

## **Introduction: *Bodies and Boundaries of Identity in Science Fiction***

As a genre, science fiction emerged around the turn of the twentieth century, at a time of rapid industrialization and imperialism. In his analyses of capitalist, industrial manufacture, Karl Marx observed that the introduction of machinery and rationalization of production had resulted in an inevitable alienation of workers from their work. No longer creators themselves, they became frustrated, desperate cogs in a system of production that increasingly wedded human and machine in an uneasy marriage. From some of its earliest inceptions, science fiction has provided a lens through which this intimate alienation can be explored.

This issue presents four essays which interrogate the representations of the body in science fiction, with an eye to the intersections of race, gender, and power in the relationships between creator and creation, human and machine, “natural” body and “engineered” body. While all four address the question of what it means to be “human” when the “tools” made by *Homo Faber* are sentient and bear a strong kinship to humans themselves, each author interrogates particular issues that expand and even blur the boundaries of human-ness. In Maura Daly’s and Lorna Jowett’s essays, machines can be more human than humans and those who appear human may be cyborgs. Diana Francis considers how a plant can be a wife, subject to a long tradition that held the female body to be a male’s property, to be sown and harvested. And Keren Omry delves deeply into denaturalizing “self” and “other”, human and alien, in the post-apocalyptic writings of Octavia Butler.

Uniting these essays is a shared theoretical engagement with mimicry, performativity, and the markers of race, gender, and technology – all of which can both create and blur the distinctions of identity. Although science fiction may be imagined as a realm where anything is possible, the authors of the essays in this volume demonstrate how the constraints of existing racial and gender hierarchies are reproduced (and reinvented) on the bodies of cyborgs, robots, and anthropoid vegetables. They employ the critical perspectives of Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Paul Gilroy, bell hooks, and Homi Bhaba in readings of science fiction films, stories, and television programs that reflect some of the central obsessions in an age of genetic engineering and artificial intelligence: not just *what* makes a human, but *who* makes (and controls) humans and their technological kin?

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