

confined to such technical fields as bionics, medical prostheses, and virtual reality. Manifesting itself as both technological object and discursive formation, it partakes of the power of the imagination as well as the actuality of technology. **Cyborgs actually do exist: about 10% of the current U.S. population are estimated to be cyborgs in the technical sense,** including people with electronic pacemakers, artificial joints, drug implant systems, implanted corneal lenses, and artificial skin. A much higher percentage participates in occupations that make them into metaphoric cyborgs, including the computer keyboarder joined in a cybernetic circuit with the screen, the neurosurgeon guided by fiber optic microscopy during an operation, and the teen gameplayer in the local videogame arcade. "Terminal identity" Scott Bukatman has named this condition, calling it an "unmistakably doubled articulation" that signals the end of traditional concepts of identity even as it points toward the cybernetic loop that generates a new kind of subjectivity.²

How does a culture understand and process new modes of subjectivity? Primarily through the stories it tells, or more precisely, through narratives that count as stories in a given cultural context. **The stories I want to explore are narratives of life cycles.**³ They bring into focus a crucial area of tension between the human and posthuman. Human beings are conceived, gestated, and born; they grow up, grow old, and die. Machines are designed, manufactured, and assembled; normally they do not grow, and although they wear out, they are always capable of being disassembled and reassembled either into the same product or a different one. As Gillian Beer has pointed out, Frankenstein's monster—an early cyborg—is monstrous in part because he has not *grown*. As a creature who has never known what it is like to be a child, he remains alien despite his humanoid form.⁴

When cyborg subjectivities are expressed within cultural narratives, traditional understandings of the human life cycle come into strong conflict with modes of discursive and technical production oriented toward the machine values of assembly and disassembly. The conflict cannot be reduced to either the human or machine orientation, for the cyborg contains both within itself. **Standing at the threshold separating the human from the posthuman, the cyborg looks to the past as well as the future.** It is precisely this double nature that allows cyborg stories to be imbricated within cultural narratives while still wrenching them in a new direction.

The new cannot be spoken except in relation to the old. Imagine a new social order, a new genetic strain of corn, a new car—whatever the form, it can be expressed only by articulating its differences from that which it displaces, which is to say the old, a category constituted through its relation to the new. Similarly, the language that creates these categories operates through displacements of traditional articulations by formulations that can be characterized as new because they are not the same as the old. The cyborg

is both a product of this process and a signifier for the process itself. The linguistic splice that created it (cyb/org) metonymically points toward the simultaneous collaboration and displacement of new/old, even as it instantiates this same dynamic.

The stories that produce and are produced by cyborg subjectivities are, like the cyborg itself, amalgams of old and new. Cyborg narratives can be understood as stories only by reference to the very life cycle narratives that are no longer sufficient to explain them. The results are narrative patterns that overlay upon the arc of human life a map generated from assembly and disassembly zones. One orientation references the human, the other the post-human; **one is chronological, the other topological; one assumes growth, the other presupposes production; one represents itself as natural or normal, the other as unnatural or aberrant.** Since the two strands intertwine at every level, the effect is finally not so much overlay as interpenetration. Sometimes the interpenetration is presented as the invasion of a deadly alien into the self, sometimes as a symbiotic union that results in a new subjectivity. Whatever the upshot, the narratives agree that the neologistic joining cannot be unsplit without killing the truncated organism that can no longer live without its cyb/ernetic component. As these narratives tell it, a corner has been turned, and there is no going back.

To illustrate how cyborg narratives function, I want to concentrate on three phases of the life cycle and three corresponding dis/assembly zones. The first is **adolescence**, when self-consciousness about the body is at its height and the body is narcissistically cathected as an object of the subject's gaze. Appropriate to the inward turning of narcissism is a dis/assembly zone marked by the joining of limb to torso, appendage to trunk. The second phase is **sexual maturity**, when the primary emphasis is on finding an appropriate partner and negotiating issues of intimacy and shared space. The dis/assembly zone corresponding to this phase is located where the human is plugged into the machine, or at the interface between body and computer network. The last is the **reproductive** or generative phase, when the emphasis falls on mortality and the necessity to find an heir for one's legacy. The dis/assembly zone associated with this phase focuses on the gap between the natural body and mechanical replicate, or between the original and manufactured clone.

Because gender is a primary determinant of how stories are told, I have chosen to mix stories by male and female authors. Spanning nearly half a century, these texts bear the stamps of their times as well as the subject positions of the authors. The generalizations that emerge from these texts confirm socialization patterns that make women welcome intimacy, whereas men are more likely to see it as a threat; they also show women more attuned to the bonding, men to aggression and hierarchical structure. The interest of the comparison lies less in these well-known generalizations, however, than in