CYBORG SOLDIERS AND MILITARIZED MASCULINITIES

CRISTINA MASTERS
York University, Canada

Abstract

The interface between technology and human bodies has often been lauded by feminists and critical theorists, within international politics, as potentially emancipatory. Specifically, feminists have theorized how the interface between technology and gendered bodies has had the effect of disturbing the constructs of femininity and masculinity. This article explores how the constitution of the cyborg soldier within the military, rather than displacing and disturbing gender, reinscripts gender onto bodies of technology revealing gender as socially constituted, while simultaneously concealing this through representations of technology's supposed 'neutralness'. Moreover, the constitution of the cyborg soldier through militarized techno-scientific discourses represents the desire to transcend the bodily limits of the human soldier. Even as the cyborg represents a post-human move in its instantiation, it remains within the rhetorical frame of modern humanism wherein the shift continues to signify a desire to protect specific sentient bodies and a particular kind of humanity/humanness. Finally, this article explores the ethical possibilities of the interface through the Levinasian encounter with the Other constituted in the production of the Self.

Keywords

cyborg, ethics, Gulf Wars, Levinas, militarized masculinity, other, representation, self, techno-scientific discourse

INTRODUCTION

> A cyborg is . . . a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.
>
> (Haraway 1991: 149)

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The intimate link between the military and technology in the United States is certainly a familiar and well-documented relationship. At present, advanced technologies constitute an integral and central component of the American military apparatus, and necessarily play roles in shaping, informing and (re)producing military techno-scientific discourses[1] (Haraway 1991, 1996). Essential to these discourses has been the necessary reconstitution and reproduction of American soldiers to fit into, operate and function in this ostensibly new information age. New times seem to require new soldiers for the 'job' of defending the nation. Military discourses have constructed the cyborg soldier – previously confined to the realms of what we have virtually only witnessed in science fiction novels, Hollywood productions and Star Trek episodes. Neither old nor new, neither worldly nor out-of-this-world, neither entirely man nor machine, the cyborg soldier represents the 'juncture of ideals, metals, chemicals, and people that makes weapons of computers and computers of weapons and soldiers' (Gray 1997: 8).

To be sure, the cyborg soldier represents a practically imperceptible shift in American military doctrine; weapons advance at accelerated rates, but soldiers appear to remain essentially the same, with the notable exception that soldiers now come in a variety of colours, and more than one sex and/or sexuality. The making of soldiers into machines is scarcely a new phenomenon, continuing to signify the constitution of the body as a primary site of technological inscription. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (1977: 138) argues that by the eighteenth century the soldier was already becoming something that could be constructed:

> The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born, it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies.

The human body continues to be a key site of technological grafting in the American military: '[t]oday ... [t]he basic currency of war, the human body is the site of these modifications, whether it is of the "wetware" (the mind and hormones), the "software" (habits, skills, disciplines), or the "hardware" (the physical body)' (Gray 1997: 195–6). However, these arguments do not fully capture the reconstitution and the reproduction of the twenty-first century cyborg soldier, thus a few *modifications* are necessary to complicate further and contextualize representations of the cyborg soldier.

The cyborg has far deeper roots than the late twentieth century, but what constituted the cyborg in its earlier manifestations, the insertion of the mechanical into the biological to enhance the biological, has been radically rearticulated in the contemporary context of advanced technology. It has not entirely lost historical understandings of the cyborg but neither has it remained the same. The constitution of the cyborg soldier is contextual, complex and often contradictory, and in many ways the present constitution of the interface has been ‘unfaithful’ to its past, particularly unfaithful to the enhancement of the biological. What we are witnessing, and indeed participating in, is the constitution of the cyborg soldier as a radical rearticulation of human subjectivity (Springer 1996: 33) – a subjectivity that is fundamentally post-human. This post-human subjectivity is represented through the cyborg in the very processes of transferring human reasoning and thinking from human subjects onto technology, wherein technology is infused with the ability to reason and think without being interrupted by emotions such as guilt or bodily limitations such as fatigue, and in that the human body is no longer the subject that can produce and project desired representations of the American self. However, this post-human subjectivity may also be read through Enlightenment humanist discourses, wherein the constitution of the cyborg soldier represents a nostalgia that coincides with the teleological trajectories of Cartesian and Kantian discourses – the separation of reason from emotion, and mind from body – in other words, a ‘libertarian technophilia’ (Gabilondo 1995: 431).

Whereas historically humans could be, and have been, disciplined into fine-tuned fighting machines, they no longer seem able to meet the demands of advanced technologies, and instead have been constituted through military techno-scientific discourse as having hit a ‘developmental wall’ that seemingly cannot be surpassed. In part this stems from the compression of time and expansion of space produced through advanced technologies. As Chris Hables Gray (1997: 40) argues:

> [b]attle is three dimensional now and as it spreads into physical space it compresses in real time (i.e., lived, human). AirLand Battle goes 24 hours a day . . . Rapid attacks, slashing and thrusting scatter the enemy fronts and armies in a matter of hours instead of the days that blitzkriegs took . . . In the war of mechanical speed against human reactions, bodies are the real losers.

Thus, no matter how much the mechanical is inserted into the biological, the body still needs to sleep and eat. ‘Be all that you can be’ – the quintessential motto of the Army – is no longer enough. Thus, the constitution of the cyborg signifies the desire in military techno-scientific discourse to acquire maximum, if not total, intelligence, while at the same time escaping the imperfections of the human body through the coding of human bodies as problems in need of solutions. ‘And yet, while disparaging the imperfect human body, the discourse simultaneously uses language and imagery, associated with the body and bodily functions to represent its vision of human/technology perfection’ (Springer 1998: 484). This not only symbolizes an anxiety engendered through the vulnerable human soldier but also a ‘rage at our bodily limitations’ (Robins and Levidow 1995: 124). The effect is that the triad of hardware, software and wetware are no longer solely about the human soldier: the *hardware* has now come to represent the whole range of advanced high-tech weapons, the *software* represents information and communication technologies and the *wetware* represents the embodied human soldier and, significantly, the weakest link in the triad.

At the same time, the constitution and production of the cyborg soldier is rearticulating the ubiquitous relationship between techno-scientific discourses and masculinist discourses. Hierarchical dualisms which have traditionally distinguished between masculinity and femininity – culture/nature, mind/body, superior/inferior, subject/object, objectivity/subjectivity, disembodied/embodied, strength/weakness, active/passive, rational/irrational – have come to represent the distinction between cyborg and 'humanoid'. The characteristics traditionally inscribed on male bodies have been rearticulated by military techno-scientific discourses and remapped onto military technologies, reflecting Donna Haraway's (1991: 152) claim that '[o]ur machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert'. So while the cyborg soldier has blurred particular distinctions between machine and man, where *technology* embodies *masculinity*, the distinctions between the cyborg soldier and the traditional soldier have become discursively formalized along the lines of masculinity and femininity. In effect, military technologies have been 'techno-masculinized' while human soldiers, apart from technology, have been 'feminized' and reconstituted within the realm of those needing 'protection'.

For instance, up until the Gulf War, soldiers were the subjects of military discourse: they were the focus of intense training and discipline, it was soldiers who engaged in battle with the aid of technology, it was soldiers who ultimately won wars in the eyes of the American body politic and it was soldiers who won medals of honour, valour and courage. Contemporary military techno-scientific discourses, however, have fundamentally altered who and what are the subjects and objects of discursive power productions, where advanced technologies now constitute the subjects and human soldiers constitute the objects of military discourses (for a discussion on the inversion of subject/object in military discourse, see Cohn 1987). This inversion is quintessentially what constitutes the cyborg – where what we are witness to is not so much the insertion of the mechanical into the biological, but alternatively the insertion of the biological into the mechanical. With the body of the soldier no longer representative of American identity, technology instead has become the productive site of identity and the nexus of power and knowledge within American military techno-scientific discourses. In other words, technology, not the body, is the critical surface for the writing and speaking of power and knowledge (Haraway 1991: 153).

Technology as a productive site of power/knowledge thus demands critical inquiry into how cyborg soldiers are constituted within American military techno-scientific discourses. This is a critical feminist practice necessary for exploring the dangerous possibilities represented in the instantiation of the cyborg soldier. The cyborg soldier represents dangerous possibilities expressly through the heightened and hyper disembodiment and disembeddedness from the discursive materialities of war: violently inscribed 'alien' bodies who discursively appear as blips on radar screens, infrared heat-sensored images, laser-guided targets, numbers and codes on computer screens and enemy targets in virtual reality military training simulations. While the discursive dehumanization of the enemy is not a new phenomenon solely ascribed to the cyborg, the cyborg soldier further mystifies these processes by leaving very little evidence of the 'enemy', or for that matter, any evidence of the other in the desired subject self.

Moreover, this calls for critical inquiry into the militarization of masculinity and into the discursive processes inscribing hegemonic masculinity on/into military technologies. The constitution of the cyborg

> in fact provide[s] new ground upon which to argue that gender and its representations are [discursive] technological productions . . . cybernetics simultaneously maps out the terrain for both postmodern discussions of the subject . . . and feminist debates about technology, postmodernism, and gender.
>
> (Halberstam 1998: 476)

The formation of the cyborg soldier provides new grounds upon which to reveal gender representations as contingent, historically grounded, social constructs – it is not that military technologies are inherently gendered, or in other words, that military technologies are prediscursively masculine, but rather that constructions of the cyborg soldier within military institutions need to be understood as performative and in continual (re)production.

This also provokes and compels a critical feminist inquiry into questions of subjectivity, because the grafting of subjectivity on/into military technologies through techno-scientific discursive practices within the American military violently delimits the terrain of alternative possibilities. This is so at the very least because these discursive inscriptions enable and constitute representations of an American self without the burden of responsibility – the responsibility signified in the desire to be an 'I' (Levinas 1986). Also, because the attempt to shed oneself of the burden of responsibility to the other is enunciated in the desire for a unitary, hegemonic identity, manifest in the desire for the infallible cyborg soldier.

> Hence, it will be as important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as is it will be to think about how and to what end bodies are *not* constructed and, further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary 'outside,' if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter.
>
> (Butler 1993: 16)

Navigating the ethical possibilities and implications of inscribing military technology with subjectivity, and thus power, requires not only analysing the *effects* of advanced military technologies, but also analysing the processes that discursively constitute the cyborg as a political subject. It also requires exploring the (re)creation of others in the processes of (re)creating the self, because it is in this relationship that ethics is made possible. Therefore the question of how we can begin exploring the emergence of ethical moments within these articulations is what this article ultimately seeks to explore.

MILITARIZED MASCULINITY AND CYBORG SOLDIERS – 'BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE MADE INTO' (GRAY 1997: 203)

Militarized Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinist discursive practices have long been essential to the constitution and reproduction of American soldiers within the military apparatus. Discourses produced within the American military, however, differ significantly from the masculinist discourses in broader social contexts and therefore need to be represented as specifically 'militarized masculinity'. Distinct, in that militarized masculinity is intimately linked to specific processes of militarization (the making of 'man' into 'soldier'): 'out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed' (Foucault 1977: 135). Significantly, the archetype of militarized masculinity goes further than producing particular qualities; it is also fundamentally about representations of race and sexuality – wherein whiteness and heterosexuality are crucial signifiers of militarized masculinity. These signify the ideal representation of the American soldier – white, male and heterosexual – and have historically functioned as the representation of power within the American military (for further discussion on the operation of race and sexuality in the production of US soldiers, see Farmanfarmaian 1992; Boose 1993; Cohn 1998; Niva 1998).

The American defeat in the Vietnam War, however, signified a crisis in these representations and, importantly, a crisis in the representation of the American subject self because Vietnam produced no 'heroes' and belied the 'warrior myth', effectively castrating the almighty American post-WWII phallic identity (Hooper 1998: 40). In its place, anti-war discourse and a strong peace movement within the American body politic 'asserted – and for a time successfully promoted – an identifiably "feminized" structure of values against the distinctly "masculine" priorities of the other [patriotic nationalism] . . . [and] effectively challenged the hegemony of American culture's traditional self-presentation' (Boose 1993: 70). These counter-narratives of the Vietnam War, which were significantly different from hegemonic representations, none the less continued to operate within hierarchal dualisms constituted by hegemonic discourses of masculinity and femininity. On the one hand, through the reification of so-called feminine values; on the other hand, and contradictorily, by maintaining men as the subjects of counter-representations, even though discursively 'emasculated'. Although the Vietnam narrative crisis of hegemonic militarized masculinity offered an opportunity to renegotiate representations of American identity and fundamental social and political relationships of power in more reflective and responsible ways, this did not take place. Instead, what was renegotiated and consequently reproduced through dominant revisionist narratives and pop culture (e.g. Rambo and Terminator movies) was the retrenchment of hegemonic masculine representations through which the 'problem' of Vietnam was 'reformulated' (Boose 1993: 72). While pop culture narratives became one of the modalities through which to reformulate American identity, the Gulf War provided the 'real' modality to reconstitute and reinvigorate a techno-masculinized American military.

The discursive constructions of the Iraqi 'threat' which precipitated the Gulf War were integrally about the 'rebirth' of the American military, and accordingly the (re)production of hegemonic militarized masculinity. The testing of American 'manhood', the flexing of military phallic muscle, visions of the American 'warrior' and all types of phallic representations reconstituted American military discourse, and simultaneously reconstituted American soldiers. Throughout the Gulf War, it did not seem to matter that many soldiers (combat and non-combat) were women, racial, ethnic and sexual minorities. It did not seem to matter because central to representations of the American self during the war was the constitution of the Middle Eastern 'other' which posited and privileged American identity as white, western, heterosexual and masculine with the definitive purpose of defeating the non-white, non-western, Middle Eastern emasculated other. Difference necessarily had to be negated and disciplined within the American military ranks because what one was, was first and foremost an American soldier, and by discursive definition that meant white, male and heterosexual. But perhaps more importantly, difference had to be negated because to recognize difference would necessarily be to face the very impossibility of a singular and capital 'I' identity. One of the strategies performed in the Gulf War to mitigate against the recognition and admittance of difference and diversity within the self, was precisely through technological hybridization.

For instance during the war a popular caricature of Saddam Hussein depicted the Iraqi president on all 'fours', his posterior high in the air, seemingly 'inviting' a US missile draped in the American flag strategically targeting his rear end. This particular depiction exemplified the discursive construction of Saddam Hussein, and Iraqis in general, as submissive (read: woman), inferior (read: ethnicity/race and animal-like) and deviant (read: homosexual). Simultaneously, this also discursively constructed American hegemonic militarized masculinity as embodied in a single phallus-shaped missile with the US military and American flag boldly emblazoned on it. Interestingly, it was a missile that represented American hegemonic militarized masculinity, and not a 'pumped up Ramboesque' soldier. As Kevin Robins and Les Levidow (1995: 123) argue:

> The Iraqi state, even an entire society, was personified as an irrational monster, 'a new Hitler,' from whom we must be saved. The sadistic 'rape of Kuwait' posed a threat of symbolic buggery against the West, even a threat to civilization itself. Saddam seemed to personify a sadistic, unpredictable, limitless violence. He was a 'madman' who transgressed the combined rules of morality and rationality . . . In contrast to Saddam's Sadistic, Scuddish violence, the West was imagined to be inflicting a morally based violence; 'our' missiles, by virtue of their precision and rationality acted as exterminating angels. The good/evil split permitted western TV audiences to deny the barbarism within their own civilization, to deny the internal sources of its violence, and to treat its destructive hatred as an enemy threat.

The constitution of the Iraqi other in these particular ways attempted to secure not only the hegemonic militarized masculinity of the American military, but also representations of the American body politic, and the West more generally, as once again the moral champions and saviours of the world. This in part was achieved in Operation Desert Storm through the fusion of techno-scientific discourse with discursive constructions of militarized masculinity. What makes the Gulf War stand out as a significant moment in American military discourse is that it was not only about recapturing the phallic power 'lost' in Vietnam, it was also an attempt to ensure that it would never happen again. Getting back what was 'lost' was not and could not be enough, because experience had proven it was not enough to begin with. The phallic power the American military reinvented and reproduced necessarily needed to be stronger, smarter, harder, deadlier and infused with much more staying power. It needed to be, in other words, the cyborg soldier.

Militarized Masculinity and Cyborg Soldiers – the Interface

> . . . by escaping from its close identification with the male body, masculine subjectivity has been rearticulated, suggesting that there is an essential masculinity that transcends bodily presence . . . What this reconfiguration of masculinity indicates is that patriarchy [and capitalist imperialism] is more willing to dispense with human life than with [masculine] superiority.
>
> (Springer 1998: 494)

Techno-militarized masculinity has come to symbolize the *model* American soldier, represented in the machine-man interface through the reciprocal processes of technologies constituting soldiers and militarized masculinity constituting technology. The machine–man interface in so many ways is literal in the American military, where everyday experience is characterized by constant interaction with advanced technology, from weapons to computers, from training simulations to *real* battle. The interface is also significantly metaphorical, in the sense that it is clearly not only *male* soldiers that interface with technology. Rather, the interface represents the discursive *unhinging* of male subjectivity from the physical male body and the reinscription of male subjectivity on/into military technologies, in which masculinity need not coincide with the bio-male body. 'It is not that the soldier is influenced by the weapons used; now he or she is (re)constructed and (re)programmed to fit integrally into the weapon *systems*' (Gray 1997: 195). Specifically, it is advanced technologies that are the subjects of discursive constructions, in other words, technology as the key signifier that *performs and represents* American identity. The impetus for the inscription and transference of male subjectivity on/into technology surfaced specifically in the post-Vietnam identity crisis of the American military and the US body politic at large.

The post-Vietnam identity crisis arose directly from the failure of American soldiers to 'live up' to representations of American hegemony post-WWII, literally and figuratively. The dead, wounded and maimed American soldiers returning from the war in Vietnam, broadcast for all America to see, belied the hegemonic warrior myth, especially in juxtaposition to Vietnamese guerilla war fighters – seemingly ill-trained in the 'art of war' and ill-equipped in comparison to American soldiers. This threw into question an American narrative premised on a mythical history of victory and glory, dating back to American independence from British colonial rule. How was it that one of the most powerful militaries in the world could not defeat, in the words of Michael Hutchinson, 'a bunch of skinny little Orientals in black pajamas' (cited in Farmanfarmaian 1992: 126)? How indeed, has been a significant motivating force in the constitution of the cyborg soldier. The Vietnam War exposed the vulnerability of the human body, and in particular the vulnerability of the human body as representative of American hegemony. All the training and discipline of American soldiers could not conquer the Vietnamese Oriental 'other'.

> [T]he fear of Vietnam functioned very much as castration anxiety for an emasculated American manhood that could only be soothed by an open and overwhelming display of prowess in the Gulf ... the war took place not with Iraq but with the self, with America itself.
>
> (Farmanfarmaian 1992: 112–3)

The reconstituted American 'prowess' performed in the Gulf, however, did not make the same 'mistake' of constructing American identity embodied and represented in the white male *human body*. In its place, American military technoscientific discourses constructed a much more resilient subject, a hegemonic technological subject animated by masculine subjectivity, effectively mitigating against the imperfections of the human body while simultaneously maintaining a close identification with white, heterosexual, masculine subjectivity.

High-tech weapon systems, state-of-the-art computer systems and information technology, artificial intelligence, complex virtual reality simulated training exercises, digitized battlefields and so on, animate the current debate surrounding the revolution in military affairs (RMA) and form integral components of existing US military war doctrine. Command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, information and interoperability – certainly a stretch from the 'Cold War days' of C3I (command, control, communications and intelligence) – inform, shape and constitute contemporary techno-scientific military discourses (Gray 1997). However, American techno-scientific discourses continue to rest on 'old forms of imperialism and oppression' (Stabile 1994: 14) and on Darwinian assumptions of 'survival of the fittest' that are in no way revolutionary but rather more evolutionary, of which the Gulf War was only a prelude to the debate currently underway. One thing that seemed clear during the Gulf War was that the American body politic would now only support wars that kept US soldiers out of harm's way. This has been one of the critical driving forces behind the so-called revolution in military affairs and ultimately has served as a rationale for increasing technological superiority. It is not that high-tech weapons necessarily win more wars than low-tech weapons, but they *virtually* keep *our* soldiers safe. The contemporary 'technophilia' manifest in American military techno-scientific discourses represents not only the desire to win wars, but more importantly represents the desire for absolute hegemony and dominance – a hegemonic subject-self. Integral to this is keeping soldiers 'safe' because 'dead' soldiers represent failure in the eyes of the American body politic, and dead soldiers represent vulnerability to the other.

In many ways, the inscription of technology with masculine subjectivity is easily recognized in military techno-scientific discourses. Phallic-shaped missiles, precision-guided missiles that easily find the 'target' (unlike their 'immature' counterparts that needed to try again and again to find the target) and aerial bombings that leave one with the impression of an 'orgasmic ejaculation' impregnating their target with death and destruction rather than life, are only a few of the more obvious representations of the discursive inscription of masculine subjectivity on/into military technology. What is less obvious is the discursive inscription of masculine 'intelligence' – knowledge – on/into military technologies, particularly military technologies that are not overtly gendered in shape, size and overall appearance, but gendered in capabilities, for instance computer and information technologies. 'At the heart of most dreams for absolute information there is the ideal of pure intelligence. It is a peculiar version of rationality that is masculine, mathematical, emotionless and instrumentalist' (Gray 1997: 70). Masculine subjectivity, as constituted by scientific discourses, has historically represented the mastery of mind over body, rationality over irrationality and intellect over emotion. This representation has traditionally been associated with the white, heterosexual male body, however, the male body has proven to be a serious liability to achieving, if not absolute, at least superior intelligence. Whereas male soldiers previously were constituted as the archetypal representation of that mastery, the failure of American soldiers in Vietnam essentially represented a failure to master the body, irrationality and emotion.

In response to this failure of human soldiers, twenty-first century military techno-scientific discourses have reconstituted the soldier in such a way as to allay the susceptibility of the human body through the discursive construction of technology, not the male body, as the subject effecting the discursive transcendence of embodiment. Advanced military technologies have now been constituted as superior in almost every way to the human male body – 'they' are superior at information and intelligence gathering, they are superior in 'remote sensing', they are stronger, faster, more agile and have much more staying power. The 'eyes' and 'ears' of the military are no longer susceptible to human error. For instance, the twenty-first century cyborg land soldier will be outfitted with technology that in essence replace his 'senses' through technological prostheses that replicate biological senses while circumventing human biological limitations: poor eyesight, hearing and discernment.

> His helmet will be fitted with microphones and earphones for communication, night-vision goggles and thermal imaging sensors to see in the dark, along with a heads-up display in front of his eyes to show him where he is on the ground and give him constant intelligence updates.
>
> (Waller 1995: 8)

Computers are not at the mercy of bodily functions and while they do not function without the presence of humans, the computer programmers who 'man' computers can always be replaced with relative ease, and without disrupting 'their' capabilities: 'The computer recommends the targets he should attack and even keeps watch on the skies when he's away from his screen (Waller 1995: 8). What this ostensibly effects is the circumvention of emotional and biological limitations in bio-bodies through the interface. The insertion of the biological into the 'mechanical' has ensured that techno-scientific discourses can discriminately pick and choose – discursively breaking down the biological – what does and does not get 'inserted' into the mechanical.

The cyborg represents the privileging of technology over biology to the detriment of the sentient body with the express purpose of reconstituting masculine and human subjectivity, thus positing power and knowledge in the cyborg. This relationship between knowledge and masculinity is articulated in techno-scientific epistemological commitments to rationality, objectivity and abstract disembodiment, effectively separating the 'knowers' from the 'known' through hierarchal dualisms of masculinity and femininity. The inscription of technology with masculinity fundamentally constitutes technology as rational, objective and the source of moral knowledge claims. Artificial intelligence (AI) scientists within the American military apparatus 'explicitly are working for exactly unsituated, disembodied intelligence through research on pure AI and in "downloading", putting a specific human's consciousness into an artificial brain' (Gray 1997: 72). In effect, these attempts to master knowledge are slowly closing the spaces in which to contest how knowledge is discursively constituted, and closing the spaces for alternative understandings of knowledge which are situated, contextual, subjective and open to interpretation and contestation.

One of the main signifiers of the cyborg soldier and hegemonic techno-masculinity has been the discursive, abstract disembodiment of advanced technologies inscribed with masculine subjectivity. Depersonalization from the effects of war and dehumanization of the enemy through various discursive practices, have long been 'hallmarks' of war and military doctrines. However, the cyborg soldier complicates these hallmarks in often more abstract, dangerous and insidious ways. The constitution of the soldier as cyborg has, if not radically, at least significantly, altered *who* is constituted as a soldier. Traditionally, the signifier *soldier* was confined to combatants, in other words, men who actually engaged in physical battle. The fusion of technology and masculinity has significantly blurred this traditional distinction, so that even now civilians can be considered soldiers, and more specifically, cyborg *soldiers*. Thus, military personnel, who will likely never be in physical battle and who literally sit in front of computer screens, have now been constructed as soldiers through the interface, effectively enlarging and reconfiguring the representations of soldiers because it is the technology that embodies masculinity and thus reconstitutes the 'soldier'. In the words of US military Colonel Ehrhard: 'It is the software engineer who kills now' (Beal 2000: 26). Cyborg soldiers, almost by definition, may never have to lay *human eyes* on their enemy again – the gaze will be that of the gunsight, computer screen and global positioning satellite targeting systems. On the continuum of traditional discursive depersonalization and dehumanization, the cyborg soldier represents the extreme of abstract disembodiment. In other words, the discipline once required for soldiers actually to kill enemy combatants has virtually disappeared because to kill in battle is to aim at a blip on a radar screen or a heat-sensored image. A mental image of an air fighter's 'bomb's eye view' during NATO's 'humanitarian' intervention in Kosovo, frighteningly captures this:

> Killing people does not go through your mind . . . From the air, the human factor doesn't mean what it would in an army guy. When you're a fighter pilot, you don't see eyes. You see things – a building, a truck, a bridge, a dam. It's all so technological. I had no Serbian in mind . . . I was shooting at a radar pulse.
>
> (Wallace 2000)

Abstract disembodiment has 'virtually' disembedded cyborg soldiers from the very material realities inscribed in the interface, where the Gulf War became

> the ultimate voyeurism: to see the target hit from the vantage point of the weapon. An inhuman perspective . . . Seeing was split off from feeling; the

> visible was separated from the sense of pain and death. Through the long lens the enemy remained a faceless alien, his/her bodily existence de-realized ... Perversely, war appeared as it really was.
>
> (Robins and Levidow 1995: 121)

The distinctions between simulation and reality, training and battle, have been breached to the point that there is *virtually* no distinction, where the critical distinction should be that people are killed in the *real* world of war. However, corporeality has been obliterated in the cyborg through the apparent interchangeability of reality and simulation. A telling example of this is the description of the Combat and Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany, by an American Colonel:

> Once a unit goes into the Box, with the exception that they're shooting laser bullets, and that a guy, instead of falling down with a gunshot wound, will read from a card he's carrying in his pocket how badly hurt he is, virtually everything we do is real. There's nothing simulated in the Box.
>
> (Der Derian 1997: 121)

The discursive naturalization collapsing reality and simulation has, and will have, deadly ramifications for the bodies violently inscribed by *real* wars and cyborg soldiers. The disciplining of soldiers to believe that simulations are reality, and conversely, that reality is a simulation 'produces "a kind of isolation" from the violence of war that allows for its unrestrained prosecution ... removed from the bloody results of their decisions' (Gray 1997: 200). Simultaneously, this rationalizes and mystifies the disappearance of the body from war, and the denial of the 'sentient physicality of human embodiment' (Gusterson 1998: 124).

The denial and suppression of embodiment is indicative of the inscription of military technology as the subjects of techno-scientific masculinity, and of human bodies, both soldier and civilian, as the objects of power and knowledge. The discursive positioning of military technologies as superior to the human soldier has constituted machines as the subject of the text. Technology has become the surface upon which power has been inscribed – inscribed with the power to 'write the world' (Haraway 1991: 175) through violent inscriptions and domination. The transference of subjectivity onto technology has fundamentally grafted military technology with agency and power through the discursive reinscription of hegemonic techno-militarized masculinity as representative of machine. The cyborg soldier now plays a central role in constructing meaning, in effect constituting the other. The language of the cyborg is the language of violence. It is a language that has the power to generate meaning and knowledge about the bodies upon which it acts. The *other* – gendered, racialized and sexualized – is constituted as less human, as object, as different, as a 'code problem' in need of techno-scientific solutions. The language of the cyborg necessitates the denial of the body of the self so that it can act upon the body of the other, effecting a distance and disassociation from the other so that it can engage in practices of domination, subordination and subjugation. Necessarily, this has required the naturalization of the machine–man interface through techno-scientific discursive practices in order to legitimate practices of hegemony.

The affinity between machine and hegemonic masculinity within the American military apparatus has been made to appear as a natural process deepening and reinforcing the split between mind and body 'which effectively disembodies ethical deliberation' (Shildrick 1997: 116). High-tech weapons are rationalized through discourses of protection and defence, where it seems that even human soldiers need to be protected, evident in the discursive emasculation and feminization effected on the bio-bodies in the transference of subjectivity onto technology. Human soldiers are slowly becoming support workers for the cyborg soldier, who are now inscribed with the identity of warrior, defender and protector, with a captive feminized and emasculated audience as the supporting cast for its production. Male bodies no longer keep America safe; the masculinized bodies of technology keep America safe. The cyborg soldier as subject effectively denies the subjectivity of the other and remystifies and makes invisible responsibility to the other. 'Technology not only becomes a shield for humans but in many ways it seems headed toward "literally replacing human responsibility" ' (Gray 1997: 103). One of the ways in which this has been produced is through the cloaking of the cyborg in discourses of morality, peace and humanism, even while techno-scientific discursive practices effect an utter denial of the human body:

> Today we are once again seeing renewed optimism that technology might yet provide relief from the nightmare of war. Recent scientific developments raise hopes that 21st-century warfare – if not avoided all together – might nevertheless be waged in a more humane manner. Much of this optimism is traceable to the Gulf War where the application of high technology seemed to minimize allied and Iraqi casualties alike.
>
> (Dunlop 1999: 24)

One can be sure that Charles Dunlop could not anticipate his words being put to the test not long after he committed them to paper, leaving us with the opportunity to ask: has advanced technology provided 'relief from the nightmare of war' and is twenty-first century warfare being waged more 'humanely'?

Operation Iraqi Freedom and Cyborg Soldiers II?

With the help of Hollywood, 70-inch plasma screens and 'crystal-clear video images of war-zone action' (Gill 2003: A14) we *watched* all the weaponry, gear and technology of the cyborg being set up in and around the borders, boundaries and bodies of Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Through our equally high-tech TVs in our living rooms, we *heard* that this war was about saving the Iraqi people from their despotic leader. We *heard* that this war was about peace, freedom and liberty, democracy and thus fundamentally about all of humanity. This time it wasn't specifically about saving some people from other people, it was about saving all of us from all that Saddam Hussein stands for, especially his weapons of mass destruction. To this end 23,000 cyborg-guided bombs were dropped on Iraq, in comparison to the 9,500 dropped the first time around in Operation Desert Storm, and this time they 'hit the buildings they were aimed at nearly 100 percent of the time' (Houlahan 2003: 2). (One probably does not want to know how many targets were missed in Operation Desert Storm). As well, with the help of global positioning system satellite signals (instead of the topographic maps stored in the 'electronic brains' of the Tomahawks in 1991) more than 800 cruise missiles were launched, in comparison to 333 launched in Gulf War I (Houlahan 2003: 2). All in all, the number of smart, cyborg weapons used was 'more than double that used in Kosovo and six times that used in the first Gulf War' (Forbes 2003: 2).

> The surgical removal of a one-party police state while trying to leave the civilians and the infrastructure as untouched as possible is an operation of unusual difficulty. Yet the pictures from the opening nights of the war told the story: plumes of smoke from precision strikes on Saddam's instruments of power while the city lights remained on and cars casually traversed the streets.
>
> (Krauthammer 2003: 1)

The cyborg soldier is once again on the stage for all of us to see. But is that all that we saw?

Despite all of the efforts to make this the 'cyborgian war orgy' of all war orgies and also to secure the representation of absolute technological hegemony over the other, the cyborg soldier failed. This failure was not only because the cyborg could not live up to its discursive production – failure was already signified in the cyborg's fractured identity – but also because the performance went too far. The very desire to project this representation for all the world to see exposed the very myth of the infallible, invulnerable cyborg soldier. Embedded reporting was intended to propel us into the cyborg narrative, indeed it was intended to bring us into close and personal contact with the 'awe' of advanced technology. Instead, we were 'shocked' by its 'fundamental vulnerability and sometimes downright uselessness' (Elizabeth Dauphinee, Researcher, Centre for International and Security Studies, York University, Toronto, Canada, 30 September 2003). It's not that we were simply witness to the 'fog of war' but rather that we were witness, quite literally, to the 'sand' of war – sand that literally, and often, brought the cyborg to a s(t)andstill. The strategy of 'shock and awe', borrowed from Harlan Ullman and James Wade's *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, was figuratively turned on its head, not because the strategy did not live up to Ullman and Wade's doctrine for how the Department of Defense should approach war in the twenty-first century, but rather because it did:

> . . . the objective is to apply brutal levels of power and force to achieve Shock and Awe. In the attempt to keep war 'immaculate,' at least in limiting collateral damage, one point should not be forgotten. Above all, war is a nasty business . . . While there are surely humanitarian considerations that cannot or should not be ignored, the ability to Shock and Awe ultimately rests in the ability to frighten, scare, intimidate, and disarm. The Clausewitzian dictum concerning the violent nature of war is dismissed only at our peril.
>
> (Ullman and Wade 1996: 24)

The strategy of 'shock and awe' employed in Operation Iraqi Freedom succeeded in its very aim: it frightened, scared, intimidated and disarmed the people of Iraq, but it also frightened, scared, intimidated and disarmed American people and soldiers as well as people around the world. In the words of a US soldier serving in Iraq:

> . . . as a soldier preparing to take part in the invasion of Iraq, the words 'shock and awe' rang deep within my psyche. Even as we prepared to depart, it seemed that these two great superpowers were about to break the very rules that they demanded others obey. Without the consent of the United Nations, and ignoring the pleas of their own citizens, the US and Britain invaded Iraq. 'Shock and awe'? Yes, the words correctly described the emotional impact I felt as we embarked on an act not of justice, but of hypocrisy.
>
> (Predmore 2003)

But not even American soldiers publicly protesting their own country's preemptive action in Iraq or hundreds of thousands of people around the world taking to the streets in protest seemed to matter. In the American security desire to once again wage war on the bodies and terrain of Iraq, it appeared to be through the violent gaze of the cyborg that the bodies that mattered materialized – the body of the cyborg soldier and the cyborgs sitting on the sofa in front of their television screens – the bodies that failed to materialize, or that disintegrated before our cyborg eyes, are bodies that do not matter. This compels the question of how do we or can we navigate the terrain of representations produced in this particular moment?

Alternative Body Politics – Negotiating the Pleasures and Pains of the Interface

> From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of women's [and other men's] bodies in a masculinist orgy of war. From another perspective,

> a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters.
> The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism ... But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.
> (Haraway 1991: 151–4)

It is in this particular moment, the moment of demarcating which bodies matter and which bodies do not, that questions of ethics and responsibility must be raised. The Levinasian encounter with the other is upon us. The self in this very moment is facing the other, an other that has yet to be utterly and violently obliterated and thus reduced to the self. But the 'possibility, as well as ... necessity, of responding – that is, reacting – to what Levinas defines as an incalculable alterity of the other is the source of an ethical condition (even if not a guarantee of its positive fulfillment)' (Zylinska 2002: 219). Its unwillingness to expose the vulnerability and fragmentation always present in the self, thus the unwillingness to 'put into question' that which is already always in question, will without a doubt effect closure to the other. No Levinasian invitation, welcoming or ethical act of responsibility will greet the other. But must this signify the closure of *other* articulations and dissimulations? Is there still time to articulate *other* politics, politics of contestation, contradiction and multiplicity, politics grounded in social and bodily reality, not in virtual reality, simulations, boxes, cockpits and securitized outer-spaces? 'What if we leave the desire for mastery to the insecure and instead imagine a new dialogue of security, not in the pursuit of an utopian end but in recognition of the world as it is, *other than us*?' (Der Derian 1995: 26). What if we took up Nietzsche's challenge 'to destabilize the intolerable fictional identities of the past which have been created out of fear, and to affirm the creative differences which might yield new values for the future' (Der Derian 1995: 32), to 'beware of *superfluous* teleological principles! – one of which is the instinct of self-preservation' (Nietzsche 1997: 10)?

One place to begin is the recognition that the 'black box' of the cyborg soldier is infinitely leaky (Ormond 1995: 32). In rearticulating alternative politics, we must begin by navigating through the reality that technology is an integral part of western ontology, which cannot be simply wished away through 'the nostalgic longing for an allegedly better past' (Braidotti 1997: 521). Nor can technology be romanticized as the ultimate arbiter of emancipation from western epistemologies and ontologies while simultaneously taking seriously the claim that technology can be a critical component of *other* politics. For instance, Donna Haraway (1991) argues that advanced technologies can fundamentally challenge traditional western discourses grounded in dualisms, because technology effectively blurs for example, distinctions between mind/body, self/other and man/woman. Technology, Haraway argues, makes apparent the social constructedness of unitary identity and ultimately reveals the multiplicity, contextuality and contingency of subjectivity. Although technology has emancipatory potential, I would argue that Haraway moves too quickly to embrace this supposedly postmodern, post-humanist technophilia, without attending to the social relationships of power engendered through technology. Technology can be unhinged from western discourses and ontology, but not before hegemonic articulations of power and knowledge represented through technology are destabilized.

In the context of American military techno-scientific discourses and the constitution of the cyborg soldier, multiple subject positions, contextuality and constructedness have actually become more insidiously mystified. In reality, this multiplicity, contextuality and contingency have been discursively *flattened* through the constitution of the cyborg soldier. Certainly the construction of the cyborg soldier has blurred distinctions, but those distinctions have been extremely particular – primarily between man and machine, not between man/woman, self/other and mind/body. More importantly, the constitution of the cyborg has reconstituted and resolidified distinctions between technology and humanity, masculinity and femininity, mind and body and self and other. The cyborg soldier has not blurred many of the hierarchical binaries that inform American hegemonic discourses and practices. In addition, the blurring of binaries is only sufficiently emancipatory from the chains of traditional western discourses if they challenge the arbitrary and hierarchal nature of binary epistemologies. We are not witness to complex realities and experiences, instead we are witness to a *virtual* reality, that more often than not, has very little association to multiple bodily realities. Did we see the complex, multidimensional realities of the 'Iraqi other' in the Gulf Wars, or instead did we see, through the *gaze* of a Stealth bomber, the American construction of the pathological, totalitarian 'Iraqi other'? But even more critically, did we see anything at all through the *gaze* of American military technology that indicated any other life, any *other* bodies? The question becomes then what are the possibilities for challenging the dangerous and deadly effects of the cyborg soldier? 'What . . . might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as "life", lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?' (Butler 1993: 16).

Ironically, the construction of the cyborg soldier has provided the terrain upon which to contest and deconstruct the myth of unitary, homogenous identity and to advance moments of ethics and responsibility, on the basis that the cyborg itself is not unitary, it inevitably transgresses the boundary of man and machine. Critically, this exposes the permeability and fluidity of identity boundaries, and consequently, the constructed hierarchal boundaries between the self and the other. It also exposes that the very desire for unity and harmony of identity is 'closer to death rather than life' (Connolly 1991: 172). The cyborg soldier exposes the American self in its death throes, the desperate, anxious, fearful and violent attempt to make possible what can never be – the mastery of the American self. It represents a deep crisis in American representations of self in the very desire to construct an invulnerable subject position. These processes of identity desire, however, have had profound violent effects for those multiple other bodies upon which American identity has been articulated and inscribed. Ironically, it is through this crisis in American identity that alternative possibilities can be articulated, because these discursive representations can never be closed or finished productions; it can only ever be a partial formalization, for the deadly cyborg soldier to continue to exist it will need to be continually reproduced, effectively opening up spaces, however small, to articulate a politics of interruption and destabilization. Possibly, the very technologies that represent the cyborg soldier can be used against the cyborg and the culture of violence that it represents and reproduces.

The challenge then, is to radically *restyle* the subjects of ethics and responsibility (Jabri 1998): 'to create "a space for an encounter with, even intrusion of, what is radically different from the self"' (Hall 2002: 142). The challenge is to expose the very vulnerability and insecurity of the self, to make possible the ethical encounter with the other.

Cristina Masters
Centre for International and Security Studies
York University
375 York Lanes, 4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario,
M3J 1P3, Canada
E-mail: cmasters@yorku.ca

Notes

1 In Donna Haraway's (1991: 164) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, techno-scientific discourses are represented as the 'formalizations i.e., as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but should also be viewed as instruments for everyday meanings'; she expands on this in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. Female-Man_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (Haraway 1996). Haraway argues that techno-scientific discourses constitute:

> The apparatuses of twentieth-century military conflicts, embedded in repeated world wars; decades of cold war; nuclear weapons and their institutional matrix in strategic planning, endless scenario production, and simulations in think tanks such as RAND; the immune system-like networking strategies for postcolonial global control inscribed in low-intensity conflict doctrines; and post-Cold War, simultaneous-multiple-war-fighting strategies depending on rapid massive deployment, concentrated control of information and communications, and high-intensity, subnuclear precision weapons.
>
> (1996: 12–13)

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