due to its degree of autonomy, Ellul regards technological society as an organic being with such an uncanny ability. He believes that

technology now has become an autonomous system that forms the technological determinism which takes control over human beings. The autonomous characteristic of technology comes from its liberation from morality and its connection with the idea of legitimacy. It becomes a transcendent standard to measure human politics and economic systems. Technology has nothing to do with morality since technology, in the name of science, must remain scientific, rational and logical in order to pursue its objective and actual results. Once related with moral or any humane factors, scientific experiments or technology cannot be neutral enough to claim its objectivity. Technology, hence, is totally independent of all moral judgment. Furthermore, in modern society, Ellul considers that it is the general belief that the scientific result is legitimate, including all technological invention. The public has internalized the idea that once something is technological, it is automatically legitimate. In modern society, anything concerned with technology cannot be challenged because science achieves its results through a sequence involving rational thought, experimentation, and calculation. One can hardly be skeptical of the validity of rationality. Therefore, Ellul concludes that “Independent of morals and judgments, legitimate in itself, technology is becoming the creative force of new values, of a new ethics” (396). Seen as a judgment and measurement of the society, technology would easily control the economics and politics and form a dominant system of ideology. In addition, it influences the direction of economic investment and the distribution of funds. Encompassed by the technological world, as Ellul notices, humans are hardly aware of the limitations placed on their consciousness. It is too difficult for one to have an awareness which is completely outside the frame created by this system.

However, human beings are not completely unable to confront the transcendent power of technology, nor must they merely be under its total domination. They are still hopeful of being able to deal with the difficulty. Martin Heidegger and Jacques Ellul both offer guidance for human beings. Heidegger argues its possibility by quoting Friedrich

Hölderlin's poem, "Where danger is, grows/The saving power also" (310). Indeed, in the essence of technology, there exists a threat to humans, but it is in the face of this danger that human beings start to think about the meaning of people's lives and of technology. Besides, Ellul rejects other critics' attack against him who accuse him of being a pessimist by declaring that there might be a solution to the predicament. Based on Ellul's contention, people are indeed determined on all sides, but they can never cease fighting against the determinism and necessity. Once resigned in the comfort of the determinism, they are enslaved. Therefore, if humans still possess freedom, it is because they are still open to overcome determinism and necessity. It is, according to Ellul, everyone's responsibility to "seek ways of resisting and transcending technological determinants" (185).

It is useless if the critics merely provide some hope without telling us what should be done. For this purpose, I have included Günther Anders' views on technology. It is his argument that the danger of technology mainly comes from the distance between the technological reality and the human imagination. Technology progresses so rapidly that humans are incapable of responding to its transformation immediately. Therefore, it is this gap which makes new inventions dangerous. As Anders states, this danger comes from "the effect of the daily growing gap between our two faculties; between our action and our imagination; of the fact that we are unable to conceive what we can construct; to mentally reproduce what we can produce; to realize the reality which we can bring into being" (Anders 130). Anders provides a more practical and realistic way to look at the problems. Namely, to develop our imagination and to follow the speed of technological progress; in this way, human beings still possess a chance to prevent the catastrophes that lie in wait.

V. Film Theory

Films, regarded as the representative modern art form, not only provide a field for the film makers to develop their imaginations but exert a powerful influence on the masses. In the thesis, I would like to use films as the contemporary manifestation of our imagination which can draw human beings closer to the modern advanced technology. Among various approaches to understand films, I would like to adopt “auteurism” to construct my argument. “Auteurism” is “the belief that cinema was an art of personal expression, and that its great directors were as much to be esteemed as the authors of their work as any writer, composer or painter” (Lapsley and Westlake 105). That is, the critics of the theory tend to analyze a particular director’s whole body of films, attempting to find his or her common thematic preoccupations, the repetitive motifs and incidents, or the habitual style and tempo (Wollen 556). The idea was first expressed in two articles in the French journal called *Cahiers*. One written by Alexandre Astruc in 1948, in which the writer compared the director to writer or artist and claimed that through the camera the director is able to express his thoughts and sensibility; the other one written by François Truffaut in 1954 was to focus on the directors’s style and mise-en-scène such as lightening, acting, camera and sets, etc (Lapsley and Westlake 106). Therefore, the subsequent development of “auteurism” drew from the two precursors and separated into two aspects: one is thematic motifs and the other is style. The former one focus on studying the themes in different films of one individual director, and the latter critics try to find out common characteristics of the directors’ style in the films.

Furthermore, besides the autuerism, I would like to adopt the approach of film genre criticism. The origin of genre criticism is connected to that type of autuerism that focuses on a particular style of one individual director. As Dudley Andrew points out, at the inaugurated period, the genre approach only plays as a foil for the auteurism since it seems to be a shortcut to studying the prototype of every director (116). The approach is trying to divide films into certain categories, such as the western, the gangster films, the

horror film, the science fiction film, systematically based on certain conventions (Grant xii). With the genre approach, critics do a systematic reading to compare and categorize common themes, certain typical actions, narrative forms, or certain types of characters. However, with this approach, one question always remains: how can the audience be interested in a story which—in essence—they are quite familiar with? To this, the critic Deborah Knight provides an answer: a film does not merely include the same form of representation, it also involves “a complex interrelationship of thematic, iconographical, and narrational cues and conventions” (345). Therefore, even within genre criticism, the spectators are able to find out a work’s subversion of, expansions of the conventional films. Although some films belong to a certain genre, they still have their own distinguishing features to attract an audience.

In the thesis, I would like to adopt these two film approaches, auteurism and genre criticism, to examine David Cronenberg’s films. Instead of concentrating on the camera, shot, light, setting, etc., I am more inclined to pay attention to the auteur’s narrative style and story content to understand his films. I attempt to concentrate on analyzing the consistent motifs that the director presents throughout his films and the relevant issues he is always concerned with. With the genre criticism, I would like to argue that despite his use of certain genres that are already endowed with many conventions; the director is still able to create his revolutionary images in his films.

VI. Conclusion

With the philosophical concepts and film criticism discussions, I would like to argue that technology has formed an omnipotent power to dominate human lives, including physical and mental transformation of the mind and body and to such extent that they barely possess any awareness of this invasion and loss of autonomy. Only through art can people retain their critical thinking to fight back the technological attack.

To achieve this aim, Cronenberg's films are chosen to be an exemplification of the contemporary phenomena of technological invasion of human bodies in order to arouse people's awareness of the tension with technology. His films are able to give the viewer a different perspective from which to examine the world again. Indeed, in the rapidly changing world, it is hard to grasp the idea of what is going on at the current moment. With the division of labor and education, people are only concerned about the limited particular things related to what they specialize in; however, it is the world that everybody is involved in. The world needs everyone's concern. Cronenberg's films provide an opportunity for human beings to grasp and seize the technological trends in the society and contemplate it once more.

Chapter Two

David Cronenberg and His Films

I. David Cronenberg's Philosophical Ideas

What make David Cronenberg's films so outstanding is his philosophical ideas and the special genre he adopts in the films. In this chapter, I would like to discuss the two elements in detail. It is the director's intention to make films that really get to the spectators' souls. As he believes, "There are books you read because they're a diversion, and there are books you read when you're in spiritual trouble. They are soul food; they really do balm the soul. I want my movies to do that, get to the soul" (Rodley 20). He is strongly opposed to movies which contain no ideas and only offer comforts to make the viewers feel good (Porton 4). He insists that there must be some philosophical ideas in his works. When talking about his films, the director says that "everything in [his films] had a bizarre conceptual element" (Rodley 131). It is the philosophical element that creates his unusual style through which he enables his films to get to the viewers' souls.

His philosophical ideas presented are focused on two themes: the mind-body schism and the culture-nature split. The typical themes in Cronenberg's films show his preoccupation with these two traditional philosophical problems. These two questions have been discussed for a long period of time; however, with the appearance of technology, they are endowed with new meanings: the technologized body and technological culture have deepened the gap between mind and body, culture and nature.³

Mind-body schism is the theme most critics observe in David Cronenberg's films.⁴ He uses the theme to express the idea of technology's power to disturb the human

³ The dichotomy here is the contrast between the technologized body and the mind not yet invaded by technological rationality; between the technological culture and Mother Nature.

⁴ The critics like Lukas Barr, Robert Hass, Bart Testa, and John Costello, when introducing Cronenberg's themes of the films also notice his philosophical idea of mind-body schism.

condition. Cronenberg is so fascinated by Descartes' vision of an absolute mind-body split that he adopts this theme in most of his movies. It is René Descartes's contention that a human being is "a thing which thinks" rather than an "assemblage of members which is called a human body" (84). That is, Descartes not only asserts the distinction of mind and body but depreciates the value of the human body. He views the body as having such a low value, so that he is skeptical about everything received through the senses. To Descartes, nothing can be understood and perceived without the faculty of mind. However, though attracted by Cartesian ideas, Cronenberg does not agree with Descartes completely. He is stimulated by the idea of the dichotomy but in total disagreement with the devaluation of the body. The director explains:

I don't think that the flesh is necessarily treacherous, evil, bad. It is cantankerous, and it is independent. The idea of independence is the key. It really is like colonialism. The colonies suddenly decide that they can and should exist with their own personality and should detach from the control of the mother country. At first the colony is perceived as being treacherous. It's a betrayal. Ultimately, it can be seen as the separation of a partner that could be very valuable as an equal rather than as something you dominate. I think the flesh in my films is like that. I notice that my characters talk about the flesh undergoing revolution at times. I think to myself: "That's what it is: the independence of the body, relative to the mind, and the difficulty of the mind accepting what the revolution might entail." (Rodley 80)

Cronenberg compares the body with a colony which suddenly awakes and finds that it can be independent. The human body embraces the power of technology and undergoes a revolution to transform its structure and function; namely, "the new flesh rhetoric [...] testifies to the condition of the body as infinitely malleable, as always already technology's body" (Testa 51). However, the technology's body does not bridge the gap

between mind and body; on the contrary, technology's body increases the gap. Because this revolutionary body is evolved by means of technology, the mind is unable to follow the body's speed. The increasing gap results in a sort of schizophrenia. Cronenberg's films focus on the revolution of the body and the disaster caused by the gap between new body and old mind. Unlike the Cartesian philosophy emphasizing the superiority of the mind, Cronenberg's focus is on the awakening of the body.

We can see this theme repeatedly in his films. In *Rabid* (1976), because of a serious car accident, the protagonist Ross is treated with a new experimental surgery to treat her injury. However, the side effect of the surgery engenders a new organ, a phallic red spike, extruded from her armpit. This spike has an irresistible thirst for blood. The new body transformed by new medical techniques has its own need, and the mind is incapable of controlling the abnormal behavior that the new flesh brings forth. In *Scanners* (1980), the hero Cameron Vale has a supernatural scanning power because of a medical experiment conducted on him by a scientist, Dr. Paul Ruth. He gives "ephemerol" to pregnant women, one of whom is Vale's mother. The medicine endows the baby with this strange supernatural power. His new scanning power can connect two different individuals' nervous systems, enabling the scanner to control the other's mind and behavior. Again, the new body transformed by the new medical technology, does not make Vale an omnipotent superman; instead, it leaves the hero a derelict in the modern society. The extraordinary function of the human body does not help to promote and improve human's consciousness or wisdom or create a harmonious relation with the mind; instead, it exacerbates the separation between the mind and the body. It is the intolerable characteristic of this dichotomy that brings unease, anxiety and tragedy to contemporary people, like Ross in *Rabid*, and Vale in *Scanners*.

The power of technology does not only enable the technologized body to alienate the mind, it also intensifies the human power over nature. The critic William Beard

extends Cronenberg's theme to the antinomy between culture and nature. According to Beard, the director is always interested in the dichotomy of mind and body or culture and nature, and that "the director's distinction consists of a unique, personal, tragic view of this opposition" (qtd. in Testa 41). Cronenberg's vision of a mind-body split places humans in a schizophrenic position. Once the heroes' bodies become technologized, it is at that moment when the heroes' start their process of decline. In *Rabid*, once the heroine experiences the new operation, she needs to deal with the problem of another living creature, a parasite, co-existing in her body. Her consciousness is unable to comprehend the brutal behavior of her own body so that she stands on the edge of schizophrenia. In *Scanners*, because of the injection of new medicine, the hero suffers from serious headache. Since his mind again cannot comprehend what his body can do—to hear all voices inside others' mind—he falls into a sort of schizophrenia. The incapacity of the mind to follow the speed of the body's evolution creates the terrible symptom of schizophrenia for the heroes in Cronenberg's films.

Moreover, he also presents the other type of separation which may also affect people, the discordance between culture and nature. The hubristic scientists armed with the most advanced technology are the representatives of culture who always play important roles in Cronenberg's films. They have devoted themselves to developing science and rationality which can attempt to dominate nature. Beard argues "These scientists are forever tinkering with nature in an effort to make it serve more fully the convenience of the rational consciousness. It is their machinations which are the first catalyst of the plagues and terrors which invade the Cronenbergian world" (116). Indeed, in Cronenberg's films, the fatal disasters always come from the revenge of nature: "Monstrosity results when the body-as-Nature takes revenge against over-weening rationalism-as-Culture figured in Cronenberg's films as violent release of the anarchy of the flesh" (Testa 41). Human beings are stuck in the belief that by means of science they

hold the power of dominance over nature. Therefore, the conflict between culture and nature, to Cronenberg, is related to the human faith in science and the development of technology. With the technological assistance, human beings become powerful enough to invade nature. However, in the director's films, people's naïveté of natural power and the arrogance of scientific technology always cause tremendous conflicts in human society.

In Cronenberg's films, the disasters can be seen as the consequence from the human hubris of possessing science and technology. *The Fly* (1986) can be seen as a movie exemplifying this theme. Although the same topic was filmed in the 1950s, Cronenberg decides to present it in his way. When the director is asked the reason to remake the film, he replies, "It was really reading the script I was given that had some elements in it that really struck me as being very powerful and very much me!" (qtd. in Haas 4). The arrogant scientist, Seth Brundle, makes a claim that he has invented telepods to "change the world and human life as we know it" (*The Fly*). However, while he uses himself as an experimental object, a fly, the natural animal, intrudes into his telepod. He becomes Brundlefly, a combination of insect and human being. *The Fly* destroys the arrogant scientist's plan incidentally. Nature always can fight back people's scientific calculation and estimation without difficulty.

II. The Special Genre "Horror in Science Fiction"

Cronenberg is not only famous for his films full of philosophical implications but also respected for using the genre "horror in science fiction." In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, John Clute points out that Cronenberg is one of "the auteur directors who have specialized in blending sf with horror" (587). Indeed, to achieve his purpose of representing the penetration of technology, he combines the genre—horror and science fiction—to explore the problems that technology may cause to human beings. But why does Cronenberg choose the blended genre of horror and science fiction? Why does he

combine these two genres?

Recent film criticism tends to discuss the horror genre from the perspective of psychoanalysis, thus adopting terms such as “return of the repressed” or “catharsis” to construct their thesis and explain why people like to see horror movies. Joseph Grixti believes that horror functions as a channel to release audiences’ repressed desires. Namely, “horror appeals to deep-seated, psychoanalytically intelligible repressed desires” (qtd. in Tudor 444). It is generally believed that every individual has deep, unconscious sexual desires or basic unconscious fears, so that the horror genre has great resonance among the spectators. Therefore, in psychoanalysis’ view, the monster in horror movies is humans’ secret nature without any disguise, the most obscure or dark part of human nature. Moreover, the return of the repressed not only reflects the humans’ unconscious desire; it is also the representation of cultural constraints. The horror that film makers like to present in the movies is the most gruesome, dreadful, and grotesque elements that society tries to hide. The spectators can achieve a tremendous release by seeing the horror film. As Robin Wood suggests, “the horror film serves as a window onto the cultural and thus individual unconscious, it allows the spectator to recognize the nature and extent of his/her repressed ‘monstrous’ desire [...]” (qtd. in Hurley 206). Furthermore, according to psychoanalytic theory, the plot in horror movies does not cease at the climax of arousing audience’s unconscious desires; rather, it would end with a plot of catharsis to make them feel safe. To the individuals, seeing the horror film is to experience a rite of passage, the transition from the monster to the “normal individual.” By seeing the films, spectators understand the limit of proper or acceptable behavior in society. According to James Twitchell, the frightening moments are the most efficient teachers (Tudor 448). On the other hand, with respect to the society, the death of the monster in the horror film also brings the consequence of catharsis. The reason why the culture allows the artist to reveal the rotten elements in society is because it is exposed in

the unreal realm of fantasy. Also, it is believed that the norm would be reconstructed by the end of the film, so people can be assured that they would all be safe and normal after seeing the movie. Therefore, Kelly Hurley draws the following conclusion about the genre, “It is revealed as a genre impoverished in its effects endlessly and monotonously enacting narratives of repression and displacement to an unsophisticated audience compulsively returning to the theater for yet another healing or normativizing catharsis” (209).

However, the psychoanalytic interpretation of the horror film is unable to answer the obvious question: if every individual has unconscious secrets, why does not everyone enjoy seeing horror movies? Noël Carroll, Stephen Prince and Andrew Tudor adopt different approaches to understand the horror film by claiming that the horror comes from ideas of pollution and taboo in society rather than from the repression of one’s unconsciousness. The production of the pollution and taboo results when there is “a set of explicit prohibitions governing speech or behavior which are surrounded by powerful social or supernatural sanctions, the violation of which is accompanied by a sense of sin or defilement” (Prince 21). The dominant power of society controls the way to classify and construct the system of order, so the society is arranged into a binary system; “human and non-human, female and male, edible and inedible, holy and profane, punish and transgression” (Prince 22). However, while creating the systems of order, the powerful would also produce “at the same time a system of disorder, whose categories are regarded by members of the social community as dirt, pollution, taboo” (Prince 22). Therefore, presenting images of this disorder or pollution may threaten the network of socially-constructed rules. In addition, the horror images may also menace the individual’s sense of safety regarding the society. Furthermore, it is Carroll’s contention that the horror film is attractive because of its manifestation of anomalies. The monster in the horror films is “categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless” (Carroll

32). The monster in the horror films always breaks the routine or limited boundary within the social norm. The critics believe that the representation of the horror is more complicated than the psychoanalysts' ideas of the repressed. The monster here "represents those unmapped areas bordering the familiar configurations of the social worlds" (Prince 27).

Therefore, if the viewers adopt the second interpretation of horror movie, the horror movie can be seen as the reflection of social phenomena, since it always challenges the social taboo and the transgression of the boundary. People get used to the social rules and restraints so that they become docile in the context of the sustainable social order. By means of showing the unknown and grotesque side of society, the central authorities and the system of classification are challenged again. Since the genre has the function of challenging the tradition, it is natural that people adopt it to express their dissatisfaction with society itself. According to Andrew Tudor's research, it was in the 1950s that the film industry began to treat the "horror genre as articulations of the felt social concerns of the time" (456). The directors may use the topics as nuclear weapons and the role of science in their films to express their concerns about certain significant issues in the world. However, the concerns need not be limited to the cold war period alone; the horror genre serves the function of reflecting the cultural and social changes in contemporary society. The elements presented in the horror films "correlate with our distinctive experience of fear, risk an instability in modern societies" (Tudor 459).

However, there is still a question of why there are so many viewers who like to see horror films if they specialize merely in showing the gruesome and polluted sides of the society. Carroll believes that while seeing the horror film, spectators are able to feel fascination and distress simultaneously. The audience is fascinated because such anomalies would never show up in real life. Moreover, the fascination comes from the spectators' involvement in the process of discovering the monster. People in the theatre

enjoy the pleasure of confirming the existence of a monster, a process in which the sense of fascination is aroused. On the other hand, the spectators also feel distress; yet this distress, according to Carroll, is “part of the price to be paid for the pleasure of their disclosure” (184). Also, the distress or the disgust is merely a response to the thought of a monster rather than the real presence of a disgusting or fearful thing. Hence, though there would be the sense of distress while enjoying the film, it is acceptable to the viewers.

III. David Cronenberg’s Horror Films

I feel that this latter type of criticism, centering on sociological discussions of taboo and pollution, is more relevant than psychoanalytic theory to what David Cronenberg presents in his films. Cronenberg’s horror films are always full of social taboos or obscene scenes in order to provoke the viewers’ response. The director likes to present Cronenbergian horror by presenting some prohibited topic in order to challenge sexual and other social taboos. Of course, people usually avoid speaking of things concerned with sex, since they do not belong to the system of order that the norm permits. However, by filming sex as a central theme, Cronenberg presents the taboo that everyone tries to avoid, stimulating people’s deepest fear. In *Shivers* (1975), the phallic-like parasite is able to provoke human’s sexual desire. Once affected, people cannot help but follow their sexual impulse. In *Crash* (1996), the characters indulge in endless sexual behaviors in order to feel their existence. Modern life is stale and tedious; even sex fails to bring any satisfaction. Only by pursuing more and more exciting and dangerous sexual activities can people feel that their senses are still working. By showing the unshowable, speaking the unspeakable, Cronenberg challenges people’s limits to receive the images and invoke their horror, forcing them to contemplate the contemporary society.

Furthermore, the other theme Cronenberg often adopts is body horror which also

subverts the viewers' usual conceptions of the human body. Cronenbergian body horror, to Kelly Hurley, is "a hybrid genre that recombines the narrative and cinematic conventions of the science fiction, horror, a suspense film in order to stage a spectacle of the human body defamiliarized, rendered other" (203). To present the body as the transformed grotesque other is basically because the traditional thinking always believes that the human body is an organic whole. To violate or transgress the bodily boundary can be seen as threatening to the ordered society. In Cronenberg's films, the body itself is always presented as "the source and the object of annihilation" (Sargeant 3). The body becomes the field which is bruised and torn in order to arouse the viewer's feeling of fear. By being shown the incomplete organic body, people are aware that human beings are not the subjects who can be totally isolated from external influences.

The use of the theme, body horror, is related to aspects of postmodern social experiences. According to Noël Carroll, it can be seen as the product of the postmodern era because "it gives expression to postmodern experiences of social fragmentation and to the constantly threatening confrontation between embattled selves and the risky and unreliable world that they inhabit" (456). In his use of body horror, Cronenberg is not merely eager to present the disgusting and to shock the audience but also adopts the genre to figure out how the digital environments destroy and ruin people's lives. By means of showing the tearing of the flesh, people are capable of comprehending the struggle between the social-cultural surroundings and their own perception of the human body. The director's purpose in using body horror as the essential theme is because it can represent the condition, as Kelly Hurley says, of "a human body whose integrity is violated, a human identity whose boundaries are breached from all sides" (205). A human subject is not one complete autonomous organic unity anymore, but is intruded upon by many external factors, such as the influence of science, media, or technology. In *Videodrome* (1982), the body is penetrated by media so much that Cronenberg even

designs a vagina-like slit opening in the protagonist's stomach. In *Crash*, the human body is not an organic self-circulative system anymore; on the contrary, it needs special outer circumstances for people to sense their existence. The director challenges the common senses by showing the body as the other. The viewers are aware of the cause of the horror existed in their own body as well which results in overpowering panic.

Another Cronenbergian confrontation with social taboo presents his protagonists as the monsters themselves to deepen the spectators' sense of horror. In most of the horror films, observed by Robert Haas, the protagonist and the monster are in an antagonistic position; however, in Cronenberg's films, the monster is usually the protagonist, that is, the monster comes from the protagonist himself or herself. What stands in front of the hero or heroine is himself or herself rather than something entirely alien. What they need to confront is the horror inside their body. The hero in *Shivers* needs to deal with the parasite within his body; the heroine in *Rabid* becomes a female vampire because of the phallic spike in her armpit; the hero in *Scanners* is asked to face the troublesome supernatural power in his own mind; the heroes in *Videodrome*, *Naked Lunch* (1991) and *eXistenZ* confront the confusion of reality and their hallucination. The enigma lies in that the enemy is not the other creatures, but is humans themselves. Besides, the monsters in Cronenberg's films are all postmodern ones transcending "all conventional and contemporary representations" (Haas 5). The monsters are often "the integration of human and animal and machine, between science and nature, between the mind and the body [...]" (Haas 5). The postmodern monsters are just like Donna Haraway's term, cyborgs. However, unlike Haraway's positive and optimistic viewpoints on cyborgs, Cronenberg's monsters always come to a disastrous end. The monster in *The Fly*, "Brundlefly", is the integration of human, animal and machine, but the protagonist ends in a tragic death. The postmodern creation is a failed cyborg. Indeed, not only is Brundlefly a failure but most of Cronenbergian heroes are pessimists who hold a totally

negative and morbid view of the world. It is extraordinary that “when one ‘opens up’ Cronenberg’s characters, one finds nothing—no immunity, no transcendence, no relief from the ills that plague us or the plagues that kill us” (Kauffman 124). Cronenberg’s protagonists are never heroes in this sense, they are only ordinary people suffering in the unbearable and unsolvable postmodern predicament. While the future seems full of prosperity and infinite possibilities thanks to technology, Cronenbergian monsters are incapable of finding the way out.

By exhibiting the themes exposing the social taboo and prohibition, Cronenberg successfully makes a striking impression on viewers’ consciousness, forcing them to consider their lives again. Adam Lowenstein sees the device as “shock effect.” Lowenstein uses Walter Benjamin’s idea of shock effect to argue that Cronenbergian horror is more unusual than the general horror in other movies. According to Benjamin, shock feeling is kind of “a symptom of the alienation and impoverishment of modern experience” (qtd. in Lowenstein 40). The feeling enables the spectators to keep a certain distance to examine the familiar and have a new perspective to contemplate what is going on in the modern world. The shock effect provides human beings an opportunity to enter a state of awakened consciousness. In the modern urban society, people are always too used to the trends provided by the society, so they are too obtuse and insensitive to what is going on in the world. Through the shock effect, people have a chance to awaken, to see and think of the society. What Cronenberg provides is a visceral shock to challenge the daily experience of viewers. The shock in his films is not like external and superficial threats to the spectators; instead, it stimulates the viewers’ inner reflections to contemplate the modern phenomena after seeing films. Therefore, in most of his films, the audience are unable to find any releases in the ending. Cronenberg’s film does not accord with the psychoanalysts’ expectation by presenting the catharsis at the end. According to psychoanalytic theory, the monster in the horror films should be killed or

destroyed to show that the norm can be restored finally. However, Cronenberg does not follow this psychoanalytic approach to comfort his audience with a happy ending. It is Cronenberg's style to retain the evil power or sadistic ending to intensify the shock effect to the viewers. Lowenstein finds out that "Cronenberg inhabits the ambivalent moment of transformation itself, where neither forward nor backward movement promises any definitive resolution of conflict" (41). Most of Cronenberg's movies end with the tragic death of the hero or the suspicious survival of the monster. The director refuses to give any hope to his viewers. The unsatisfactory endings intensify the shock effect that Cronenberg attempts to create for his viewers. Therefore, Cronenbergian horror images and atmosphere can easily pervade the spectators' consciousness, taking root in their mind, prompting them to rethink the world again.

IV. David Cronenberg's Science Fiction Elements

David Cronenberg's films are also categorized in the science fiction genre, but what is the definition of the genre, and what are its conventions? Why does the director like to adopt this genre? Since the term "science fiction" came into general use in the 1930s, different critics have given discrepant definitions of it in different periods. Earlier critics described science fiction as "a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision [...] Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading—they are always instructive" ("Definition of SF" 311). Here, the critic believes that only the novel with a scientific basis, the instructive functions, and even with prophetic vision can be called science fiction. Critics in the 50's and 60's considered that science fiction should be responsible for depicting the phenomena of society and human identity. It is created to "comment on our own world through the use of metaphor and extrapolation or to create genuine imaginative alternatives to our own world" ("Definition of SF" 313). Also, the genre contains the search for the definition of human and their

status in the universe. As time goes by, the modern critic Marshall McLuhan endowed the genre with the new significance of social criticism by suggesting that “science fiction writing today presents situations that enables us to perceive the potential of new technologies” (qtd. in “Definition of SF” 314). To sum up, the science fiction genre entails the capacity of instructing and educating human beings by disclosing the present social phenomena and the human position in the universe.

Cronenbergian themes are mostly consistent with the science fiction genre, since his films are capable of shaping “our concerns about the present and our fears and fantasies about the future” (“Film” 165). Among the themes the director is interested in, his concern about the relation between the human and contemporary science and technology is the most remarkable. His earlier films, like *Shivers*, *Rabid*, *The Fly*, discuss problems that medical and scientific research may cause. The diseases or the monsters in these films are all failed products of scientific or medical experiments. Also, in *Scanners* and *Dead Ringers* (1988), Cronenberg put his emphasis on reproductive technology. He notices that modern medical improvements may not achieve necessarily positive effects; on the contrary, they may bring about disastrous side effects. Furthermore, two films are concerned with the effects of modern technology, *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, in which the director attempts to figure out the possible consequences metaphorically when modern technology influences human beings. The movies he creates are all related to modern conditions now; his *mise en scène* is always set in the ordinary urban area which the spectators are quite familiar with, the diseases or the monsters he creates are quite reasonable and plausible so that the audience is willing to believe them. By means of well-developed plots, Cronenberg arouses the viewers’ horror successfully. The spectators also sense the horrible thrills that the technology brings to us. It is Cronenberg’s style to defamiliarize “the man-made technological universe that already invisibly envelops us, inaugurating the epoch of the posthuman” (Kauffman 117).

In *Rabid* and *Scanners*, he prolematizes the medical technology that surrounds modern people to remind us of the possibility of the danger of the experimental medication. The operation and the medicine look quite logical and understandable; but in fact, they do not exist in the world. By the presentation of the hypothetical technology, Cronenberg successfully defamiliarizes the existing medical technology and illustrate its potent danger in the modern world.

Not only the themes he creates are similar to the science fiction genre, the element, tracing back the origin of the horror, is one of characters of science fiction films which makes his films quite successful. It is Testa's idea that even though science fiction borrows horror's plotting, it remains its own style to explain the source of horror and suggests different concepts to explain the source (42). The offer of the explanation is significant in Cronenberg's movies for two reasons. On the one hand, since the spectators are presupposed the world of the films is fictional, the explicit explanation of cause and effect makes the plot more convincing and plausible. The other reason is that the explanation can transform the unknown into something new. When the unknown information or knowledge is added with reasonable explanation, the reader would consider it as new knowledge to absorb. The horror monsters in Cronenberg's films are not the conventional creatures in the horror films, such as supernatural ghosts or vampires; instead, they provide rational cause and effect and certain plausibility. Cronenberg's films are "neo- or pseudo-realistic, offering some attempts to account rationally for origins of their 'impossible' contents," which is consistent to the requirement of science fiction ("Film" 165). Providing the scientific explanations enables Cronenberg's spectators to be convinced of the possibility of the danger that science or technology may bring to human beings.

From the theoretical concept to Cronenberg's visually realized and specific embodiment of the ideas, it is clear that there are more and more people to pay attention

to the modern problems that technology may bring. There may be the extremely pessimistic views of seeing the relation between human beings and technology, but hope never fades away. As Anders notes, as long as people draw close the distance between the technological reality and the human imagination, human beings might be able to escape the overwhelming domination of technology.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Background

Even if most people live in the world surrounded by technology and get used to everything it provides us, some modern philosophers and thinkers have noticed the seriousness of the issue: the relationship between humans and modern technological systems.⁵ In this chapter, I would focus on Martin Heidegger, Theodor H. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and Jacques Ellul's discussions of the essence of the technology—its characteristics and its influences on human beings.

I. The Essence of Technology

Martin Heidegger can be seen as a pioneer in raising technology to a central concern in philosophy (Ihde 277). From an ontological perspective, he begins to question the essence of technology and to consider human existence in relation to it. Heidegger considers modern technology such an important issue that he believes that only when people understand it can they comprehend the modern phenomena in the modern era and prepare to respond to it. In the opening paragraph of "The Question Concerning Technology," he asserts that only when people understand the essence of technology can they obtain the real freedom of human existence (284). To Heidegger, the essence of

⁵ The so-called "modern technology" is distinguished from the manual traditional technique. The Industrial Revolution is the line of demarcation. Though different thinkers have different approaches to the issue, they are unable to deny the fundamental importance of the historical event of the Industrial Revolution which generates the inventions of machines and rationalization of production processes. For example, Friedrich Rapp, in *Analytical Philosophy of Technology*, states explicitly that "In the nineteenth century, traditional technologies based on artisan skills were fused with the physical sciences which had developed from natural philosophy" (1). Martin Heidegger also feels that modern technology is based in science and modern physics after the eighteenth century. Also Jacques Ellul does not use the term "modern" or "traditional" to distinguish the type of technology, but he sees the Industrial Revolution as a tremendous technical revolution. Evandro Agazzi, when thinking about traditional and modern technology, uses the terms "technique" and "technology" and believes that the Industrial Revolution is the beginning of modern science, which influences the development of modern technology.

technology is not concrete objects such as technological apparatuses or instruments. He endeavors to discover the essential feature common to all individual manifestations of technology. He believes that the essence of technology is “the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth” (294). It is the way of revealing by which the truth can manifest itself. The intervention of technology into human history brings forth or unconceals the veil of a thing. Technology provides the human being with the “entry into something which, of himself, he can neither invent nor in any way make” (Heidegger 313). The character of revealing challenges human beings, asking them to open the concealed knowledge within nature, transforming what has been originally stored up in the earth into natural resources. Heidegger contends that if technology becomes the sole way to uncover the truth, humans would see the world as the ordering accumulation of things exclusively reserved for humankind. The world thus changes into field abundant with energy and power that can be captured and stored.

Heidegger’s idea of revealing seems to focus on seeing technology as an instrument for human beings to explore nature. However, in the latter part of the essay, Heidegger further explains that it is technology rather than humankind that possesses the power of controlling the development; technology controls what and when to reveal. He argues, “Man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any given time the actual shows itself or withdraws” (299). Human beings are merely endowed with the destiny by technology to reveal the truth. Heidegger uses the term, enframing (*Gestell*), to give further explanation of the destiny. Enframing describes all human beings as in the position of the frame provided by the essence of technology; therefore, people are destined to explore what is hidden, to reveal what is concealed. It is the term that means “the gathering together of that setting-upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve” (302). People find themselves unexpectedly taken into the frame so that they cannot escape the destiny of

revealing. Human beings are passive to the extent that all they can do is merely respond to the call of unconcealment and follow it to unearth the concealed truth.

It is because of the passivity that human beings are going to face the danger of the essence of technology, as Heidegger argues, “where enframing reigns, there is danger in the highest sense” (Heidegger 309). To Heidegger, technology is not dangerous at all; rather, it is the essence of technology which has the power to compel people to investigate nature ceaselessly. The inability of ceasing scientific research is the source of danger. In other words, people now are so dominated by this sole way of relating to the world that they ignore all other ways. Therefore, technology becomes the sole power and its aim is total manipulation of the world (Krell 285). Under the monopoly of technology’s power, humans fall into two kinds of danger: one is that people themselves are regarded as standing-reserve resources; the other is that they are unable to grasp the meaning of their own existence. Once technology becomes the sole master of revealing, human beings are no longer concerned as living creatures with their own subjectivities, “but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve [...]” (Heidegger 308). Human beings are subordinated to the essence of technology. On the other hand, Heidegger points out that the power of enframing also obstructs people from contemplating the value of their own existence. Especially when people are obsessed with revealing the world, they may fail to recognize other perspectives on it, so that they can never recognize their existential value and their own essence. Once they become caught up in the technological framework, people easily lose their subjectivity. They merely become working machines without possessing any reflective or thinking ability. Besides recognizing the essence of technology, Heidegger also suggests its possible danger.

II. Horkheimer/Adorno and Ellul’s Ideas on Technology

These Heideggerian ideas about the essence of technology are the fundamental ideas about the nature of technology which can in various ways be seen in the other critics' observations. After World War II, the catastrophe caused by modern technological weapons awakened people who had originally been convinced that technology could bring no harm but enrichment and improvement. This thesis would like to adopt the theories of Ellul and Horkheimer/Adorno as they challenge the accepted ideology of technology. Although Horkheimer/Adorno and Ellul have quite discrepant starting points, their views are able to resonate with each other, including their definitions, characteristics and effects of technology. Whereas Horkheimer/Adorno start from Marxism, Ellul proceeds from the history of technology to its effects on economics, politics and government. In spite of the different starting points, they both construct clear pictures for readers to comprehend modern technology in their discussion. Furthermore, it is the different starting points that enable them to supplement each other's notions and at the same time make the discussions of technology more complete.

Horkheimer/Adorno and Ellul do not limit their considerations of technology to the apparatus phase, which is merely concerned with machines or instruments. Rather, their definitions of technology include the artificial methods and other surroundings which may control the masses. To Ellul, technology is "totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity" (1964, xv). That is, Ellul defines technology as the method of using the most rational process to achieve the best results with the maximum efficiency. He argues that this belief has pervaded every perspective of human life, such as economic activities, political management, etc. As he says, technology does not merely include mechanical technology but also contains the technology of "propaganda, education, and psychic manipulation came to reinforce the others" (115). Horkheimer/Adorno's concept of technology, which corresponds to Ellul's definition, "refers to method, the exploitation of others' work, and capital"

(Horkheimer/Adorno 1972, 4). Their concept of technology also consists of “system of churches, clubs, professional associations, and other groups” (Horkheimer/Adorno 1972, 149). The technological instruments also include the social institutions which enclose people in a certain ideology to achieve the aim of social control. Thus, Horkheimer/Adorno’s definition of technology is similar to Ellul’s; both of them do not limit technology in the limited frame of the facility level.

Under the expanded definition of technology, both Horkheimer/Adorno and Ellul make the same observation about it: the tendency toward totalization. Technology now becomes the sole way to comprehend and interpret society and the world. Ellul ascribes the reason for the totalization to the ceaseless search for efficiency. Heidegger finds that the essence of technology is in restless revealing, and Ellul complements the point with discovering its permanent law: the pursuit of efficiency. That is, technology has been always finding “the one best way” of revealing. Ellul writes,

When everything has been measured and calculated mathematically so that the method which has been decided upon is satisfactory from the rational point of view, and when, from the practical point of view, the method is manifestly the most efficient of all those hitherto employed or those in competition with it, then the technical movement becomes self-directing. (1964, 80)

After the precise calculation and measurement, the only thing technology is concerned about is efficiency, to the exclusion of any other criteria, such as ethics. It refuses to accept any interference which may intrude on its pursuit of efficiency. Under the single standard of development, humans can do nothing but follow this formula and succumb to the rule of efficiency.

III. The Power of Technological Rationality

However, why are people willing to obey the rule of efficiency without any objection? As Horkheimer/Adorno note in their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it is because the masses now think based on technological rationality, and therefore they fail to detect the domination of technology. Eric L. Krakauer, when studying Adorno's concepts of technology, expresses that now "technology, as the power/knowledge that generates and regenerates itself, is essentially a mode of thinking or reasoning" (23). This is what Horkheimer/Adorno called technological rationality. Technology itself has produced an ideology to compel people to adopt efficiency and speed as the supreme goal to work for. Once people have internalized this rationality, technology can easily form a seamless totality which people have no power to fight against, since they all follow that mode of thinking. Technological rationality leads "to mass society instead of classless society, conformism instead of universality, a parody of the utopian vision" (Susan Buck-Morss 173). It is the technological rationality that makes the totalization possible.

In addition, Horkheimer/Adorno also argue that Enlightenment is actually a production of technological rationalism.⁶ Here, Enlightenment "consists above all in the calculation of effectiveness and of the techniques of production and distribution; in accordance with its content, ideology expends itself in the idolization of given existence and of the power which controls technology" (Horkheimer/Adorno xvi). The ideals of the Enlightenment are nothing more than a technological instrument to dominate the masses subordinated under the given regime. In the Enlightenment ideal, science and reason, are always promoted as the most important two elements manifesting the spirit of Enlightenment. Horkheimer/Adorno believe that Enlightenment has created science and reason as a technological rationalization to carry out the efficient management of society. Enlightenment, as they say, "is the philosophy which equates the truth with scientific

⁶ Horkheimer/Adorno use the term Enlightenment to mean the ideas (e.g. reason, progress, order) that the historical Enlightenment of the eighteenth century promised to human beings.

systematization,” and on the other hand, “science itself is not conscious of itself; it is only a tool” (85). Science, in the sense of technology, is merely a method to create a criterion for the masses to follow.

Seeing science as a product of technological means rather than a pre- knowledge of technology verifies Heidegger’s concept of the essence of technology: science is the result of the process of revealing manifested by technology. Modern technology is considered applied science; nevertheless, Heidegger believes that “the essence of technology is [...] historically, ontologically, prior to modern science itself” (Ihde 281). Modern technology may appear later than modern physical science, but the essence of technology is definitely earlier than science. The characteristic of the essence has the enframing power which enables people to amass scientific knowledge. Thus, science is the consequence of the revealing of technology.

This essential interpretation of technology provides us with a good approach and point from which to scrutinize the relation between science and technology in contemporary society. Both Horkheimer/Adorno and Ellul observe that science now functions as the instrument of technology, regardless of how it appeared in earlier historical periods. Ellul notices that the time between scientific discovery and technical application gets shorter and shorter. The compression of time refers to the fact that the existence of scientific activity is now entirely governed by the use of technology. Science has become an instrument of technology. Horkheimer/Adorno also notice that science is now associated with “the interests of industrial society, of a society intent on ever greater economic, military, and political power” (34). That is, now science becomes the pure pursuit of power, rather than pursuit of abstract knowledge. It is no longer physical science that generates modern technology; rather, it is subordinated to become one of the elements to achieve technological ends.

IV. The Impact on Human Beings

According to Horkheimer/Adorno, the Enlightenment concept of rationality and science, as parts of technological rationality, indeed help technology form a totalitarian thought system for human beings. Technological rationality now has become the censor that controls human's way of thinking so that they are unable to claim their individual thoughts. According to Ellul, "thought or will can only be realized by borrowing from technical [...] modes of expression" (1964, 418). In the domination of technology, when people need to see or judge the validity of things, they need technological rationality and reason to form the criteria of so called objectification. Influenced by technological rationality, only through the examination of scientific knowledge and logical reason can human beings obtain "correct" ideas. Human beings must think according to the particular mode of thinking. Moreover, under the technological rationality, whoever dares to "resign himself to life without any rational reference to self-preservation would, [...] regress to prehistory" (Horkheimer/Adorno 29). Those who refuse the scientific or rational thought would immediately be categorized as the outsider in our culture and be cast away from the society. People are forced to stay within the frame of technological rationality. To cross the boundary is not possible since the technological rationality has enframed the world in a certain way for humans to follow.

Staying within this limited range of thought, losing the critical ability, people are now "mass men" who have lost their subjectivity (Horkheimer/Adorno xvi and Ellul 1964, 405). They are not able to possess individual and personal impressions and feelings nor are they capable of any independent judgment or critical thinking. Controlled by the ideal of instrumental rationality, human beings cannot think otherwise but follow a standard process consisting of apprehension, classification, and calculation—the standard process of scientific investigation—in order to pursue

efficiency. Impressions and feelings do not belong to the category of science or rationality because in the realm of science, everything should be examined from the standpoint of precise calculation. Horkheimer/Adorno criticize this technological rationality that has turned thought into a mere instrument, that is, “mathematical procedure became, so to speak, the ritual of thinking. In spite of the axiomatic self-restriction, it establishes itself as necessary and objective. It turns thought into a thing, an instrument” (24). Therefore, people now are changed into collectivities of “mass men” without any peculiar individual thought. Ellul also observes the phenomenon of “mass men” in his *The Technological Society*, stating that technological society would “contribute to making man a mass man and help put an end to what has hitherto been considered the normal type of humanity” (405). The goal of technology is to control human beings and to force them to have all the same ideals, the same purposes, so that they are not various individuals but a conforming collectivization. Since people become a universal and conforming mass, they do not possess their own opinions. Once technological rationality has been internalized in human beings, the mass men are shaped, and technology is capable of dominating people without any difficulties.

Not only do human beings lose their thinking ability, they are also deprived of the freedom of choice. The principal rule of technology is the pursuit of efficiency, and people now are obsessed with this kind of technological rationality. Therefore, the choice they make is merely to follow what technology wants them to make. Ellul, when noticing efficiency is the major determinant in society, remarks that now human beings “can decide only in favor of the technique that gives the maximum efficiency” (1964, 80). What is determinant to influence the decisions is technological requirement rather than humans’ personal considerations. Human beings merely function as ones who record effects and results of technology. What technology is concerned with is to strike the balance between technological and economic efficiency and human beings are merely the

components which help it to accomplish the goal. Likewise, Horkheimer/Adorno also indicate that the mass men are always convinced that they have freedom of choice; however, what they choose “always reflects economic coercion—everywhere proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same” (167). The decision is economically or technologically oriented. It is not human beings who are autonomous; rather, the supreme purpose of technology, the pursuit of efficiency, has determined everything.

Under the premise of the pursuit of efficiency, human beings become merely cogs of the whole technological system. Human intervention is incidental and merely causes technology to achieve its purpose. Ellul notices that “anyone who is sufficiently up-to-date technically can make a valid discovery which rationally follows its predecessors and rationally heralds what is to follow” (90). What is important is not the human ability anymore, since anyone who has technological rationality can execute technological procedures. It is not the human wisdom to invent anything new but technological thinking that makes the new discovery possible. Human beings are merely the objects overpowered by technology to achieve technological intention, that is, irresistible pursuit of progress.

The single-minded thinking controlled by technology and humans who have become the instruments of technology indeed reflects Heideggerian ideas of the danger which comes from seeing technological revealing as the sole approach to explore the world. Heidegger in his essay argues that once human beings are totally dependent on technological way to reveal the truth, they fall into the danger caused by technology. Whereas Heidegger views the possible danger in epistemological terms, Horkheimer/Adorno and Ellul observe a realistic danger in the modern society. The danger remarked in Heidegger’s essay is also warned of by Ellul and Horkheimer/Adorno: Everyone is a “mass man”, lacking in subjectivity and critical ability and free will.

Moreover, technological rationality alienates human beings from nature for the

sake of scientific knowledge. With the Enlightenment spirit, human beings are driven by such an intolerable fear of the unknown that they are eager to investigate everything hidden in nature. However, this is the impulse that drives people away from being intimate with nature since it now is merely the place where people can obtain knowledge. Under the influence of Enlightenment instrumental rationality, there is a dichotomy between science and nature: whereas science represents the known and progressive, nature is chaotic, and primitive. Krakauer, when studying Horkheimer/Adorno's ideas, states that the forming of science or knowledge is the process of dominating nature. "To produce knowledge by joining with nature," Krakauer expresses, "is to comply with and follow 'her.' It is to pursue 'her' in the sense of studying and exploring, inspecting, and invading 'her.' It is to penetrate her secrets, to know her in such a way as to give rise to instruments of domination" (21). It is through the continued pursuit of scientific discovery and knowledge that human beings begin to see nature as the other, the enemy. Horkheimer/Adorno also finds out "For civilization, pure natural existence, animal and vegetative, was the absolute danger" (31). The critic Ellul also observes the same dichotomy. He believes that technique or science, and nature are two opposite elements by arguing "the two worlds obey different imperatives different directives, and different laws which have nothing in common" (79). It is also Ellul's contention that by pursuing technological progress and development, the artificiality destroys and eliminates the natural world. Nature is sacrificed in the name of the purpose of achieving the scientific or technological discovery.

While human nature is obsessed with technological rationality proposing the world as knowable and setting up itself against nature, it has lost its first nature and fallen under the domination of the second mechanic nature. According to Friedrich Rapp, the first nature is the "autogenous nature, untouched by human intervention", and on the other hand, the second nature is "technological invention" (118). Because of technological

intrusion, human nature becomes inorganic losing closeness with nature. Rapp quotes Ernst Cassirer, “In the moment in which man signed himself away to the harsh law of technological work, a multitude of immediate and spontaneous pleasures, which organic existence and purely organic activity had afforded him, were lost forever” (Rapp 122). People now subordinate their immanent organic nature in order to pursue the increasing efficiency of mechanical procedures. Ellul, when considering the same question about technology and human nature, also expresses that once facing the ceaseless pursuit of efficiency, human beings “must be made to yield his heart and will, as he had yielded his body and brain” (115). Moreover, losing the inner nature is the origin of anxiety in human beings. People are unable to achieve the sense of inner balance from the second nature when there is still a deep desire for pursuing the inner harmony through the first nature instead of technological pursuit of economic or industrial interests. This disequilibrium “has produced the climate of anxiety and insecurity characteristic of our epoch and of our neuroses, [...]” (Ellul 333). Submitting oneself to the second nature does not merely represent the disappearance of our nature and heart, it causes inevitable anxiety and neurosis.

Technological invasion has forced human beings into a helpless condition, including losing their first immanent nature, their thinking ability, and their freedom of choice. Humans now are reduced to merely the instrument of technology losing their subjectivity. They can only define themselves only as things, as static numbers to enable the technological system to work out. As Adorno marks, “In many people it is already an impertinence to say ‘I’” (qtd. in Buck-Morss 180). Under the overwhelming intrusion of technology, it is doubtful that people can still possess their original human nature and their consciousness to fight against the domination of the technological. How can humans now claim themselves as autonomous subjectivity? Human beings are helpless to deal with all these problems and save their subjectivity. Ellul also believes that under

the technological domination, people can hardly find their outlets except in madness. “According to Ellul,” John Wilkinson, translator of *The Technological Society* says, “there are ominous signs that human spontaneity, which in the rational and ordered technical society has no expression except madness, is only too capable of outbreaks of irrational suicidal destructiveness” (xvii). It is Ellul’s contention that going mad is the simplest remedy to cure the anxiety and disequilibrium when confronting technology. In the total technological determinism, is it still possible for human beings to survive under the overwhelmingly technological power?

V. An Exit from Technological Domination

How can human beings face the predicament? In the context of overwhelming technological domination, is it possible for people to find a solution? Both Heidegger and Horkheimer/Adorno provide a similar response to the question: critical thinking and radical art as the other way of seeing the world. To Heidegger, one of the ways to fight against the excessive mastery of technology is that people must address critical questions to technology to defeat its mastery. Heidegger believes that “essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology, and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. [...] For questioning is the piety of thought” (317). People need to adopt two approaches to understand the essence of technology; one is closed to the essence, and the other is to keep a distance from it, questioning it. Questioning technology critically is the starting point to understanding the essence and the danger. Horkheimer/Adorno have a similar opinion with Heidegger. For them, maintaining critical thinking is also the way to refuse technological rationality and to maintain human subjectivity. This critical thinking, for Horkheimer/Adorno, means “a movement, an ongoing reflection, questioning, and self-differentiation” (Krakauer 59). The capacity should enable individuals to have the

critical minds to ponder the status quo and to question the existence value of technology in the modern world. Susan Buck-Morss also points out Horkheimer/Adorno's approach to resist technology is "to maintain a position of relentless negativity, which in no way made peace with the status quo and hence kept alive the critical independence of the subject, salvaging it from social extinction and historical oblivion" (173). Horkheimer/Adorno's hero must be an outsider who is strong enough to defy the traditions of their tides. Both Heidegger and Horkheimer/Adorno believe that only when people question the existence of technology and modern conditions is it possible to resist the power of technology.

The other solution is through the presentation of art. From Friedrich Hölderlin's poem, Heidegger draws an inspiration: "But where danger is, grows/The saving power also.../...poetically dwells man upon this earth" (original ellipsis in Heidegger, 316). He believes that the essence of technology can bring human beings an entrance into the truth which, though it contains danger, also holds out the saving power, *poiēsis*. The danger mainly comes from seeing technology as the primary sole way to reveal so that it threatens the possibility of all other revealing to the point that everything will be "consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve" (Heidegger 315). Once technology becomes the sole method of interpreting the world, the world becomes the instrumental resources for technological uses. Therefore, he believes that people should enrich the other approaches of revealing which can avoid the danger of technological totality. Heidegger traces back to the origin of the word technology and finds out that the original one, *technē*, also means fine art of *poiēsis*. The philosopher reminds human beings that the *technē* of art has been the sole revealing in Greece in ancient time and people should not neglect the approach to knowledge that it offers. By considering the same derivation, Heidegger emphasizes the primal thinking of the poet, seeing art as the other mode of revealing which can open new

possibilities of other knowledge or life style. Heidegger contends, “Why did art bear the modest name *technē*? Because it was a revealing that brought forth and made present, and therefore belonged within *poiēsis*” (316). To Heidegger, art, compared to technology, is not only the other way to present and to manifest the world, but also the main power to work against the technological totality. As Heidegger argues, “essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology, and, on the other, fundamentally different from it” (317). A realm totally consistent with such a description is art. Art is the way to assist human beings to question, and confront the dominant power of technology.

Moreover, Horkheimer/Adorno also believe that the radical modernist art can present and challenge the techno-administered world.⁷ Krzysztof Ziarek, when comparing Heidegger and Adorno, marks that “In Adorno’s terms, we could say that art is radical when it realizes its own relation to the modern techno-rationality at the same time that it lays bare its non-identity, its difference from technicity” (352). To Adorno, it is only when the art is radical that technological rationality and its contemporary manifestations can be challenged and the technological structure loosened. Horkheimer/Adorno insist on the necessity of the artist being absolutely radical and not swinging with modern social trends.

For the radical art, Günther Anders also provides his idea towards the solution of the technological society. Anders believes that people should employ art to build up the gap between the reality and the imagination. According to Anders, the predicament people face today is that they are unable to grasp the effect of technological results in the future. “Not only our reason has its limits,” he expresses, “not only it is finite, but also our imagination, and even more so our feeling”(130). Human beings are now so unable

⁷ Radical art in my argument is defined as the embodiment of critical reason, which is opposed to technological rationality. Cronenberg’s films in my interpretation are a successful example of radical art in terms of its critical reasoning power. In other words, the postmodern practice is excluded in my defining radical art despite the fact that radical art could also take postmodern form in the sense of uprooting reason.

to comprehend or imagine what has happened in the technological world that they are unable to predict the apocalypse which may come upon us in the future. On the other hand, modern technology is too “far outside the sphere of those actions which we can visualize and toward which we can take an emotional position” (Anders 130). For modern people, technology is too abstruse, so that we are incapable of making the proper emotional response to it. Thus, there is a broad gap between the technological reality and our imagination. All we can do now is to depend on the radical art to bridge the gap. Human beings need the artists who are endowed with the radical thinking to create the artistic presentation for the ordinary people to grasp the effect that technology may bring to us. To Anders, art is the only solution to enrich our imagination, to predict what might happen in the future.

The works of art are seen as a medium for humans to retain their clear mind and critical thinking towards the contemporary society. Heidegger, Adorno, and Anders all endow art a significant meaning to keep people awake. To the critics, to appreciators, art can be viewed as a source of revolutionary power; however, to the creators of art, the artists, the art cannot be created under the demands of social responsibility or it may not possible to create a good piece of art. David Cronenberg, when creating his films, does not have any social or moral ideas in mind, since he believes that, “As soon as you talk about social or political responsibility, you’ve amputated the best limbs you’ve got as an artist” (Breskin 66). However, the fact that he has no social and political responsibility in mind does not mean that the presentation of his films do not have any moral meanings. In fact, his art is full of philosophical reflections on the contemporary society. The director has a serious attitude towards art, “I take the art of cinema seriously and I think it should do what art can do, and I would separate it from pure entertainment alone. It’s meant to do more than that. Cinema has incredible and vast potential” (Kjolseth). Such an attitude is similar to that Adorno and Anders who expect the art endowed with the

value of retaining people's critical mind towards the modern world. The potential of films Cronenberg suggests here is also consistent with Heidegger, Adorno and Anders' expectation of art: the critical thinking and the bridge to connect the gap. Through Cronenberg's films, one not only can maintain one's critical thinking but arouse the imagination about the future. The critics and the director all have the same expectation of what art can achieve. Even though Cronenberg does not have the morality nor certain purposes in mind when directing the films, he hopes that the viewers are still able to get the inspiration and make the responses after seeing his films.

Chapter Four

The Convergence between Humans and Technological Machines

The philosophy concerned with technology provided by Heidegger, Horkheimer/Adorno, and Ellul gives the readers one of the approaches to understand the essence and the effects of technology. In this thesis, I would like to argue that Cronenberg's films, *The Fly*, *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, not only reflect these theories but also present the increasing domination of technology and the diminishment of the consciousness and humanity of human beings. In order to demonstrate the process more clearly, a movement is going to be discussed here: the convergence of machines and human beings. In the three films, it is clear that there is a tendency that human beings become more and more technological and for technology to become more human.

I. The Inclination of Machines to Humans

Technology plays an important role in the three films, being demonstrated in the form of various mechanical devices. In the first film, *The Fly*, the scientist, Seth Brundle, has serious motion sickness, so that he devotes himself to producing a machine which can transport objects without any movement. The machines appearing in the film are one big computer, three chrysalis-like teleportation pods, and the connecting cables. In *Videodrome*, the hero, Max Renn, has serious hallucination problems because of video images; hence the technological devices in the movie mainly are television sets and video recorders. In the third film, *eXistenZ*, the director deliberately eliminates the hardware devices to establish the scenes of virtual reality; therefore, no familiar modern technology, such as televisions, cell phones or machine guns, appears in the film. The facilities that enable the characters to merge into the virtual reality are a nipple-like metaflash game

pod and a transmission line called UmbyCord which is just like a human umbilical cord. The development of devices above is related to the plot directly so the viewers can observe the convergence of machines and human beings from the series films.

The process of the convergence between machines and human beings is shown in the three films. In *The Fly*, the pieces of equipment in Brundle's laboratory retain their traditional solid mechanical shapes. Even Helen W. Robbins believes that the teleportation pods are womb-like, but it is easy to tell that the machines are still made of metal and glass. They are merely shaped like the human organs but are produced from inert materials. However, the machines in the film actually attempt to learn how to become more human. In the initial period, the scientist's experiment is not totally successful, since the pods can only teleport "inanimate objects." It is after his sexual affair with the heroine Veronica Qualife that the scientist finds the key to solving the problem. He figures out that the sense of "the flesh" is lost when the computer is translating the protocol; he decides to teach the computer to understand and to learn something about the flesh and blood of creatures. In the film, Brundle explains to Veronica excitedly about the element the computer lacks, the flesh which "should make the computer crazy, like those old ladies pinching babies" (*The Fly*). Brundle teaches the computer how to have such a desire towards the flesh. He endows the inorganic computer with human desire. The step by which the computer acquires the human desire is the key to Brundle's final success, but simultaneously, it is also the beginning of his misfortune—his transformation into "Brundlefly". As Adam Knee argues, "It is when the technology becomes compatible with the flesh, when it has access to the mysteries of human existence, that it is able to put Seth through a kind of computerized intercourse with a fly" (26). As the machine moves towards the human, the scientist moves toward his tragedy. In the first movie, the machines here retain their fixed shapes: heavy, hard, and solid. The machines still need to be taught how to be more human or they are unable

to comprehend animate creatures. The machines require the special order from humans to know what they need to execute. The scientist needs to key in his questions or demands in such a way that the computer can respond to them. The mechanical apparatuses and human beings are clearly distinguished from each other, since a special computer codes and protocols are needed for their intercommunication and understanding.

In the second film, *Videodrome*, the technological machines become much more fleshy and human, compared to those in *The Fly*. Steven Shaviro in his book *The Cinematic Body* describes the technology in the film as follows: “Video technology is no longer concerned merely with disembodied images. It reaches directly into the unseen depths, stimulating the ganglia and the viscera, caressing and remolding the interior volume of the body” (141). The technology in the film does not remain at the mechanical level but reaches deeply into to animate the function of the human organs. Dr. Brian O’Blivion appears on the television screen explaining to Max why he produces the scum show, *Videodrome*, and claims, “the television screen is the retina of the mind’s eye. Therefore, the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain” (*Videodrome*). The doctor believes that television in the contemporary society has become one of the organs of human beings, so that people need to see and comprehend things through the television screen. Dr. O’Blivion not only makes this declaration but actually practices his theory: he has not met with others face to face for many years, according to his daughter. He insists on seeing others only by means of the television. Since the television screen is his retina, through the television, he addresses the other people directly. Therefore, as Max watches the videotape, O’Blivion can address him and talk to him directly. Appearing on the television, the doctor seems to notice that Max does not listen very carefully, so he says to him, “Max, I am so glad you came to me. I’ve been through it all myself, you see” (*Videodrome*). The television, instead of being a mere conveyor of images, becomes the doctor himself because the television screen is

now his eyes. Furthermore, during the explanation of O'Blivion, Nicki Brand straps the doctor into his chair, strangles him, and substitutes O'Blivion to talk to Max. She keeps summoning Max, "Come to me now. Come to Nicki. Don't keep me waiting, please, please" (*Videodrome*). It is at this moment that the television set starts to become animate: It begins to pulse and undulate with Nicki's breath and to be soft, so that even Max's head can be drawn into the screen which is occupied by Nicki's mouth. The television set becomes fleshy, so that Max can touch it as if he were touching Nicki. The screen, at that moment, is like Nicki's mouth, tender and flexible. Furthermore, not only can the set become flesh-like, even the video cassettes are animated. When Harlen is going to put a cassette into Max's stomach, the cassette itself becomes organic to fit into the human body. In the second film, the hard-shaped technological machines turn into living creatures which connect with human beings directly. The machine, television, becomes so animate and human-like that it can seduce the hero to touch it, kiss it. As the cassette becomes soft, it can be accepted in the hero's stomach. The more human the machines become, the more intimate they are with human beings.

In the third film, *eXistenZ*, the machines are directly composed of organic genes, flesh, and neurons. The film review journalist, Matthew Ryan, notices the characteristic of the machine in *eXistenZ*: "The representation of technology as an imposed order, or as a means to control human and natural environments, is replaced by a kind of organic ubiquity. Soft and meaty machines are everywhere, like microbes or creeping weeds" (3). The game pod and the gun are the most revealing organic machines in the film. The pod Allegra is designed to restore the program and data for players to download the game, which may be compared to the current day disks. However, the pod is completely different from the concrete disk. Instead, it is a living mobile game pod that has its own life. Kiri Vinokur, an engineer in the film explains the pod to the novice, "The *eXistenZ* game-pod is basically an animal, Mr. Pikul. It's grown from fertilized

amphibian eggs stuffed with synthetic DNA” (*eXistenZ*). Therefore, the electronic pod is made from animals’ cells and nervous system. Cronenberg himself explains that the “game pod is almost like an organ. It is like an external organ that’s—it’s as though human body has developed an organ especially designed to play games, you know, to make game—playing more realistic” (D’arcy). It is a lively creature which moans when it is hit and gets infected by viruses. In fact, when the pod is hit, Allegra brings it to Vinokur trying to remedy her pod instead of fixing it. The operation of the pod is just like the metabolism of an animal. When the pod is infected by the deadly spores, Allegra uses an antidote called “sporicide” to heal it. Both ways of treating the pod are not the usual approach to fixing machines; rather, it is like healing an animal or human using surgery or antibiotics as a remedy.

Furthermore, the other significant mechanical equipment is the pistol. Instead of the traditional metal gun, it is “made of bone and gristle, almost like the half-decayed body of a small mammal whose snout is the barrel, and whose rigid hind leg is the trigger. Instead of bullets, the gun shoots human teeth” (Maslin). Designed to pass all kinds of metal or synthetic detectors, the new weapon is composed of different parts of animal and human bodies. In order to emphasize its difference from the traditional machine guns, Cronenberg even demonstrates how to put together this kind of weapon. In the Chinese restaurant, the two main characters are asked to order “the special”, and what they are served is mutant reptiles and amphibians, which can provide “new and previously unimagined taste sensations,” according to the Chinese waiter. While enjoying the meal, Ted puts the bones together to form the pistol. Besides showing how to assemble the gun, the most obvious way to illustrate that the gun is animated is in the scene in which the gun is punched by the waiter, when he does this, we see the gun is bleeding. It is incarnated in the element of flesh and blood, so that it is wounded rather than simply broken. In this film, the machines are no longer cold, mechanical, or electronic but

become living creatures.

From the three films, the developmental process of machines can be examined in their external transition from pure mechanical conformations to organic structures. Cronenberg emphasizes that “Since I see technology as being an extension of human body, it’s inevitable that it should come home to roost” (Blackwelder). It is a tendency for technology to be more and more human since it extends from the human body originally. Therefore, with this development, the machines are more and more similar to organic creatures. That machines become more human suggests that technology is more autonomous, free, out of human beings’ control. In the first film, the computer and the scientist are still in separate categories, and they need the particular computer language to comprehend each other. Their communication is slow and inefficient; the scientist needs to key in many questions to know what exactly the machines do to him. In addition, in *The Fly*, the machines do not distribute any messages or information to lure the scientist; rather, it is Brundle himself who is a desperate scientist with his experimental teleportation pod. In the second film, *Videodrome*, the television set can directly become human-like: it pulses like a human body, it is soft like human skin. The television set is a solid object, but Dr. O’Blivion has made it a component of human organs. Though the machines are not yet totally organic, they can change into organic form to seduce the hero. Instead of being passive and only listening to the host’s orders, the machine in the second movie is more active and capable of understanding the psychology of human beings. The machine is able to control the hero’s consciousness and command him to do anything. It is not like the computer in *The Fly*, which can merely respond to the scientist’s order and execute what he asks. In the third movie, *eXistenZ*, the machines are not solid anymore; moreover, they, like vivid creatures, are made of organic genes like human beings. They don’t need to obey the master’s demands or wear the firm and awkward shapes; now they are like animals which have their own figures and lives. Moreover, the facilities in

eXistenZ are so advanced that it is unnecessary for them to command anything to humans since the two subjects are completely fused together. It is impossible to separate the two. Humans and machines are in the situation of symbiosis; therefore, it is unnecessary for the machines to seduce humans to be intimate with technology anymore. In the beginning of the film, since Allegra Geller is hurt by a bullet, her baby pod is damaged as well. As Kiri Vinokur, the mechanic of the game pod, gives Ted Pikul an infected bio-port, the pod is also infected and the whole game system is going to die. Since the facilities and the human beings are in a symbiotic relation, how can humans have power to resist machines? With this development, it becomes clear that by getting more and more similar to organic subjects, the machines gain more and more power to control human beings.

II. The Tendency of Humans toward Technology

In addition to the trend of technology moving towards the organic, human beings themselves are also unable to retain their pure organic unity. The human body is compelled to accept the combination of technology. Scott Bukatman believes that the body always plays a significant role in Cronenberg's movies since his theme is always on "the invasion of the body." The body is the metaphorical location for the presentation of profound social anxiety. According to Bukatman, the body becomes a dimension, "a contained and closed circulatory system prone to infection and disruption" (83). By opening the interior body to an exterior and to public gaze, Cronenberg shows how technology invades human beings gradually. In addition, Bart Testa notices that the body in Cronenberg's films is presented as the written body: the human body is penetrated by languages, written words, and ideology. He quotes Michel Foucault, "The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)" (62). According to Foucault, the body, like the mind, is also the site to be influenced by any events and

thoughts.

In Cronenberg's films, the body gradually opens to accept technology. Not only is there a trend in which the mechanical technology moves toward the organism, but human beings themselves incline to be technologized, namely, they are not in pure animate forms but bounded with some mechanical elements. However, the more they are technologized, the more they are captured in a small cage. Again, from *The Fly* to *eXistenZ*, the degree of increasingly technologized phenomena can be observed. In the first film, though the scientist is crazy about his new invention, the technology does not impose on the human body directly except the tragic ending of the fusion of the telepod, Brundle and the fly. It is in the last scene that helpless Brundle falls out of the telepod physically fused with the part of the frame of the door and the telepod. The fusion of the technology merely offers a desperate abyss for the hero.

In the second film, *Videodrome*, the hero is not like the one in *The Fly* who keeps a certain distance from the technology. Max's body is wounded and opened by technology apparently. There is a vagina-like split, a wound, in Max's stomach while he is watching the videotape which Bianca, the daughter of Dr. O'Blivion, gives to him. Bart Testa believes this is the evidence that the human body is written by the video images: "O'Blivion speaks and what he says does actually transform the body" (70). In the videotape, the doctor advocates the coming of a new organ, the tumor in his head, which can control our hallucination and change human reality. He claims, "After all, there is nothing real outside our perception of reality, is there?" (*Videodrome*). As Max watches, he holds his gun scratching his stomach. Just after the moment Max watches the declaration, he finds that a slit opens in his own stomach, into which the gun disappears. The new brain tumor, O'Blivion claims, has produced certain hallucination in the hero, so that he perceives a split in his stomach. Cronenberg presents the metaphor by opening Max's body to prove that O'Blivion's words indeed incise and inscribe the human body.

The human body is not injured only by cutting and exposing its inside out. Furthermore, the human body is also technologized with the equipment of the gun. The gun does not disappear in the movie; instead, the next time Max is going to use it, it emerges again from his stomach and extends black metal tendrils into his hand. The gun and the hero become the one.

Also, Max' body becomes a cassette machine which plays the videotapes made by Barry Convex, Bianca O'Blivion and Harlan. Since Max is addicted to the video images of Videodrome, he starts to have serious hallucination problems, and his body becomes a cassette recorder for others to inscribe. In *Videodrome*, Max's body is used as a video recorder three times. The first time is forced by Convex who orders Max to kill his partners in Civic TV for the ownership of channel 83. When Convex takes the pulsing videotapes to Max, he says, "I want you to open up, Max. Open up to me. I've got something I want to play for you" (*Videodrome*). Then, he puts the tape into Max's split in his stomach. Max becomes the killing machine which is compelled to carry out Convex's demands. The second time is for Bianca who incises Max's body again to remove Convex's original order to replace her own command—to destroy the show Videodrome. Now the Max body is filled up with another video cassette, he now plays the other's content, Bianca's command: "And now that you are the video word made flesh, you know what you have to do. You turn against Videodrome. You use the weapons they've given you to destroy them" (*Videodrome*). As a machine, Max's body is open to everyone to write into and change the cassettes in order to control his behavior. The third time, as Harlan gets a videotape and is eager to change his program, the Max machine accomplishes Bianca's order and destroys Harlan by turning his hand into a ticking organic grenade. Max becomes a mechanical device used by other people, as Bukatman concludes; the consequence is that "Image addiction reduces the subject to the status of a videotape player/recorder; the human body becomes a part of the massive

system of reproductive technology” (89).

In the film, the hero's body continues being disclosed, opened and incised by various kinds of languages and technology. From being exposed in the Videodrome signal to the machine of playing the cassette, Max's body does not function like the original pure organism. Instead, it turns the body to the machine that others can mold, shape, and incise arbitrarily. As the observations by Arthur Kroker and Michael Dorland, Max is initially a master to order to pirate a “Pittsburgh-based signal diffusing sadomasochistic sex, until his own body becomes the pirated and vaginal site of Videodrome tapes” (15). The film is the presentation of the progress to describe how the hero develops from the organic forms to the technologized body, from the master of Civic TV to the organs of the videotape machine.

In the third film, *eXistenZ*, the technology is not like the one in *Videodrome* that keeps invading the human body, but instead, it has already found a place in the heroes' spine. There is an orifice in the back of their body, called a bio-port in the film. It serves as the way to install the program of the game; then the umbilical cord plugs into the human spine with the main pod on the other side. As the port, its job is to accept UmbyCord to receive the information. The characters' neuron system, as a transporting channel, downloads the outward information enabling his/her whole body to function in Virtual Reality. In order to make the game smooth and animated, the nervous system needs to fully engage with the game architecture. That's why the orifice is fitted directly on the human spine. The body is seen as a communication network in which the spine is a connecting line transferring the outward messages to the body. The human body is not seen as an entity but as a mainframe of the computer to connect to the bio-port. In addition, the human body also functions as the battery to support the port. When the trainee Ted Pikul asks a naïve question about where the battery of the pod is, Allegra replies, “you're the power source: Your body, your nervous system, your metabolism, you

energy. You get tired, run down, it won't run properly" (*eXistenZ*). The human body cannot be an inner closed circulatory system but opens to connect with other mechanical devices. Thus, adding a technological organ to the human body is like upgrading the technology to fit the rapidly changing world.

With respect to the creative organ, the director sees it as a new organ of human beings. Cronenberg offers his explanation:

Why not invent new sexual organs? We could do it. In a way it's happening with all the penile extensions, vaginal surgery, and god knows what else. We're messing around with it anyway, so why not go further and have another new orifice? Women can have penises and men can have vaginas, or the equivalent. And if we don't want the baggage of past sexual history, we can call them something else—we can call them a bioport. It's a new sex which doesn't necessarily involve any of the old mechanisms of sex because they're not needed anymore. (Spletzer)

From this explanation we see that Cronenberg is expressing the idea that since humans have now all blended with the mechanical technology anyway, having a new orifice, regardless of the traditional idea of sex, is merely one more invention. He believes that the fusion of technology and human beings is an irresistible trend, so in *eXistenZ* he creates the image of the bio-port, which directly attaches to the human body.

Again, from the first film to the third one, we can observe a tendency for the human being to be more and more mechanical and technologized. In *The Fly*, except for the hero's fusion with the teleportation pod in the end, the hero does not connect with the technology directly and obviously. Though the film presents a process of bodily decay, it is due to a fusion with the animal rather than with machines. Instead of breaking the boundary between technology and human beings, the first film shows a clear demarcation between the two different categories. When Brundle's body suffers its gradual

metamorphosis into the fly, every part of his body loses its function gradually. There is a scene in which, while his teeth start falling out and his mouth begins to vomit a white liquid as a fly's might, he still types on his keyboard, trying to figure out the solution to save his own life. Murray Smith notices that the contrast between organic organs and inorganic keyboard is emphasized in this scene: "The dissolution of his body into this organic goop is highlighted by its contrast with the hard, clean edges of machine technology—as, for example, when a handful of teeth and a mouthful of blood dribble from Brundle's mouth onto his computer keyboard" (74). Using the representation of the scene, the director shows that in contrast to the technological hardware, the organic body is decaying to a more primitive phase. In the first film, the human body is not penetrated directly by technology yet.

In the second and third films, though the characters both are bounded with technology, the degrees, experiences and effects are different. In *Videodrome*, the hero is not technologized initially. Moreover, the opening of the split and the attachment of the gun are due to an outer force: exposure to massive video images. It is out of Max's control to resist the embodiment of the technologized body. However, in *eXistenZ*, the technological orifice exists in the beginning of the film. The device of bio-port seems a standard outfit that everyone needs in this future world. As Allegra argues, "it's the game everybody's already playing" (*eXistenZ*). Almost everyone is glad to accept the new organ in the human body to experience virtual reality, and that is quite different from the characters in *Videodrome*. Moreover, in *Videodrome*, it seems that very few persons are involved in the scum show, so only Max is the focus to be observed of the body penetrated by technology. However, in the third film, almost everybody is exposed to the technological surroundings. Everyone's body is equipped with mechanical technology. The human body is penetrated more thoroughly and extensively in *eXistanZ* than in *Videodrome*. From the first film to the third one, it is clear to see the process of the

convergence of the human beings to the mechanic technology.

For the human body to be more technological is going to have fatal consequences for human beings. Like Testa quotes Foucault's ideas, once the body becomes the site of invasion, "the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of substantial unity), and a volume in disintegration" is observed in his films (48). Bukatman also expresses the same argument, "Cronenberg's spatialization of both bodily and viral forces presents a collision [...] of the usurpation and dissolution of individual power" (83). By showing the body as the site of invasion of technology, Cronenberg shows the possible results of the invasion: the dissolution of the human power. From the process of being more and more close to the machines, or even being fusing with them, humans possess less and less subjectivity.

From the three films, the viewers can feel that there is indeed a convergence, in other words, that the technology has become more human and animated, while the human body has become technologized more completely and thoroughly. From this development, the more machines are similar to the human species, the more powerful they are to dominate human beings. Besides the trends that technology gets close to humans, humans themselves incline more and more to technology. The fusion with machines only causes the result that humans possess less and less power to control their lives. Becoming more and more like machines does not accord to the idea of an evolutionary progress of historical development. As the critic Murray Smith finds out, the fusion of the mechanic and the human body cannot achieve any progress at all: "for Cronenberg the convergence of machine technology and the human body only seems to highlight the differences between the two" (75). The two different categories fail to coexist in and blend successfully and harmoniously in humans. The fusion of the two different categories does not bring any progressive evolution to human beings; instead, Cronenberg's films manifest that violation of the boundary would only push human

beings into the desperate abyss. As Kauffman believes, this kind of fusion “does not necessarily connote ‘Enlightenment progress,’ the melding of organic with inorganic does not automatically insure either a happy ending or utopia” (132). The convergence fails to create any progressive evolution or positive advantages to human beings.

Chapter Five

The Tremendous Effects on Human Beings

The convergence of humans and machines is a tendency observable in the three films. But why has this phenomenon happened now? Why do humans not resist these developments? I believe the reason is quite simple: technological rationality has been embedded in the human mind to such an extent that what people think depends on this single criterion. Because of technological rationality, people are incapable of escaping the fate of being fused with mechanical technology. How can people elude the transformation to technologized body when they themselves think and behave according to the ideology that it provides?

I. The Influences of Technological Rationality

Besides the philosophical critique against it in Chapter Three, technological rationality is particularly persuasive for its close connection with the cultural dominance of science, reason, and logic. The reason in question is actually, in Siegfried Krakauer's words, "the unreason of self-blinding technological rationality as a leveling of all qualities into mere quantities" (26). It renders the world into quantities which science can explain, control and understand. Technological rationality understands/views/conceives the world within certain limited categories, according to which everything in the world can be comprehended and explained. Horkheimer/Adorno believe that technological rationality has refined various thinking modes by means of the stringency of formal logic (11). Thinking ability, in the end, becomes superfluous: "Thinking reifies itself into a self-running, automatic process, striving to be like the machine which it itself produces so that ultimately the machine can replace it" (Horkheimer/Adorno 25).

In the three films, it is explicit that the characters are all imbued with technological rationality, so that their acts are quite consistent with the technological regime. In *The*

Fly, when Brundle asks Veronica to try an experiment—eat two steaks and compare the two pieces of meat—he requires a definitely scientific answer to his question. Brundle says, “I need an *objective* opinion” (emphasis added). For an individual, taste is impossible to possess an absolutely objective opinion because it is a subjective experience and judgment. However, the scientist is doing his best to reduce the experience to this limited concept, so that he can view the experiment as successful. After she tastes the meat through the transportation, he questions her again:

Veronica: Ohh, it tastes funny.

Brundle: Funny how?

Veronica: It tastes, synthetic. (*The Fly*)

The word “funny” refers to Veronica’s subjective feeling concerning the meat, but it is unable to answer Brundle’s expectation of an objective opinion. He needs more impersonal and neutral words to continue his analysis. For a scientist, even a very subjective experience requires the scientific expression to describe personal feelings and judgments. The other case is that when Veronica knows Brundle has suffered from the failed experiment of melting the fly, the first idea in her mind is still the scientific solution: to do some other tests. Even if she knows that the fusion results from the failed scientific experiment, she wants to look to science for a treatment of the illness again. For the protagonist himself, when the tragedy occurs, he is eager to place the metamorphosis under the category that makes it understandable and explainable. Of course, it is a scientific explanation again. Even when Brundle has turned into Brundlefly, he still uses very specific scientific words to explain the phenomenon, like “a bizarre form of cancer” and “general cellular chaos and revolution” (*The Fly*). The scientist attempts to use the power of specifically scientific words to control the unpredictable and unprecedented disease. Technological rationality occupies the characters’ mind that every decision they make is within its logic.

In *Videodrome*, technological rationality is presented in the other kind of manner: the pursuit of interests or benefits. Under the pursuit of benefits, no personal choices exist. Everything is less important compared to magnitude which relates to benefit directly. When everything is concerned with quantity which is easy to calculate, measure in an indisputable way, people can now only think about numbers. Max is deeply influenced by this kind of logic. When he is interviewed in Rena King's TV talk show, and is asked why he offers everything from "soft-core pornography to hard-core violence" in the channel 83, he answers, "It's a matter of economics. [...] In order to survive, we have to give people something they can't get anywhere else, and we do that" (*Videodrome*). With economics as the starting point, Max is only concerned with the money he earns regardless of the social responsibility. Money is the master who controls the direction of the company, Max is merely an assistant to execute the goal of making money. Furthermore, there is a scene that Convex appears in Harlan's lab and confesses he is the one who gives Max the signals of Videodrome on purpose. Convex hackles Max,

Convex: Why would anyone watch a scum show like Videodrome?

Max: Business reason.

Convex: Sure, what about the other reason? (*Videodrome*)

When being asked the motif of seeing Videodrome, Max replies intuitively with his technological rationality in order to try to conceal his masochistic desire. "Business reason" is the first excuse that comes to Max's mind to explain why he is fascinated with the show. From his intuitive answer, it is not difficult to figure out how technological rationality infects his daily mode of thinking. He chooses to ignore his own personal opinions and feelings but manifests the industrial value that everyone worships. By emphasizing the supremacy of economics, Max provides the most perfect and acceptable reason for those who never see the show. From the film, it is obvious that people who are

obsessed with the instrumental ration are easily persuaded by the idea of taking interest as the top goal.

In *eXistenZ*, people have already lost themselves in the technology-made world, so how can they not be filled with technological rationality? The characters in the film always pass through different levels of games, experiencing various virtual realities. Technology has created a limited world in the form of virtual reality, in which human beings can think only in a certain mode that technology provides. Technology has formed a totality that human beings are incapable of escaping from. When Ted is curious about why anybody would want to play the gloomy and disgusting game, Allegra confidently replies, “it’s a game everybody’s already playing” (*eXistenZ*). No matter how the hero feels, technology has already surrounded everyone’s life. Moreover, technology not only encompasses people but controls their thinking in a certain mode. In the film, the only thing that the characters think of is winning the game. Not until the end of the film do the viewers understand that outside the game of *eXistenZ* is still another game of *transCendenZ*. It is when the moment that Allegra kills her “friendly” partner, Ted Pikul, and shouts “Have I won? Have I won the game?” that the audience suddenly realize Allegra and Pikul are in the other level of the game.⁸ In order to win the game, Allegra begins to be suspicious and kills her good companion. To win the game, the characters can kill whoever they want because they believe that it is only happening in the game. In the film, the gas person gives Pikul a broken bio-port in order to kill Allegra. The mechanic who fixes the pod, Kiri Vinokur, also gives Pikul an infected bio-port in order to kill Allegra to win the game. Every character in the film has only one thought as technology asks: to win the game. Human nature, such as trust, cannot be found in the

⁸ In the game world, it is hard to tell whether the person beside you is hostile or not. In the earlier part of the film, Pikul and Allegra appear be the good companions. Also, Allegra once forces Pikul to declare his position, “The only way I can tell if everything is OK is to play *eXistenZ* with somebody friendly. Are you friendly, or are you not?” (*eXistenZ*) Because of the confirmation, the viewers would always believe that they are in a perfect companionship.

film. After all, the only purpose and value to exist is to win, according to the order of technology. All characters in *eXistenZ* do follow and behave according to the value which is made by technological rationality.

Because of technological rationality, technology is believed to provide a prosperous future for human beings. Thus, humans have an illusion that technology brings positive and better choices to them. The belief reflects in the three movies obviously. In *The Fly*, the starting line is the scientist's self-inflated monologue, "What am I working on? Uh... I am working on something that'll change the world and human life as we know it" (*The Fly*). Brundle is so confident that his scientific experiment is magnificent to change the human world. He calls conceitedly his telepod as "earth-shattering invention ever." He merely thinks his invention would bring a prosperous future to the world but totally neglects the possibility of failure. He predicts that his invention will be going to change the natural law which has its fixed circulation rule by saying that his experiment would end "all concepts of transport, of borders and frontiers, of time and space" (*The Fly*). His confidence in science makes him believe that natural rules can be modified by human hand.

In *Videodrome*, Dr. O'Blivion is a representative of seeing technology as a required element to lead human beings to another evolutionary phase. His fundamental belief in *Videodrome* is "the next phase in the evolution of man as a technological animal" (*Videodrome*). It is because of the creed that he becomes *Videodrome*'s first victim since he receives massive doses of its signals. But even as he is killed, he still advocates his new invention. He proposes to Max, "I think that massive doses of *Videodrome* signal will ultimately create a new outgrowth and control hallucination to the point that it will change human reality" (*Videodrome*). He hopes that the new coming technology would alter the contemporary phenomena so that human beings are able to control their unconsciousness. In his original idea, he can invent a new technology which can help

him to achieve the goal to manipulate the human fantasy and unconscious desires. Like the scientist in *The Fly*, Dr. O'Blivion never considers the failure. What he knows is only the possible results of his experiment, Videodrome, but he doesn't have an ability to control or predict the results of the failed experiment. He is too optimistic and expects too much from technology so that he fails to estimate the costs of the failure: he becomes the first victim of his experiment.

In the third film, *eXistenZ*, especially when everyone is bathed in virtual reality created by technology, very few characters doubt the technological surroundings. Almost everyone holds an extreme optimistic viewpoint about the virtual reality. In the Allegra's prologue of introduction to her game, she declares, "people are programmed to accept so little, but the possibilities are so great" (*eXistenZ*). The sentence is like a creed to most of all characters in the film: they deeply believe that plenty of possibilities are in the technological world. Geller once blamed Pikul's cowardice for not daring to be penetrated by technology, "This is the cage of your own making which keeps you trapped and pacing about in the smallest possible space forever" (*eXistenZ*). Geller is like a missionary preaching the infinite greatness of technology and accusing those who dare not have bio-ports. Technology provides another world for characters so that almost everyone sees it as God creates a new world for humans. Therefore, the characters are convinced that they merely live in the virtual reality pretending they are somebody else and trying to neglect their real lives. The gas man annotates the attitude with his conversation with Pikul,

Pikul: What was your life before?

Gas: Before?

Pikul: Before it was changed by Allegra Geller.

Gas: I operated a gas station.

Pikul: You still operate gas station, don't you?

Gas: Oh, well, only on the most pathetic level of reality. Geller's work liberated me. (*eXistenZ*)

Gas has totally given up his actual life and is addicted to playing the game roles in Allegra's game. Technology has changed his life giving him an illusory paradise, paralyzing his senses in real life. Since technology is like morphine to Gas, he is convinced that it brings an exciting fantasy to him. In *eXistenZ*, the characters are bathed in the fantastic virtual journey with their technological rationality, they worship technology without any consideration of the cruelty of reality.

On the surface of the film, it is easy to understand that technology attempts to produce an illusion to persuade humans that it is beneficial to mankind. In the beginning of the three films, the heroes all sense the magic transformation of their body which enables them to believe the magic power of technology. However, in the end of the films, they all find out that they are deceived by the technology. In *The Fly*, after experiencing the transportation of the pods, Brundle is amazed of the experiment since he seems to become a totally reborn person. He explains to Veronica the result of the experiment at first, "it's purified me, it's cleansed me. And I tell you, I think it's going to allow me to realize the personal potential, I've been neglecting all these years" (*The Fly*). He feels energized as though he had a new-born body which can function better than the original one. The critic Shaviro also holds the positive attitude towards the transformation of Brundle's development in his book *Doom Patrols*. He believes the achievement of Brundlefly is the "postmodern realization of Nietzsche's Overman" which means that man is something that should be overcome. Brundlefly is a representation of superman which replaces the position of human species since it functions better than humans. As Brundle shows off to Veronica, "I hardly need to sleep anymore and I feel wonderful. It's like a drug, but a perfectly pure and benign drug. The power I feel surging inside me! And I won't be able to wear you out" (*The Fly*). He is absolutely right at one point: technology

is just like a drug for him to feel energetic. However, after the effect of the drug vanishes, the damage would be left. Ironically, as Nietzsche predicts, the human is overcome by a new species; a fusion with the animal. Unfortunately, the revolution only causes the tragic results. The power of his body is merely a temporary advantage which technology brings. After the enjoyment of the physical sensation, the scientist needs to face the decay of his body.

The same initial exciting sensation also occurs in the second film *Videodrome*. After the stimulation of the signal, the hero seems to be stimulated to try more novel things. Since they watch Videodrome before their love making, Nicki is inspired and asks Max to use the cigarette to burn her body and take a needle to her ear. Once Max does it, he immediately falls into his imagination as he is in the live show of Videodrome. As Shaviro argues in *The Cinematic Body*, Max's body "is not erased or evacuated; it is rather so suffused with video technology that it mutates into new forms, and is pushed to new thresholds of intense, masochistic sensation" (137). The Videodrome signal offers an opportunity for Max to experience a novel sensual stimulation. However, in the latter part of Shaviro's article, the critic notes the technological video images only enhance the bodily senses and claims that "the purpose of masochistic games is to make bodily sensation more vivid, and therefore more 'real.' Video technology only further heightens this pleasure"(138). Indeed, the video signals only stimulate the hero's body sensations but restrain other developments to human beings. As the film goes, the hero is trapped in the total confusion of reality and his own hallucination. Indeed, the body is stimulated and gets the temporary ecstasy; in fact, one in fact sells his body to technology to achieve the end: the total domination of technology. After the momentary sensual satisfaction, one pays more painful price for the bodily pleasure.

In *eXistenZ*, the same situation happened again on the heroes. Originally, the hero is extremely afraid of being penetrated by a bio-port on the spine; however, as soon as he

is fitted by one in his spine, his first response is "I love it! Great!"(*eXistenZ*). In the scene, Cronenberg uses the metaphor of sexual orgasm to symbolize the excitement of the virtual game. The new-born organ, the bio-port and the game pod are used as the new sexual organ in the film. When Allegra first puts the pod into Pikul's port, she commands "it's just excited. It wants action" (*eXistenZ*). The device of receiving the condition of virtual reality is meant to be like sexual excitement for the heroes to be totally immersed in the games. Also, when Pikul first enters the world of *eXistenZ* which is full of novelty, he is full of joy for he can play Allegra's game finally. As the pattern in *The Fly* and *Videodrome*, in the beginning, the body always enjoys what technology brings to us. Pikul is like Brundle in *The Fly* and Max in *Videodrome*. It is also after a while that Pikul does not feel good that he mentions series of questions to doubt the veracity of the virtual game, "I'm worried about my body, where are our real bodies? Are they all right?" (*eXistenZ*). Also the undistinguishable feeling makes him scared, "I'm not sure here, where we are, is real at all. This feels like a game to me. And you, you're beginning to feel a bit like a game character" (*eXistenZ*). However, once the body is penetrated by technology, it is too late to raise any questions. What Pikul does is to fall into the abyss of virtual reality. He, like Allegra, becomes the one who eager to know what happened in the game, so only he can do is to go back again regardless of his concerns. Also, like the other characters in the film, he becomes the one who merely pass through the endless virtual realities incapable of experiencing the reality anymore. The sensual excitement is the trap that technology makes; once one falls into it, it is difficult to escape from the net of technology.

II. The Incapacity for Thinking

With technological rationality in the mind, human beings are unable to resist the coming of technology. However, what is worse than that is that humans start to lose

something very important, their consciousness. Humans now only want to get more and more physical sensations and excitement and no longer care about metaphysical issues. They are now filled with instrumental ideas, so everyone thinks about almost the same thing. The situation is consistent with Ellul and Horkheimer/Adorno's analysis of modern people under the attack of technology. Technology has produced mass man so that everyone has a single mind without containing any resistant thoughts. As Horkheimer/Adorno note, "the need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness" (121). Human beings, under the control of technology have no counterpart ideas to challenge the domination of technology.

The loss of thinking ability is reflected in the three films directly, and the condition becomes worse and worse with each film. In *The Fly*, though the scientist suffers from the failure of the experiment, he keeps his consciousness through the film. It is true that his consciousness belong to part of technological rationality merely allowing scientific and statistic and precise proof. Nevertheless, in the first film, the hero strives to find an answer to his failed experiment. Even if he becomes Brundlefly, he tries to find out what goes wrong with his experiment and is capable of diagnosing his own condition. Though he is helpless to do anything about it, he tries hard to grasp and explain his condition. From new-born body, a bizarre form of cancer, to the collection of his fallen body to open a "Brundle Museum of Natural History," he keeps his consciousness to understand his mutated body. Even to the scene when he is almost transformed into the fly, he still states calmly to Veronica, "I'm saying...I'm saying I'm an insect...who dreamt he was a man... and loved it. But now the dream is over...and the insect is awake" (*The Fly*). In the whole film, Brundle is aware of his development of the transformation.

There is a great difference between Brundle's endeavor to analyze his illness and Max's situation in *Videodrome*. Compared to the scientist's struggle to find the answer,

Max only works hard to consult others to analyze his problems. At first, as soon as he gets in touch Videodrome show for only 53 seconds, he asks Masha (Lynne Gorman) to find the source of the signal. Once he is infected with the illusionary images, he asks Harlan whether Harlem has the same symptom. In respect to the scientist's attitude, Max seems to give up thinking and solving on his own. He asks for help directly to Dr. O'Blivion and Convex. Dr. O'Blivion provides Max the doctor's own research and studies and Convex is responsible for diagnosing Max's hallucination. He merely follows others' thinking without his own reflection. However, Max does not get well treatment because of their assistances; rather, he is trapped in more helpless situation. As Dr. O'Blivion points out directly, "I had a brain tumor, and I had visions. I believed the visions caused the tumor and not the reverse" (*Videodrome*). The video images are so powerful to affect the human mind that Max becomes too weak to fight against his hallucinations. He does not recover from the help he is given. However, in contrast to his tragic ending, his former behavior of finding assistance at least can be said to be a conscious action. At the end of the film, as he becomes totally a cassette recorder, he loses his thinking ability completely. When Convex puts the videotape into Max's stomach, he cannot resist but works out the command directly. When Bianca replaces Convex's order with her own one, Max accepts it without any hesitation. At that moment, Max is merely a working machine which executes the orders.

Bianca: You've become the video word made flesh.

Max: I am the video word made flesh.

Bianca: And now that you are the video word made flesh, you know what you have to do. You turn against Videodrome. You use the weapons they've given you to destroy them.

Max: Death to Videodrome. (*Videodrome*)

The conversation above shows that Max, who keeps repeats the order, has become the

machine working out the instruction. He loses his thinking ability. As Steven Shaviro argues in *The Cinematic Body*, Max's body "gets penetrated by technology to the very extent that his will is dissolved in passive fascination" (143). Except of repeating others words, he doesn't know how to express his own ideas. After receiving the order from Bianca, he directly goes to Convex's company and kills Harlan and Convex. With the order in mind, he is unable to have his own ideas to respond the questions. On his way to the company, he meets a beggar and a salesman, but he doesn't answer their questions at all. He is occupied with the order that he fails to respond the common questions they ask. What he can do is only to follow other's orders without his own considerations and thoughts.

Worse than Max, the heroes in *eXistenZ* do not have any chances to think since they are all in the virtual reality. Max has his own consciousness to search for help; however, Pikul and Allegra have no such advantages in their encounter with such virtual games. As Pikul points out directly, "Free will is obviously not a big factor in this little world of ours" (*eXistenZ*). Free will is absolutely not allowed in technological world. When entering the game *eXistenZ* initially, Pikul states, "It's none of your business who sent us! We're here and that is all that matters" unconsciously (*eXistenZ*). He is amazed of himself why he has such a statement, and Allegra comforts him, "It's your character who said it. [...] You'll get used to it. There are things that have to be said to advance the plot and establish the characters, and those things get said whether you want to say them or not. Don't fight it. Just go with it" (*eXistenZ*). The same situation happened in the scene where Pikul is forced to eat the disgusting meat of mutant reptiles and amphibians. This time, Allegra also soothes him by saying, "Good. It's something your game character was born to do. Don't fight it" (*eXistenZ*). Furthermore, when the hero gathers each part of the mutated animal into a gun, he expresses that he has an urge to kill somebody. Instead of stopping him, Allegra encourages him, "You won't be able to stop

yourself. You might as well enjoy it” (*eXistenZ*). The behaviors do not come from the hero’s awareness but are embedded in the game character originally to make the game continue. Pikul is required to keep the game going on. Under the premise of winning the game, everything can be accepted even the replacement of our consciousness. In order to win the game, humans need to give up their consciousness to achieve the total immersion into the virtual game. In the circumstances of the technology, people can only possess a limited mode of thinking to fit the game.

The decreasing of human thinking ability is observed in the series films at once. From the hero in the first film who possesses the capability of analysis and consciousness, to the one in *eXistenZ* who does not have any free will, one can tell that with the advancement of technology, people are allowed to possess less and less awareness to reflect what they are doing and to consider what is going on in the world. More and more humans merely follow the trends that technology provides without any senses of danger. In the first film, the scientist can tell what the problem is and proceed with some experiments trying to overcome the disease. In *Videodrome*, Max can merely trace the source and ask for help without any capacity to analyze and solve the problems. In the third one, the characters do not feel any problems at all since they are all in the endless virtual realities with no ways out. Technology has deprived humans’ thinking ability that they are actually mass men following its commands blindly.

III. The Power of Machines

Under the circumstances that people lose their critical ability, it is easy for technological machines to dominate the human species, which has no power of resistance at all. Human beings now become one of components or instruments to achieve technological means. As the critic Ellul observes in *The Technological Society*, “the human hand no longer spans the complex of means, nor does the human brain synthesize

man's acts. Only the monism of technique assures cohesion between humans and acts" (94). It is not humans to manipulate machines anymore but technology itself that holds the power to decide what the future will be like and dominate human function in the mechanical progress. The development of technology merely follows the supreme technological value: efficiency, which concerns not about any moral or human judgment. Therefore, the development it produces does not relate to human advantages and benefits. The development of technology does not meet human beings' needs. It is always wrongly assumed that mechanical progress will assist human society to evolve into a utopian world. Technology, according to Ellul, "evolves in a purely causal way: the combination of preceding elements furnishes the new technical elements. There is no purpose or plan that is being progressively realized. [...] We are dealing with a phenomenon blind to the future in a domain of integral causality" (97, 1964). Technology does not have a terminal goal nor any ideas to plan the future life. It is the reason that when the tragedies hit the heroes in the films, technology keeps distant and alienated to human beings.

The heroes in the three films become not only the instruments of technology but suffer from the remoteness and irresponsibility of technology after the tragedies occur. Their bodies colonized by technology turn into sites of fear rather than the embodiment of more power. As Shaviro suggests, "power and authority are swallowed up within the very mechanisms of fear that they themselves have created" (142, 1993). The technologized body originally is seen as a progressive product to bring wonderful future; nevertheless, it results in dreadful fear. In *The Fly*, the scientist intends to invent an evolutionary machine to assist those who have motion sickness. Unfortunately, the scientist becomes the sacrifice of the scientific experiment because his inability to control the whole process well. His mechanical instrument cannot tell a human's genes from those of a fly so that it fuses these two into one object. Superficially, it seems that the

scientist types the order and the machines simply execute the codes according to a command. However, the truth is that the mechanical facility changes the scientist's future: turning a human being into the human/housefly mutation. Human beings are merely experimental objects under the technological manipulation as the scientist is actually a victim of his technological experiment. Adam Knee suggests that human beings should be fearful for technology since "A related fear [...] is that of intimacy with the technological, of technology infusing even the most personal and purely human aspects of existence" (25). Technology injures the existence of mankind directly like the scientist is simply a factor in the experiment, a victim under the mechanical manipulation.

Instead of being a latent victim, like Brundle, the hero in *Videodrome* is more like a slave. The hero functions as a machine to accomplish the technological command: the total domination of human beings. Dr. O'Blivion becomes Videodrome first victim regardless of his extremely positive belief on Videodrome. His philosophy, theory and what he left behind, the stocking of video images, are unable to change the fact that he is killed by the technology he invents. The new flesh he expects is not realized in the film nor embodies in his own body. According to the doctor's analysis, the tumor in his head should not be "*an uncontrolled, undirected little bubbling of flesh*, but that it is in fact—a new organ, a new part of the brain" which is used to control our hallucination (emphasis added, *Videodrome*). The new organ, as he supposes, is going to lead human beings to the next phase of the evolution to form a new species of new flesh. However, the fact is not like what he anticipates. The doctor's former partner, Barry Convex, who possesses the technologized body, died with his body exploded in a sickening mass of bubbling tumors. It is not consistent with Dr. O'Blivion's thought about a new rise of new organ; rather, it is indeed "*an uncontrolled little bubbling of flesh*" (*Videodrome*). Convex's body proves that Dr. O'Blivion's idea of the new flesh is merely an illusion. On the contrary, the doctor's death proves that though humans may be the one who invents the

machine, but it is impossible for humans to be dominators. His firm belief on the modern technology only brings the fatal death to himself.

As for the hero, technology has transformed him into a machine that technology can use his body as a place to play the cassette. Max not only is deprived of his thinking ability but his natural body becomes a working machine to execute the orders. Being played by different people's orders, the hero can do nothing but painfully exchanges the programs endlessly. As Bianca points out in the film, "They can program you. They can play you like a videotape recorder" (*Videodrome*). The hero is not the one who writes the program to instruct the mechanical technology; on the contrary, it is the machines which have power to control Max's hallucinations and behaviors. Max, before he loses his consciousness, once makes a remark toward the videotape, "careful, it bites" (*Videodrome*). The machines are not stable and passive to receive the order; rather, it is aggressive to infuse into people's personal life and to control their lives thoroughly. In the end of the film, the hero is in mental chaos that he confesses, "I don't know where I am now. I'm having trouble finding my way around" (*Videodrome*). In such a desperate and distressed circumstance, technology appears to guide him, "to become the new flesh, you first have to kill the old flesh. But don't be afraid. [...] Watch, I'll show you how. It's easy," says Nicki in the screen (*Videodrome*). Technology first takes away human's thinking ability; then appears as a savior intending to guide the hero. Ironically, the solution guides the hero to his death. As for the heroine, Nicki herself is attracted by the show immediately and becomes its slave at once. Once she says, "I was made for that show" (*Videodrome*). However, the truth is, as Bukatman observes, instead of Nicki was made for the show, "she was made by that show" (88). She is an instrument for Video technology to seduce Max.

To the third film, *eXistenZ*, technology has become a symbolic religion to human beings. Technology accomplishes its goal of total domination. Human beings are not the

victims or the slaves of technology but become the reverent disciples to worship technology. As Ziauddin Sardar and Jonathan Romney note that in the postmodern period, people are eager to dissolve themselves into the machine desperately. “For higher reality read virtual reality. Love of God is replaced by the worship of the computer, the postmodern equivalent of the deity. The cybergeeks seek total dissolution of their selves in the object of their love—their goal is to become one with their machine” (35). The characters in *eXistenZ* are all stuck into virtual games that they are unable to grasp the senses of reality anymore. To the people live in the virtual reality, the technology and the person who creates the games are gods to common people. That’s why the setting begins and ends in a small chapel where Allegra is called as a goddess. Compared to the former films, machines do not need human beings as factors to accomplish technological goal, rather; the technology in *eXistenZ* is omnipotent and omnipresent enough to treat humans as merely puppets with no free wills. Humans now cannot live without technological reality. The actual lives are too cruel and boring for them to survive. Like Gas replies Pikul, his operation of gas station is only the most pathetic level of the actual life, and there are lots of excitements waiting for him in the game world. Likewise, as soon as Pikul departs from the virtual game, the actual life looks unreal and boring. He turns to be a person who is desperate to enter the game. To the third film, human beings are not even the instruments of technology for it has achieved its intention: the total control of human beings. Humans are merely the puppets under the total domination of technology.

IV. The Dissolution of Human Subjectivity

In the circumstance that human beings change into the slaves under technological mastery, humans are forced to forfeit their subjectivity. They do not recognize their own identity. Buck-Morss, studying the Frankfurt School, argues that Adorno has noted that under technological demands, it is impossible to have subjectivity (180). Technology

liquidates human's ego. Again, in the series of films, the gradual diminution of the hero's subjectivity is observed with the progressive development of technology. In *The Fly*, the spectators are scared by the transformation of Brundle's body which is more and more similar to the fly. However, besides the change of his terrifying physique, one can figure out that his ego does not change too rapidly. He is very conscious of his alteration of his subjectivity. In the second phase of the transformation, when his figure is no longer recognizable, he is still aware of who he is.⁹ He expresses in extremely pain, "I'm an insect...who dreamt he was a man...and loved it. But now the dream is over...and the insect is awake" (*The Fly*). Even though he is unable to control his behavior, he is able to know the regression of his body. He understands he is more and more alike to the insect and it is very possible for him to hurt Veronica. Even at the last scene in the movie, his figure is the mutation of half metal and half fly without any human shape, he still maintains his humanity in his eyes. Though he is speechless, the viewers can tell that his eyes are full of desperation. He crawls across to Veronica and places the barrel of the shotgun to his forehead, indicating what he wants Veronica to do. Even he has not human shape, he is conscious of what he exactly becomes and what is needed to be done. His consciousness does not alter with his transformation of the body. He knows his own identity and subjectivity clearly.

However, to the second film, human's identity and consciousness are both influenced by television images. By showing the impact of video images, the director manifests his belief on that technology indeed influences human mind and changes their consciousness and unconsciousness. As soon as Max watches Videodrome which Harlan pirates only for 53 seconds, he is attracted to the scrambled show immediately. Once he watches the show for nearly one hour, he starts to have hallucination to imagine himself

⁹ I would like to divide Seth Brundle's transformation into three major phases: one is that he still remain human beings; the second is his fusion with the housefly; and the third one is the tragedy ending—the melding of Brundlefly and the telepod.

as the hero in the show. At the former part of the film, the hero is affected merely by the images. He remains his partial consciousness to retain his career and identity. Though he is sometimes confused with his hallucination, he is capable of remembering who he is. Nevertheless, to the latter part of the film, when the hero gets the split in his stomach, his consciousness is totally controlled by the videotapes. The metaphor of the hero's body penetrated by videotapes symbolizes that his consciousness is switched with different videotapes. The first videotape is played by Convex, and once he puts it into Max's body, Max's consciousness is replaced by the video. Bianca also removes Convex's tape and puts her own into Max's body, and Max's mind switches to her order immediately. With the change of videotapes, Max's identity switches several times to fit with others' requests. He is unable to grasp his different identities since he realizes those commands unconsciously. As Kauffman argues, "television has reoriented our concept of time and space, for the continuous flow of discontinuous images, the endless combinations of signs and codes shape us far more than we shape them" (128). Experiencing various video images, Max is in extreme confusion about where and who he is. He is shaped by those different commands in different videotapes. He expresses his desperation in the end, "I don't know where I am now. I'm having trouble finding my way around" (*Videodrome*). After playing out different characters unconsciously, the hero is unable to recognize his identity. He is completely lost. Moreover, compared to the ending with *The Fly*, it is obvious that Max is posited in totally passive position. Brundle, because of knowing his situation and identity, he requests Veronica to shot him. On the contrary, Max's suicide is under the condition of not knowing what to do. He gives up his subjectivity to follow the technological guide which asks him to end his life.

Compared to the second film, the technology in *eXistenZ* is more advanced so that the characters are glad to eliminate their subjectivity. The hero in *Videodrome* is forced to lose his own original identity, but the characters in the third film are glad to switch their

identities and lose their subjectivities spontaneously without any hesitations. Due to the continuous alteration, people have no original identity nor recognize who they are in different levels of the games. Once entering a new level of virtual game, Pikul is unable to know exactly who he is except seeing the name card and listening to what the other calls him. As Sardar and Romney notices, “one annihilates one’s self and identity to become one with the game” (35). It is impossible for the heroes in *eXistenZ* to possess their own identities or they would fail to enter the game world. They lose not only their identities but their free wills and abilities of self-determination. They are compelled to do things they do not like to, to be another characters they are not interested in. Furthermore, the worst of all is that there are no outlets for humans to escape from endless role playing games. The roles; therefore, are trapped into the ceaseless cycle of changing identities. In the whole film, the characters are always in the game world without existing in the actual world. In the last scene, after Pikul and Allegra kill the game designer of *transCendenZ*, Noel Dichter, everyone in the chapel is shocked and the Chinese waiter utters the final sentence, “Hey, tell me the truth...are we still in the game?” (*eXistenZ*) The viewers are unable to tell whether the game ends or not even if the film finishes. It seems that the end of the film, the characters are still in the other game, aiming to win. The heroes are trapped in the world which needs to acquire the new identities all the time. The most unfortunately of all, in *eXistenZ*, is that the death is not a way to escape the endless circle. The death in the film is the other initiation of the other game. Compared to the tragic ending of *The Fly* and *Videodrome*, the characters are more miserable since they cannot escape from the ceaseless switches of roles. Death to the characters is never the effective way to flee the virtual reality. How do they know they are really dead after a shot? Everyone except Allegra is murdered at different time in the game, *eXistenZ*, but appears again in the chapel scene in *transCendenZ*. If every level of virtual reality is just a game, how can one really die? All the characters can do is to die again and again with

no true death at all. There is no way for the heroes and heroines to escape the game of instable identities.

V. Second Nature

Another fatal effect is that technology intervenes between nature and human beings and it results in the violation of human's integrity. Friedrich Rapp argues that technological working disciplines have replaced people's natural responses to intimate with Mother Nature. "In order to be able to actually utilize the increased efficiency of mechanical procedures," Rapp states, "one must submit to their immanent logic" (122). Human beings have to forsake their own inner disposition in order to work with the instrumental logic. Horkheimer/Adorno also notices that technology or science requires humans to alienate and forfeit their first nature in order to manifest the scientific spirit. Nature needs to be seen as the Other for humans to conquer or understand so that technology has power to substitute the nature in the mind to technological rationality. Human nature should be connected with nature directly; however, science sees nature as the object humans should conquer in order to be the master of human beings. Technology alienates human beings from nature. The other critic Ellul has remarked the effect of the alienation: the disequilibrium will cause anxiety and neurosis to human beings. People are infected by melancholia because they possess less and less chance to close to nature.

In the first film, the scientist with technological rationality believes that it is honorable to defeat nature. In order to pursue the goal of motionless movement, Brundle intends to invent a machine to break the natural law, the organic way of movement. He sees the organic movement as his enemy for him to subjugate. Also, the natural scene never shows up in the film at all. Besides the characters are the organic creatures, the experimental baboon is the only creature appearing in the film. However, Brundle imitates the animal in the practical level, treating it as a test in his experiment. The

scientist never respects nature and ignores the power of nature completely. Being fully trust in the omnipotence of technology, Brundle despises natural objects. The scientific spirit is the starting point for humans to alienate from nature.

In *Videodrome*, natural objects all disappears in the film except human beings. However, the contact between human beings is hardly seen in the film. Technology has replaced all relationship between the humans. They rarely communicate with each other face to face due to the invention of technology. For instance, a listener calls Nicki on air for help because she has a serious problem with her sister. She is unable to talk her problem face to face so she seeks consult from technological radio programs. Furthermore, people's fantasy only can be fulfilled in gazing various types of pornography and TV programs provided by television images. Technology cuts the human relation with nature and forces them to ask help from technological products. They cannot touch nature directly unless through the medium of technology.

To the third film, *eXistenZ*, technology creates a simulated nature for humans to reach. It is impossible for humans to connect with the real nature anymore. In the film, the characters fail to establish their relationship with others spontaneously like the characters do in *Videodrome*. The relationship is controlled by technology which provides a game world for humans to live in. In the world, the mode of the game is presupposed so there are few choices allowed to the game characters: the dialogues are planned and actions are certainly limited. People are constrained to say everything they want in the game world or they have no appropriate responses. The character needs to speak the correct words and wait for certain responses to go on the game. When Pikul first enters the world *eXistenZ*, he speaks to D'arcy Ned but is incapable of getting the response; Allegra teaches Pikul how to achieve the effective communication, "He [D'arcy] won't come out of it until you give him a proper line of game dialogue" (*eXistenZ*). In the film, technology controls human's interactions, so it is impossible to have the natural

communication between people. Everything is said to achieve the key answer of the game. The other instance is that when the characters are in the Chinese restaurant, Pikul does not want to kill anybody but he is forced to do it. The action is manipulated by technology that people behave according to the technological instructions. The characters fail to have any relation with organic people with free wills in the film. Compared to the heroes in *The Fly* and *Videodrome* who have autonomous conversation and interaction between people, the characters in *eXistenZ* are controlled by technology more cruelly and completely.

In *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, in addition to the reason that humans are imbued with technological rationality so that they draw far away from nature gradually, technology creates an illusion for people to believe that they are not too remote from organic lives. In *Videodrome*, as Bukatman observes, the representation of technology in the scum show, *Videodrome*, is not advanced at all; on the contrary, it manifests the low-technology setting simply with some crosses and rolls, electrified clay walls (88). Nevertheless, in spite of the low-technology setting, the signal messages are the results of advanced technology. The source of the signal is invisible and electronic so it can be broadcasted to different places. The show, *Videodrome*, presents the world which is very primitive in advantage to fool people to believe it is the representation of their desire. By the canny devices in the show, Max fails to figure out how effective and influential of the advanced technology behind the show. Since it is a scum show closed to the human primitive desire, Max cannot help himself to watching it continually. The representation of the world disguised in the seeming natural world deceives the heroes and makes him believe the world is related to his primitive desire.

The same situation happened in *eXistenZ* in which no technological machines are seen in the film. The deliberate lack of machines also aims to fool people that they exist in a natural world. As Sardar and Romney argue, the world of *eXistenZ* is not only

organic but “meta-organic, beyond the experience of mere biology and in the realms of perpetual ecstasy” (35). The representation of technology in the virtual game world seems more organic than the real biological worlds. The gun is made from the bones, the bullets are human teeth, and the game pod is from animals’ organs. The representation of the natural world makes an illusion for humans as they are not in the world full of technology everywhere. The strategy of the representation manifests that the technological intention is to substitute the real nature completely so that humans can no longer achieve the inner equilibration. Its only purpose is to alienate people from the real nature. In *eXistenZ*, the spectators can see that technology indeed fulfill its goal. When Pikul and Allegra are on their way to fix the game pod, they arrive at a skiing place.

Pikul: What happens if someone comes up here and really wants to ski?

Allegra: Come on, Pikul. No one actually “skis” anymore, you know that.

Nobody likes to be close with nature anymore since technology has prepared more exciting virtual nature for people to experience. From the conversation above, the viewers are able to tell that nature has totally been replaced by technology, and human beings are thoroughly distant from the real nature.

However, the stimulated nature created by technology cannot replace the real nature totally for the former one provides no peace to human beings. No matter what vivid nature technology invents, technology only cares for its own advantages. Under the total substitution of the first nature, humans are unable to retain their integrity. Getting away from nature, humans get more and more difficult to maintain their inner balance. From the series films, one conceptualizes that the heroes who possess less and less subjectivities, autonomous thinking abilities can be said puppets under the domination of technology. The characters are more and more confused of who and where they are; they have less and less power to fight against technology. They are helpless under the technological world. In the other respective of technology, it is much stronger in

eXistenZ than in *The Fly* since its rapid development. It controls more and more on human beings. People are trapped in the world. The condition that the heroes face in the film is actually a reflection of how modern people face in the modern world. In *eXistenZ*, Pikul complains about the game world to Allegra, “We’re both stumbling around together in this unformed world, whose rules and objectives are largely unknown, seemingly indecipherable or even possibly nonexistent, always on the verge of being killed by forces that we don’t understand” (*eXistenZ*). The world he complains is exactly one people live now. Like the characters in the film, human beings now also blunder around a world of uncertainty and follow the rules that one do not understand. People now seem to have no choices but to go on playing the game which provides no meanings and rules to the players. People, like the heroes in the film, are also in the endless cycle of the game which has no outlet to escape.

VI. An Exit from the Game

How can people do to face the hopeless situation? Is it any possibility for humans to escape from the technological mastery? The critics, like Heidegger, Horkheimer/Adorno and Anders provide human beings some ways to rebel against the technological suppression: art and critical thinking. The two solutions are the keys for humans to follow under the invasion of technology. From the appreciation of art, people stimulate their critical thinking to contemplate the contemporary situation in the technological society. Watching Cronenberg’s series films can indeed offer the spectators a shock effect to change the accepted technological rationality and provide a new mode of thinking to human beings. Being shocked by the tragic ending and the tremendous fatal impacts of technology to human beings, the viewers have the opportunity to think about what technology causes instead of accepting its values without any resistance. For instance, three years after *Videodrome* released, because of its narrative about the

negative effect of human's exposure to violent messages and images, Britain introduced the Video Recordings Bill in order to prevent the damages to children. Lawmakers in Britain noticed that a sub genre they called "video nasty" had begun to burgeon in home video industry which contains violence which may influence the children. Therefore, in 1985, Britain is the first country to censor and classify home videotapes (Rodley 106). Censorship and classification become the image policeman to govern the broadcasting of technological images. The legislators have their underlying assumption more literally than Cronenberg's films: images can kill. This is the example that art can arouse human's senses of awareness towards what is actually happening in the society.

Cronenberg's films always contain the element of science fiction genre which has the function to foresee the future world. By predicting the future life, human beings are able to try to prevent the future catastrophe. In the 1980s, Cronenberg successfully foresees the problems of images, and Britain starts to prevent the possible injuries to human beings. As the critic Anders argues, one of the solutions to decrease the harm that technology brings is to bridge the gap between the imagination of the future and the technological rapid development. By Cronenberg's films, the views are able to rebuild their senses with the ongoing expeditious process of technology. The technology in *eXistenZ* seems not very far away in the contemporary society now. Virtual games in the modern society, like the game presented in *eXistenZ*, are invented towards the goal of making the virtual reality more real. In order to merge with the virtual world totally, there are actually more and more technological instruments to get humans more involved in virtual reality like the pod and bio-port in the film. Once getting the imagination of the future, humans have more chances to manage the future problems. Unlike the dead end that the heroes face in the films, human beings do have choices to work out and to contemplate what need to be done to prevent the total invasion of technology. Through the representation of the art to maintain people's critical thinking out of technological

rationality, human beings have chances to survive in the technological world.

Conclusion

In the technoculture, no matter what humans think or do, is under the control of technology. Technology provides a systematical plan to control human beings, so that they are trapped in the technological surroundings more and more completely without many chances to escape. Compared to the time before the inventions of technological machines, living with technology does bring more happiness to humans as the Enlightenment promised. In the modern time, humans are more and more inclined to technology. Everything, including organic food, synthetic fiber, architectural construction, subways or automobiles, is all connected to technology. Originally, technology is invented as an apparatus for people to use; however, the truth is that humans become the parasites of technology rather than its master. In the technological environment, human lives do not become much easier and better; on the contrary, the paranoia and anxiety become the common symptoms of modern people. The wonderful future is mere an illusion made up by humans.

It is based on the observations in the society that the critics and the director present their reflections in forms of essays and cinemas. The critics have noticed the modern technology is problematic after the two world wars. Horkheimer/Adorno are the most pessimistic critics who believe humanity is terminal because of the occupation of technological rationality. Ellul also regards that in the world of seeing efficiency as the supreme value, humans are merely one of the factors which keeps the technological development. Simply being a mechanical factor causes the loss of human integrity and subjectivity. Compared to the critics above, Heidegger's anthropological approach to technology seems to be more optimistic and positive. Taking the relation between humans and technology simultaneously into consideration, Heidegger believes that technology itself is central; the danger mainly results from our ideas of seeing it as the

monopoly approach of revealing. Therefore, from the critics above, people can understand the contemporary condition: the essence of technology is strong enough to become a sole way of seeing the world occupying the human mind so that they are difficult to retain their subjectivities under technological domination.

The presentation of films is Cronenberg's way to reflect the problem of the modern technology. In his films, human beings are not the masters but the victims invaded and used by technology. The bodies of the heroes in the films are always penetrated by technology, and I believe that the penetration of the body in the films can metaphorically represent the damages which modern people get from technology. The visceral and horror images of reversing the human body inside out in Cronenberg's films are able to raise people's awareness towards the danger of technology. Moreover, his philosophical ideas also enrich his films, so that the horrified feelings and shock effects to the audience is more meaningful. His reversed ideas of mind-body dichotomy and his belief on the split of human and nature are also the critics' observations. According to Horkheimer/Adorno and Ellul, the mind under the control of technology has basically become its slave without the function of thinking. Thus, the body in Cronenberg's films is always presented as the only proof of human's existence. The split of nature and humans is also one of the consequences that the critics have argued when facing the technological domination. Away from nature, and being fully connected with technology, human beings are unable to achieve peace. The philosophical idea of the break of nature and humans are also presented in Cronenberg's films: the heroes' minds are always full of technological rationality without any attention and care for nature. With the director's observation in mind in addition to his philosophical thinking, the films are seen as different from other entertaining Hollywood cinemas.

In the thesis, three of Cronenberg's films are chosen to exemplify the development of technology. The most amazing of the three films is that they are able to manifest

explicitly from the beginning both the Enlightenment spirit and the total destruction of human beings. *The Fly* is able to express how the scientist and the characters in the film see science as the monopoly approach to understand the world. *Videodrome*, as the second film of the developing order of technology, represents that human beings are actually affected by technology deeply and incapable of mastering the technological machines and its commands. In the second film, the technology becomes the master in both physical and mental perspectives—it has turned out to be the human organs and be able to manipulate humans' hallucinations. The third film, *eXistenZ* is the declaration of the total technological occupation of humans who do not possess any power nor any free will to fight back its manipulation and domination. The characters in the film are trapped in the technological surroundings in which nature is presented by the imitation of technology. That is, the real nature has already disappeared and humans no longer have chances to be close to nature. In the technological world, humans are set to do limited actions and think in the game logic. They are merely puppets. From the three films, technology is more and more powerful and dominant so that humans forfeit their freedom to think and to act. The emancipation that the Enlightenment has predicted is merely an illusion.

Also, the phenomenon of the convergence of humans and technology which is demonstrated in the three films generates the mighty of technology and the infirmity of human beings. Whereas technology becomes more and more organic, humans are weaker and weaker to retain their integrity. The inclination of humans to technology brings the fatal impacts, including losing the autonomy, thinking ability, the sense of balance and peace. From the three films, it is clear that technology is desperate to be similar with the real nature and humans. Technology appearing in the *eXistenZ* is all in disguise of natural and organic materials. In the third film, technology is able to create the virtual nature to fool human beings. Also in *eXistenZ*, humans are technologized to have a new orifice in

the spine in order to experience and connect to the technology more directly. It is the pursuit of the thorough connection with technology and the eager to be part of technology accelerates the destruction of mankind. From the first film to the third one, the process of the convergence of humans and machines is towards the completion so that humans have less opportunity to find the way out.

Moreover, the disasters in the films are all warned and supposed by the critics. Due to technological rationality, human beings firmly believe the prosperous future that technology promises and rarely think about the damages it brings to the world. Likewise, the heroes in the films always try to catch up the speed of technological harms in their bodies with no capacity to predict the possible catastrophes which may happen to them. They always embrace the advent of the technology wholeheartedly; however, when their bodies really get in touch with technology, they are unable to deal with the penetration and wounds. The heroes' bodies seem to be awaked and stimulated by the sermon of technology. However, while they are bathed in the joy of the seeming renaissance of the body, they need to pay the price: their autonomy, subjectivity, thinking ability, and sense of balance. The protagonists surrender all to be the slaves of technology. In *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, the characters are unable to live without the orders of technology. Max needs the guides from television, and the heroes in the game world also require the series commands from the computer programs. In *Videodrome*, Max loses his thinking ability gradually; however, to the third one, the characters are not allowed to think at all. In *Videodrome*, Max sinks into the technological trap step by step; that is, there is still the existence of non-technological surroundings. However, to *eXistenZ*, the characters are not sure whether there is a real natural world anymore and are caught in the restless circle of virtual game lives. From the linear narrative lines of the three films, the constraints and damages from technology to human beings become more intense and serious. To the third film, humans are no longer humans at all but merely one of factors to assist

technology to function.

The tragedy in the films provides an effective warning to remind human beings to heed the incursion of technology. Fortunately, the desperate endings the protagonists confront in the films are not the declaration of the death. According to Anders, what people can do now is to keep their awareness to the rapid development of technology and bridge the gap between human's imagination and the technological expansion. The most important mission at the current moment, to humans, is to gain the ability to foresee the development of advanced technology. Also, Heidegger and Horkheimer/Adorno also remind humans of putting more emphases on the other revealing, art, which is useful to prevent the omnipotence of technology. Through the works of art, one can have clear consciousness again to see the world from other points of view. Cronenberg's films function as the medium to open the audience's eyes and provide the shock effect to force humans to think about their own situation now. By knowing the causes of damages and tremendous negative effects of technology, one can use the other mode of reason to see the world instead of the accepted technological rationality. Only by means of switching the thinking mode, it is possible to question the existential values of technology. Moreover, Cronenberg's works realize what Anders expects, to bridge the gap. What the director does is exactly to try to foresee and predict what will occur in the future. Establishing a possible future enables human beings to know what the future holds in the control of technology. Cronenberg's works indeed provides a chance for human beings to examine and question the existence of technology. Only with the presentation of art can humans maintain their critical thoughts to escape the technological world.

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