



DRONES, CLONES AND ALPHA BABES: RETROFITTING *STAR TREK'S* HUMANISM, POST- 9/11

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10: Time, the Final Frontier

*If Europe is indeed the cradle of so much civilization, then it might at least have the decency to apologize for it. – Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, 68.*

*... the argument that we are just meat machines or instruments for passing on genetic information makes for an incredible dehumanization.... If we become nothing but our genes, we will have bled most initiative and choice out of the world. – Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 125.*

THANKS TO MILITARIST Donald Rumsfeld, chief architect of the American invasion of Iraq, France and Germany bear the designation “Old Europe” because the leader of each nation claims the humanist prerogative of having a mind of his own. To many of us who watched the prelude to war from the sidelines, these men stood in startling contrast to Washington’s *Homo multifarious*, chanting its coalition-building mantra: *You will be assimilated*. Jean-Luc Picard is definitely Old Europe. Son of a distinguished family of French vintners that can trace its ancestry back to the French Revolution (*TNG* “Journey’s End”), the Enlightenment flows through his dignified veins. But he differs from the unrepentant French and Germans: although he defends the high-minded ideals of humanism, he at least has the decency to apologize for humanism’s excesses. Picard’s reserve and rationalism signal an abrupt departure from the rugged individualism of his predecessor, the impulsive American James T. Kirk. But his high-mindedness does get a bit tedious at times, so it was fascinating to follow his intermittent struggle with a serious case of post-traumatic stress disorder brought on by his assimilation ordeal. What Neil Badmington says of posthumanist humanism might also be said of post-trauma Picard: “A working-through remains underway, and this coming to terms is, of course, a gradual and difficult process that lacks sudden breaks” (22). This working-through can be traced in the most recent film, *Star Trek: Nemesis*, in which the clarity of

self-insight Picard once possessed finally becomes self-scrutiny “through a glass darkly.”

Picard’s struggle to reach a new level of self-understanding begins in *First Contact*, when he is confronted by Lily Sloan, who torpedoes the elaborate defence mechanism Picard has constructed to help him cope with unresolved post-assimilation issues. He flatly refuses to destroy the Borg-infested *Enterprise* and thus ensure against the assimilation of Earth and the annihilation of human history. Lily accuses him of being interested only in seeking personal revenge on the Borg:

- PICARD: In my century, we don’t succumb to revenge. We have a more evolved sensibility.
- LILY: Bullshit! I saw the look on your face when you shot those Borg on the holodeck. You were almost enjoying it!
- PICARD: How dare you!
- LILY: Oh, c’mon, Captain! You’re not the first man to get a thrill from murdering someone. I see it all the time!
- PICARD: *Get out!*
- LILY: Or what? You’ll kill me too? – like you killed Ensign Lynch? [an assimilated crewman]
- PICARD: There was no way to save him.
- LILY: You didn’t even try! *Where* was your “evolved sensibility” then?
- PICARD: I don’t have time for this!

Lily finally provokes him into a rage, and he smashes the glass of an adjacent display cabinet containing gilded models of every ship in human history that has borne the name *Enterprise*. Michele and Duncan Barrett’s interpretation of this scene is a telling one:

In smashing the ships, [Picard] is symbolically destroying not only his own ship but the entire culture of rational exploration and enlightened governance that Starfleet stands for. It shows us how selfish he has become – to satisfy his own desire for revenge he is prepared to watch over the death of all his crew. He is willing to sacrifice them (even to assimilation by the Borg, which he regards as worse than death), in pursuit of his personal “mad object.” For Picard, the vendetta is not purely personal.... The *Enterprise* represents humanity. Picard says: “we have not lost the *Enterprise*; we are not going to lose the *Enterprise* ... not to the Borg.” To lose the *Enterprise*, even if this

meant saving the crew and destroying the Borg, would be giving in. It would be allowing the Borg to take from him his personal symbol of humanity. (21, ellipsis in original)

Indeed, the *Enterprise*, the most complex – and the most fetishized – piece of technology ever humanly created (*TNG* “Booby Trap”) is material proof of humankind’s technological destiny, the humanist assumption upon which all of *Star Trek* has been premised to this point. But this techno-evolution would make no sense without a parallel Dawkinsian, or memetic, evolution. Humankind’s evolved sensibility is taken for granted by Picard, who is, after all, the apex of humanity and the long-awaited fulfilment of the Enlightenment’s Man of Reason. Together, Picard and the *Enterprise* add up to Extropian-style evidence that “[a]s a species, we are a technological and teleological force of nature” (Burch 2000).

But *First Contact* questions both the techno-destiny and the evolved sensibility of twenty-fourth-century humankind. Picard turns out to be no different from his twenty-first-century predecessors in that he is indeed shown “to get a thrill from murdering someone.” Moreover, techno-history is represented as anything but foreordained, for humanity’s success as a spacefaring species is merely a product of historical contingency – an effect of chance. Indeed, the chance encounter between Zefram Cochran, pilot of Earth’s first warp-ship the *Phoenix*, and a Vulcan ship on a routine survey mission is precisely the historical happenstance that the *Enterprise* has travelled back in time to protect from a temporal incursion as decisive as the happenstance cosmic event that wiped out the dinosaurs. Much of the film is about the cognitive dissonance experienced by Cochran, as he struggles to reconcile his role in an accident of history with the *Enterprise* crew’s radical reconstruction of it as the unfolding of humankind’s techno-destiny. “Please,” he begs, “I’ve heard enough about ‘the great Zefram Cochran.’ I don’t know who writes your history books, but you people got some pretty funny ideas about me. I didn’t build this ship to ‘usher in a new era for humanity.’ You think I wanna go to the stars? I don’t even like to fly! *That’s* Zefram Cochran! This other guy you keep talking about – this ‘historical figure’? I never met him.” Above, in orbit, Cochran’s twenty-fourth-century counterpart is frantically trying to avoid his own appointment with destiny. “I don’t have time for this,” he insists, executing a manoeuvre to evade Lily’s incoming torpedo. But the shattering glass of his display case signals its impact. This shattering might also be the sound

of *Star Trek's* humanist vision of the future crashing down in violent opposition to transhumanism's.

Picard emerges from his post-traumatic disorder a changed man. No longer is he the foreordained fulfilment of the Enlightenment's Man of Reason but rather, the outcome of the interaction between nature and nurture – specifically, his genes and his Starfleet training and experience. The interaction of chance and choice in the construction of subjectivity is the central theme of *Nemesis*. “Were we Picards always warriors?” asks his clone Shinzon, searching for a genetic explanation of his brilliant military career. “I think of myself as an explorer,” Picard answers. “Well, were we always explorers?” returns Shinzon, hoping this time for an *Oliver Twist*-style revelation of destiny encoded in his genes. Picard's gaze turns inward upon distant memories:

PICARD: I was the first Picard to leave our solar system. It caused quite a stir in the family. But I'd spent my youth –
SHINZON: looking up at the stars dreaming about what was up there. About –
PICARD: new worlds.

His reverie interrupted by this curious completion of each other's sentences, Picard abruptly returns to the present, momentarily gripped by the biodeterminist myth that “blood will tell.” Jean-Luc is the only surviving member of the venerable *Familie Picard* (*Generations*), and he is currently in the process of separating from the only “family” that remains to him, namely the members of his bridge crew who are going on to other things. What better way to ease his melancholy than by embracing this young man, this disturbing reminder of what he once was: “a damned fool – arrogant, ambitious, and very much in need of seasoning,” as he describes himself as a young cadet to Dr. Crusher. For the duration of this nanosecond, Picard is caught by Shinzon's desire: “I want to know what it means to be human.” But his own flash of desire dies in an almost imperceptible flicker of regret. “I'm trying to believe you, Shinzon,” he says, as he exits the alcove where this conversation has been taking place and steps out onto the floor of the Romulan senate:

If there is one ideal that the Federation holds most dear it is that all men – all races – can be united. What better example than a Starfleet captain standing in the Romulan senate. Nothing would make me

more proud than to take your hand in friendship – in time, when that trust has been earned.

Jerry Goldsmith's musical underscoring of this passage captures everything seductive about its humanist sentiment – a sign that *Nemesis* wants to be a film about more than just blowing stuff up. Unlike *First Contact*, whose ludic postmodernism invites us to pay attention to the way in which the film comments upon itself, *Nemesis* exhibits none of the playfulness that would keep an audience focussed on its dazzling surfaces. There are, of course, lots of action scenes and special effects, but they function more as visual expressions of the psychological violence that gives the film its dark intensity. Places in the script demand more subtle acting than audiences are used to seeing in *Star Trek*, and Patrick Stewart's Shakespearian training sets the standard in these scenes. Besides hammering home *Star Trek's* cyborgian definition of family as it evolved over the course of *TNG* and *Voyager*, the script reaches back to so many uncompleted story arcs in the *Star Trek* saga and makes so many allusions to previous films that one would have to be a Trekkie to appreciate them all. Indeed, one has to enter this film as one might a holodeck simulation. After all, if there is one thing that distinguishes *Star Trek* from all American pop culture phenomena that preceded it, it's the power of its ideas to inspire a Baudrillardian hyperreality, a Disneyland in which fans dress up in Starfleet uniforms and attend huge conventions where *Star Trek* actors are treated to a degree of deference usually reserved for NASA astronauts (see Jenkins).

But Trekkies aren't alone in finding uses for *Star Trek* that exceed the conventions of film critique. Within the academy, techno-theorists across the disciplines, taking their cue from Donna Haraway, have transformed *Star Trek* characters and other celluloid cyborgs into case studies – substitutes for technologies, biologies, and psychologies otherwise unavailable for close examination. Such studies are themselves illustrations of the permeability of the boundary between reality and illusion, real space and hyperspace, scholarship and science fiction. These studies have, in turn, influenced the cinema – the most celebrated example of which is *The Matrix* trilogy. My purpose in crossing the boundary and entering into the *Nemesis* fiction is to examine self-reflexivity, not as a postmodern cinematic device but rather, as a component of human psychology – a component that has so far eluded those AI and A-Life programmers who share the Extropian belief in the information/materiality split, assuming

that “human consciousness in an entirely different medium would remain unchanged, as if it had no connection with human embodiment.” *Nemesis* is especially useful for this kind of case study, since it offers us examples of two kinds of cyborgs: the infotechnologically constructed android and the biotechnologically constructed clone – or, more accurately, the genetically engineered human. Moreover, as I want to emphasize in my reading of it, the film assumes our ability to distinguish the differences and similarities between the two.

The difference between artificial and human intelligence is hardly a new theme for *Star Trek*. To cite just one example that closely parallels this film, *Voyager*’s “Equinox” contrasts the amoral behaviour of the holographic Doctor with the immoral behaviour of Captain Janeway. The Doctor’s actions are a consequence of the deletion of his ethical subroutines by a member of the *Equinox* crew. Janeway’s actions are a consequence of the very psychological dynamic that dealt the deathblow to the Enlightenment’s notion of reason: the return of the repressed. Upon encountering the similarly stranded Starfleet vessel *Equinox*, whose Captain has been murdering aliens and stoking his warp engines with their remains, Janeway refuses the opportunity this affords her to examine some of her own ethically suspect behaviour by looking into the mirror of her fellow captain’s crime. Sliding into a state of denial about her past violations of the humanist principles that underpin Starfleet protocol – principles intended to safeguard her humanity – she displaces her guilt by focussing exclusively on that of the *Equinox* crew, which she determines to punish by egregiously inhumane methods. Thus she enacts the ease with which interference from the irrational unconscious undermines simplistic notions of human rationality and autonomy. The solution to the Doctor’s vulnerability is simple: “Perhaps you should enhance your program with security protocols,” Seven suggests, “It will prevent such tampering in the future.” But there is no one-time fix for Janeway, nor is there any absolute guarantee that she won’t fall victim to her human frailties again. As she concedes in a later episode, the Prime Directive is only a statement of principle, not a practical document (“The Void”). Its power for good or ill is entirely dependent upon a captain’s ability to exercise self-honesty and compassion in its application. In *Nemesis*, Picard enacts the complicated and unending human struggle to narrow the gap between principle and practise, a struggle that requires him to rethink his humanist assumptions. That the struggle can never close the gap completely might go under the heading of “the human condition.”

In the scene I have already described, Picard is ending his first one-on-one meeting with the new Praetor of Romulus, ostensibly to discuss the possibility of political reconciliation. These negotiations have been contrived by Shinzon, and Picard cannot help but be aware that there are ulterior motives. He has no reason whatsoever to trust Shinzon and has already told him so, adding: "I cannot allow my personal feelings to unduly influence my decisions." It's this oblique admission of personal feelings for him that Shinzon has just exploited, hoping to undermine Picard's sense of responsibility to the Federation. But it hasn't worked. Recovered from his uncharacteristic lapse into a genes-will-tell moment, Picard's lifelong cultivation of the Federation worldview, reinforced by his Starfleet training, asserts itself. He is the embodiment of all that the Federation holds most dear, and he speaks of it as if, by some magic of twenty-fourth-century bioengineering, its humanist ideals have been encoded in his genes. To paraphrase Badmington, humanism has happened and continues to happen to him. It is the very thing that makes him *him*, and the experience cannot be erased in one out-of-time moment of intimacy with this stranger, this dangerously charming signifier of posthuman possibility. This scene is a perfect cinematic illustration of the "momentous question" Hayles identifies in other works of science fiction: "when the human meets the posthuman, will the encounter be for better or for worse? ... Will there still be a self to recognize and be recognized?"

Extropians are not especially interested in the cloning of humans as they currently exist. They place a much higher value on biotech as a technique for redesigning rather than replicating the human species; and they regard infotech and nanotech as routes to a postbiological future. Extropian involvement in the cloning issue is chiefly around the question of state regulation: a government ban on human cloning is an excellent example of the state's "entropic" interference in technological progress. The Extropians' position is consistent with their anarcho-capitalism: like all other new reproductive technologies, human cloning should be a consumer choice. The World Transhumanist Association highly recommends and links to its web site Steven Vere's "cutting-edge" article on cloning, originally published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. There are, according to Vere, at least two advantages to human cloning: economic and cultural. The cultural and economic value of cloning Clint Eastwood would be enormous, says Vere, as "His films have grossed several billion dollars over thirty years." There would be a similar advantage in cloning

sports stars: “there is always the possibility that the twin [i.e., clone] might not be interested in sports. But with the prospect before them of earning millions of dollars, this does not seem very likely.” Providing the decision is left up to “the DNA donor, the woman who will bear the child, and her husband who would help in raising the child,” Vere stipulates, “any Nobel prize winner would be worth cloning for the potential future contribution which their twin might make” (Vere). The assumption underlying all these speculations is, of course, a biodeterminist one. Genes are destiny: culture will play little, if any role in the clone product. Million-dollar movie stars, sports legends, and science geniuses will result, regardless of when, where, by whom, or under what circumstances they are nurtured or neglected.

By contrast, *Star Trek* is generally opposed to cloning, sometimes as a threat to genetic diversity, often as a threat to human individuality and uniqueness. Whether in a lab (*TNG* “Up the Long Ladder”), in a malfunctioning transporter (*TNG* “Second Chances”), or on a planet where replication occurs as a result of phenomena unknown to Federation science (*VOY* “Demon”), the duplication of a Starfleet officer is usually an occasion for much soul-searching on the part of the original. *Nemesis* is no different in this regard. Where it does differ from other treatments of cloning in *Star Trek* is that it’s not about cloning *per se* but rather, about the tangled relationship between biopolitics and geopolitics. Although Picard’s first reaction to his clone is one of shock and anger at the theft of his DNA – “I want to know where the hell he came from!” – these feelings are quickly replaced by others. As intimated in the scene I’ve already described, nature versus nurture – a debate in which Extropians come down on the side of a eugenics-style biodeterminism – is a prominent theme in the film. Picard’s struggle to understand the nature of his own subjectivity and that of his clone suggests that the evolving philosophy of *Star Trek* is informed by a more sophisticated understanding of biopolitics than is Extropianism.

The Borg’s potential for terrorizing audiences exhausted by Janeway’s spectacular victories in *Voyager*, they have been abandoned in this film for a much older adversary, the Romulans. The Romulans have been around since the original *Star Trek* of the 1960s, but they have never been fully gathered within the circle of liberal humanist assumptions. Described in *The Star Trek Encyclopaedia* as an “enigmatic offshoot of the Vulcan race,” the Romulans “left Vulcan about a millennium ago” in rebellion against the philosophy of logic and pacifism, two qualities of enlightened humanism with which Roddenberry characterized the Vulcans (282). Although under

the authoritarian rule of its elite class, the Romulan Empire is nevertheless the equal of the Federation in terms of its technological and cultural evolution. But here, in *Nemesis*, under the leadership of Picard's clone, assisted by a prototype of Data, the Empire is a far more explicit mirror image of the Federation than were the Borg of *TNG* and *Voyager*. Through these doubles, we are invited to examine the ways in which biology and technology are politicized to bring them in line with traditional humanist assumptions.

Since the potency of Janeway's weapon as a signifier of nanotechnology's dangers has also been exhausted, the writers have upped the ante in this film by inventing an even more dangerous biogenic weapon, one that annihilates biomatter on the subatomic rather than the molecular level – an SF combination of the worst of nano and nuclear technology. However, the message has not changed. Shinzon, having been swept to power on a wave of discontent among the Romulan military elite, possesses a weapon of almost unimaginable destructive power. This weapon generates “thalaron” radiation. “Thalaron research was banned in the Federation because of its biogenic properties,” Picard informs his officers. And no wonder! Thalaron radiation “has the ability to consume organic material at the subatomic level,” explains Dr. Crusher: “A microscopic amount could kill every living thing on this ship in a matter of seconds.” Indeed, the film's opening scene provides a demonstration: Shinzon's *coup d'état* is achieved by instantly turning the entire Romulan senate to dust in a shower of thalaron particles. The nanotech analogy for this effect would be “global ecophagy,” or what nanotech watchdogs describe less formally as a “Gray Goo apocalypse,” the obliteration of life that could result from the accidental and uncontrollable spread of self-replicating nanobot assemblers (ETC Group). Shinzon's state of the art starship, the predator *Scimitar*, is armed with this unspeakable weapon, which, as Chief Engineer La Forge explains, is designed to emit “a cascading biogenic pulse. The unique properties of thalaron radiation allow the energy beam to expand almost without limit. Depending on its radiant intensity, it could encompass a ship – or a planet.” Shinzon intends to use this weapon to initiate the subatomic equivalent of a Grey Goo apocalypse on Planet Earth.

Shinzon's malevolence and megalomania are the logical outcome of his unusual history. As part of a complex Romulan plot against the Federation, Shinzon had been biotechnologically created with the intention of his replacing Picard on the bridge of the *Enterprise* from which

position Shinzon would serve the Empire as intelligence operative. But due to a change in the Romulan government, the plan was abandoned, and Shinzon was shipped off to die in the dilithium mines on the Romulan colony planet of Remus. Despite starvation rations, unceasing labour, and violent beatings, Shinzon managed to survive, thanks to a young Reman guard who befriended him and taught him how to survive. Embittered by eighteen years under the Romulan lash and toughened by his experience in the Romulan military's Reman contingent – renowned as the most brutal fighting force in the Quadrant – Shinzon's ambition is Napoleonic in style and proportion. Only one thing threatens his plans. As Dr. Crusher discovers upon examining a sample of his blood, Shinzon was created with “temporal RNA sequencing.” He was designed so that at a certain point in his development his ageing process could be accelerated to reach Picard's age more quickly. Specifically, he was engineered to skip thirty years of his life. But with the abandonment of the Romulan plot, the sequencing mechanism was left unactivated. As a result, Shinzon is now in an advanced stage of cellular degradation. “Can anything be done for him?” Picard asks, permitting another glimpse into his personal feelings. Nothing short of a complete transfusion from a donor with compatible DNA, Beverly informs him. For this, Shinzon needs to capture Picard.

Shinzon's first attempt involves another clone. On a remote planet, a trap is baited with the body parts of a Soong-type android – a prototype of Lt. Commander Data. Picard and his Away Team investigate and are ambushed. But they escape, taking the android parts with them back to the *Enterprise*, where the android “B-4” is reassembled. B-4 is identical to Data in make and model but with a minimally developed neural net: he is barely sentient. Agreeing with Data that the B-4 was probably designed with the same self-actualizing parameters as Data himself, Picard approves the downloading of Data's memories into B-4's positronic matrix. In other words, Data differs from his organic comrades in that he has no anxieties about losing his uniqueness to a clone. Commander Data reasons that with his memories, the B-4 should have all of Data's abilities and be able to function as a more complete individual. “An individual more like *you*, you mean,” says La Forge: “Maybe he's not supposed to be like you, Data. Maybe he's supposed to be exactly the way he is.” “That might be so,” Data replies, “but I believe he should have the opportunity to explore his potential” – spoken, of course, like the synthetic subject of liberal humanism he is.

But the download produces no evidence of B-4's having integrated Data's store of knowledge. What Data and La Forge have failed to interpret correctly is the purpose of a supposedly redundant memory port located at the base of B-4's neck. Like the sample of Picard's DNA that gave rise to Shinzon, B-4 has been re-engineered to serve as a secret operative aboard the *Enterprise*. Thus does Shinzon begin to fulfil the goal of his own designers' aborted plot. The manipulation of both Shinzon and B-4 for political purposes recalls the following passage from Vere's cloning article in which he addresses the fear that "Evil dictators might abuse human cloning":

There is the possibility that unscrupulous dictators such as Fidel Castro or Saddam Hussein might try to perpetuate their power by creating a clone of themselves and transferring power to the clone when they die. There is also the possibility that such people might try to create a super army of thousands of clones of Arnold Schwarzenegger, and so on. These possibilities cannot be dismissed. However, it is important to keep in mind that passing laws in the US or other democratic countries cannot control the behavior of rogue dictators in totalitarian countries. The prohibition of human cloning in the US or Europe is not going to stop cloning in Iraq. If Saddam Hussein wants to clone himself, nothing short of a major military invasion can stop him. The evil in these scenarios derives not from cloning but from dictatorships. The proper solution would be a world-wide ban on dictators, which of course is not likely to happen. (Vere)

The absence of even the most rudimentary understanding of power prevents Vere from making the far stronger argument that the cloning of power – in democratic countries no less than in totalitarian ones – is both cultural and normative, not merely a future "possibility [that] cannot be dismissed." The cloning of George Bush Senior's Iraqnaphobia in George Bush Junior did not take place in a medical research facility or a fertility clinic. Nor did the fiasco by which the father's presidential power was replicated in the son contribute much to the distinction between democracy and dictatorship. Vere was no doubt pleased with the outcome of the Bush dynasty's second war in Iraq. But his defence of cloning is fundamentally contradictory: it resembles the American Rifle Association argument that "Guns don't kill people; people kill people," even as it blows that argument

apart. It's an argument that echoes the Extropian technology-as-tool motif in that it fails to acknowledge Thacker's observation of "the ways in which technology has always operated as a nonhuman actant."

The sentient android – even one as minimally sentient as B-4 – is an excellent representation of technology as nonhuman actant. In Shinzon's case, the tool is embedded in every cell of his body, engineered as a mechanism for advancing the political ambitions of those who brought him to life: the tool is as much a part of his genetic inheritance as are his Picardian facial features. Echoing Extropian anarcho-capitalist ideology, these two clones have the status of consumer products. They may be thrown out when they have outlived their usefulness, as in Shinzon's case, or they may be retooled for whatever other use the consumer has for them, as in the case of B-4. Whatever one thinks of Vere's *laissez-faire* position on cloning, he's got at least one thing right: "If you are afraid of human cloning, you are going to be petrified by human genetic engineering." Both Shinzon and B-4 raise urgent ethical questions about bioengineering – questions that cannot be left to technoscience to answer, nor to the corporations in whose service technoscience operates. This is where the political philosophy of Liberalism, given new expression through the cultural logic of late capitalism, fails us most profoundly – specifically, in its perpetuation of the fiction that a state wedded to *laissez-faire* economics is somehow also capable of regulating science and capitalism in the best interests of even those whose powerlessness prevents them from participating in the market and contributing to the GNP.

In Shinzon's second attempt to capture Picard, the Captain is beamed directly from the bridge of his ship to confinement in a lab aboard the *Scimitar*. Picard stands upright, bound within an apparatus conspicuous in its similarity to the Borg alcove in which we saw him narrowly confined in *First Contact's* opening flashback scene. A sample of his blood is extracted in a process all too similar to the brutal Borg injection of nanoprobes we saw him endure in "Best of Both Worlds." And for those in the audience unlucky enough to have missed those previous encounters with the post-human, Shinzon remarks: "What is it your Borg friends say? *Resistance is futile.*" These echoes appear to trigger memories in Picard, which he then projects onto this all-too-similar nemesis: "If your issues are with me, then deal with me. This has nothing to do with my ship – nothing to do with the Federation." "O, but it does!" Shinzon insists.

SHINZON: It's about destiny, Picard! It's about a Reman outcast –
PICARD: *You're not Reman!*
SHINZON: And I'm not quite human. So what am I? My life is
meaningless as long as you're still alive. What am I while
you exist? A shadow? An echo?

As he stands before the entrapped Picard, Shinzon reveals his own entrapment between what he regards as two polar opposites. Like the hybrid creature of Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs," he is "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal [anarcho-] capitalism" (1990 193), yet he does not feel liberated by this but rather, hopelessly belated. His hostility is oedipal. Picard's forceful insistence that Shinzon is not Reman reveals his own entrapment in this oedipal struggle. The Captain's need to break free of this psychological confinement – which includes the ideological constraints of humanism – is as urgent to the plot as is his need to escape from Shinzon's Frankensteinian laboratory. Significantly, it's Data – the same Data who liberated him from his link to the collective ("Best of Both Worlds") and released him from the clutches of the Borg Queen (*First Contact*) – who will spring him in this film from the multiple levels of his imprisonment.

In true Freudian fashion, Shinzon feels compelled to annihilate the father and embrace the mother – the culture of the Reman who nurtured and protected him from almost certain death in the dilithium mines, the culture of all his "Reman brothers," the family who "showed [him] the only kindness [he had] ever known":

SHINZON: ... We will no longer bow before anyone as slaves – not
the Romulans, and not your mighty Federation. We are a
race bred for war and conquest!
PICARD: Are you ready to plunge the entire Quadrant into war to
satisfy your own personal demons?
SHINZON: It amazes me how little you know yourself.
PICARD: I'm incapable of such an act!
SHINZON: You *are* me! The same noble Picard blood runs through
our veins. Had you lived my life, you'd be doing exactly as
I am. So look in the mirror. See yourself. Consider that,
Captain. I can think of no greater torment for you.
PICARD: Shinzon ... I'm a mirror for you as well.

The only way Shinzon can reconcile what he experiences as an internal civil war between nature and nurture – between his human genetic inheritance and his Reman cultural heritage – is to find in the former the brutality of the latter. Despite what Picard knows of his own potential for brutality through the experiences just recalled to him – his vulnerability to Shinzon-like fantasies of revenge, his capacity to “get a thrill out of murdering someone,” Locutus’s slaughter of thousands of Starfleet troops – he declares himself incapable of the kind of destruction upon which Shinzon is bent. Like Shinzon, he is reluctant to embrace the inevitability of subjectivity’s multiplicity. Both men are right: they are mirrors for each other. But as Picard has learnt and Shinzon has not, what each glimpses in the mirror must be struggled with as an option – not manifest destiny, not biological determination, but a matter of the agency and choice vested in the liberal humanist subject.

Psychology is not one of the sciences that *Trek* usually spends a lot of time and money on getting right – to wit, most of the narratives involving Counsellor Troi’s handling of the crew’s emotional problems. “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar,” says Troi, misquoting Freud (*TNG* “Phantasms”). But *Nemesis* is *TNG*’s swan song, and the writers have gone to great pains to show us a very different Picard from the one who assumed command of the *Enterprise* fifteen years earlier. He seems finally to have learnt something important about humanist individuality, namely, that its vaunted autonomy is an illusion – or, at best, relative. Human beings are not autonomous subjects but rather, interdependent. Psychologically, interdependence manifests as intersubjectivity. This realization is dawning on Picard, as he anticipates the future without his surrogate family, the web of interconnections in which his subjectivity is constituted and perpetually renewed. The concept of intersubjectivity not only works well as a framework for understanding how relationships are represented in the film; it is also consistent with the humanist-posthuman conversation, for like the cyborg it represents a crossing of boundaries – specifically, the boundary between self and other, I and thou – and represents the deconstruction of a binary at the heart of a theoretical impasse.

Dorothy Smith wasn’t the only Canadian feminist rethinking the abandonment of a whole tradition of feminist knowledge in the rush for the rarefied uplands of anti-Enlightenment theory. In 1996, Deborah Knight dared to question such feminist luminaries as film theorist Laura Mulvey and literary theorist Toril Moi as participating in a self-perpetuating crisis-mode

of thought created and sustained by anti-humanist rhetoric. The theoretical displacement of the “politically and morally repugnant,” unified subject of liberal humanism (43) by the “correct, progressive, politically efficacious,” fragmented postmodern subject has, in Knight’s view, resulted in “the structuring of a debate within a humanist/anti-humanist framework [that] trades on a series of remarkably overblown, virtually caricatured binary oppositions” (47). Because it seems to her “improbable that the only positions available are either the old, unfashionable humanist position or the new and more recently fashionable radically decentered anti-humanist position” (46–47), Knight argues for the rejection of both these caricatures, for “subjectivity is neither absolute and monolithic and univocal nor arbitrary and fragmentary and irreducibly polysemous.” She favours a conception of the subject that acknowledges that “subjectivity depends upon intersubjectivity” (53). Read in the context of this understanding of subjectivity, cloning functions as a trope. The uncanny ability of Shinzon and Picard to anticipate each other’s thoughts and actions, especially Picard’s self-reflexive insight into Shinzon’s character, is not explained by their having the same genes, thus being even more closely related than father and son and therefore experiencing their relationship as unusual in its oedipal intensity. These phenomena are better understood as intersubjective effects.

With the help of Data, impersonating B-4 in order to gain access to the *Scimitar*, Picard escapes his nemesis and returns to the *Enterprise*. As is his habit on the eve of battle, he makes ship’s rounds, “And like a thousand other commanders on a thousand other battlefields, I wait for the dawn.” He seeks out a consultation with Data. “For now we see but through a glass darkly,” Picard opens. “Sir?” says Data, taking the bait.

- PICARD: He said he’s a mirror.
DATA: Of you, sir?
PICARD: Yes.
DATA: I do not agree. Although you share the same genetic structure, the events of your life have created a unique individual.
PICARD: If I had lived his life, is it possible that I would’ve rejected my humanity?

Picard already knows the answer to this, of course. For Shinzon has reminded him of the role that privilege and opportunity have played in

making Picard who he has become and what he continues becoming. He could have remained safely on Earth and pursued a life of inherited comfort and social status, but he had exercised his agency and chosen to make a break with centuries of family tradition. Picard, the Starfleet Academy cadet, may have been “a damned fool – arrogant, ambitious, and very much in need of seasoning,” but as Dr. Crusher had noted, “he turned out all right.” Picard also knows how fragile his humanity really is. Shinzon has reminded him of that too. Data is not prepared to speculate upon Picard’s humanity, but he does draw a parallel that leads to the next step in the logic these two have been pursuing: “The B-4 is physically identical to me, although his neural pathways are not as advanced. But even if they were, he would not be me.” “How can you be sure?” asks Picard. “I aspire, sir, to be better than I am. B-4 does not – nor does Shinzon.”

As the results of the download had suggested, B-4 seems not to have been designed with the same self-actualizing parameters as Data after all. B-4 cannot “aspire.” Unlike Data, who is aided by ethical subroutines programmed in accordance with the Federation’s humanist principles, B-4 is incapable of making the distinction implied in Federation culture’s understanding of the word “better.” La Forge appears to have speculated correctly: “Maybe he’s not supposed to be like you, Data. Maybe he’s supposed to be exactly the way he is.” His role in Shinzon’s plot now having been discovered, he has been deactivated, as Data tells him, “because you are dangerous.” Like the Borg, B-4 is too technologically determined to be trusted. But Data’s analogy breaks down as it reaches for an equation between techno-determinism and biodeterminism. More sophisticated than B-4 by several orders of magnitude, Data is nevertheless still a computer. His rationalism is programmed in binary code: he can recognize sameness, he can recognize difference, but recognizing the irrational way in which they collapse into each other has always frustrated him in his quest to become more human.

But – to paraphrase Thacker – change the code and you change the cyb/organism. The “translatability” between genetic codes and computer codes is an Extropian illusion, a feature of the “informatic essentialism” to which Extropians subscribe (87–90). Thus, in contrast to Data’s coding, human genetic coding appears to give rise to another kind of understanding – the kind that Picard possesses. As he is coming to realize, it’s not a matter of biological determination but rather, biological *potential*. As evolutionary biologist and historian of science Stephen Jay Gould has written,

Linnaeus, the seventeenth-century taxonomist, had it right when he wrote that *Homo sapiens* is both special and not special. Unfortunately, however, “Special and not special have come to mean nonbiological and biological, or nurture and nature. These later polarizations are nonsensical”:

Why imagine that specific genes for aggression, dominance, or spite have any importance when we know that the brain’s enormous flexibility permits us to be aggressive or peaceful, dominant or submissive, spiteful or generous? Violence, sexism, and general nastiness *are* biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviors. But peacefulness, equality, and kindness are just as biological – and we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish. (Gould 257)

Romulan imperialism is hardly a social structure in which peacefulness, equality, and kindness can easily flourish among its colonized Others. Indeed, the dilithium mines of Remus seem perversely designed to cultivate aggression, dominance, and spite in any boy tough enough and lucky enough to survive. Unlike Picard’s, Shinzon’s early choices had all been made for him. Deep below the surface of Remus, denied the stars that had triggered Picard’s boyhood aspirations, Shinzon had internalized the only meaning of “better” available to him and aspired to it. He could not have come as far as he has in the absence of the necessary – if insufficient – genetic potential to do so. Shinzon and Picard are genetically identical, right down to their “aggressive strain of Shalaf’s syndrome,” a rare congenital condition affecting all the male members of the Picard family. It manifests itself in early childhood as a hearing disorder. Shinzon had suffered from it: “Finally I was taken to a doctor who had some experience of Terran illnesses.... Eventually, I was treated and now I can hear as well as you can, Captain.”

Picard certainly hopes so. For, at their next meeting, nature versus nurture is the only item on Picard’s agenda, and he needs Shinzon to hear this well:

Look at me, Shinzon. Your heart, your hands, your eyes are the same as mine. The blood pumping within you, the raw material is the same. We have the same potential.... Buried deep within you, beneath all the years of pain and anger, there is something that has never been

nurtured: the potential to make yourself a better man. And that is what is it to be human – to make yourself more than you are.... Oh, yes. I know you.... I see what you could be. The man who is Shinzon of Remus and Jean-Luc Picard could never exterminate the population of an entire planet. He's better than that.... You still have a choice. Make the right one now.

Within both Shinzon and Picard is an identical potential to slaughter thousands. But from Picard's humanist perspective, it all comes down to a matter of agency and choice – *having* a choice and *acting* on it. At Wolf 359, in the absence of agency and choice, Picard as Locutus fulfilled that potential. Shinzon is about to fulfill it in Sector 001. But like Shalaf's syndrome, biological potential responds to cultural intervention – in this case, nurturing. Self-reflexively, *vis-à-vis* his clone, Picard knows that nurturing can change the trajectory of Shinzon's aspirations, help to make him the man who “could never exterminate the population of an entire planet,” help to make him “better than that.” And why not? Shinzon has an advantage over Locutus of Borg. Shinzon still has a choice. But does he have the self-insight required to act on it? Cadet Picard may have “turned out all right” in the end, but for Shinzon, the end is already here. As Picard delivers these impassioned lines, he advances toward Shinzon. Imminent death already disfiguring his youthful features, Shinzon backs away: “I can't fight what I am.... I'll show you my true nature. *Our* nature.” Shinzon may have choices, but the fatal consequences of his perverse genetic engineering have caught up with him, ending the possibility of his developing what it takes to make the “right” ones.

Interestingly, it's in *Nemesis* that the Romulans are finally brought within *Star Trek's* expanding definition of humanism. The disaffected military officers who have made possible Shinzon's *coup d'état* undergo a change of heart when they begin to get some insight into his megalomania. As Sub-Commander Donatra says to her commanding officer, “Are you truly prepared to have your hands drenched in blood? He's not planning to defeat Earth, he's planning its annihilation. And his sins will mark us and our children for generations.” Commander Donatra offers Romulan assistance to Picard in his effort to prevent Shinzon from reaching Earth and detonating his weapon. And although Shinzon's *Scimitar* disables the Romulan vessels early in the battle, Donatra's later exchanges with Picard suggest that political reconciliation between Romulus and the Federation

may only be a matter of time. “The Romulans fought with honour,” says Commander Worf. This is high praise from the Klingon, who had often given voice to what the Federation’s human citizens were perhaps too “civilized” to say out loud; Worf had never made a secret of his opinion of the Romulans as a species of vermin.

In due course, Picard kills Shinzon in an especially gruesome scene on the bridge of the *Scimitar*, as the countdown toward detonation of Shinzon’s terrible weapon advances toward its final few seconds. But this time, Picard gets no “thrill out of murdering someone.” Indeed, the enormity of what he has just done paralyses him. Transfixed, he leans against the bulkhead, Shinzon’s body slumped against his own. Our knowledge that *Star Trek* films must always be scripted to include a happy ending does nothing to relieve the tension created by the relentless pace of the chronometer – *four, three, two* ... In the nick of time, Data appears, fixes his site-to-site transporter device to Picard’s breast, and beams his Captain to safety – but at the cost of his own life. Fragments of his android being are scattered across space with the spectacular explosion of the *Scimitar*. The companion who had rescued Picard from so many potentially fatal predicaments is gone. The Captain is now on his own. Or...?

In the film’s final scene, his surrogate family having disembarked for the last time, Picard sits in his Ready Room across from the reactivated B-4 trying to explain Data to him: “In his quest to be more like us, he helped us to see what it means to be human.” Picard now seems to understand fully that the only being who can perfectly embody the ideals of humanism is a synthetic posthuman consciously constructed in the image of Enlightenment Man’s ideal of himself. Assembled and programmed to specification, Data had been the only truly Rational Man aboard the *Enterprise* and *Star Trek*’s only consistently dependable repository of humanist values. All those years Picard had spent instructing Data in the value of the humanities – Shakespeare and Dickens, Bach and Mozart – were really years in which Picard was learning, through Data’s efforts to process the data, what the process of becoming entails.

B-4 hasn’t understood a word of what Picard has just said. With a sigh, the Captain rises and prepares to leave the android to whatever fragments of thought are flickering across his synthetic synapses. Suddenly, B-4 absent-mindedly sings a phrase of the song Data had sung at Riker and Troi’s wedding early in the film. B-4 repeats the phrase but can’t seem to get beyond it. Picard prompts him. B-4 responds but gets stuck again. A

second prompt gets the android only as far as the next phrase. Clearly, it's going to take time – the kind of time Shinzon ran out of.

* * *

Nemesis failed to impress American critics as one of *Star Trek's* cinematic successes, perhaps because film critics do not look to the action-adventure genre for social commentary on topical issues. Besides, in the popular American imagination, the face of the enemy is no longer imperialist but terrorist. Hence, in their eyes, the theme of the illegitimate leader launching illegal wars of aggression against sovereign nations/planets might appear timeworn and irrelevant. Any similarity between their Commander-in-Chief and Shinzon, who is “ready to plunge the entire Quadrant into war to satisfy [his] own personal demons” is not an idea many American viewers of this film are prepared to entertain at the moment. As so often in the past, Americans may well have to wait for the next *Star Trek* Anniversary Special to be told just how timely *Nemesis* was in terms of the geopolitical reality at the time of its release in the winter of 2002. Its treatment of biopolitics and biogenic warfare may also be appreciated only in retrospect – and only at the prodding of those at Paramount Pictures whose responsibility it is to keep the lucrative *Star Trek* phenomenon alive. Whatever the case, we are sure to see more cinematic science fiction dealing with military applications of nanotech and its science fictional equivalents, since – despite the hype that focuses only on the pharmaceutical and manufacturing applications of nanotechnologies – it's within nuclear weapons laboratories that the field of nanotech was born a few decades ago, and where huge sums of public funding are being invested (Arnall).

Star Trek is rarely taken seriously as an effective critique of such technologies – indeed, it is most often treated as merely a naively technophilic and teleological vision of American manifest destiny. It is, after all, only a mass-marketed series whose technobabble is regarded by many as reinforcing the mystique of science. As suggested by SF critic Carl Freedman, *Star Trek* is a “filmic and televisional” equivalent of pulp fiction that fails miserably to live up to theorist Darko Suvin's authoritative definition of science fiction as a “genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework

alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Freedman 14-16). Besides, *Star Trek's* defence of the indefensible humanist vision of Gene Roddenberry defines it as beneath the contempt of those postmodernist literary scholars who regard "serious" science fiction as a species of critical theory which, despite its anti-foundationalism, regards as foundational the Enlightenment as a dead project whose only remaining need is a decent burial. Yet many *Star Trek* scripts are not so very different from some of the most highly regarded SF texts. As I have argued, these scripts illustrate the way in which "posthumanist productions are folded together with humanist assumptions" and recognize that those assumptions require a "working-through," rather than "a belief that we can simply leave them behind." Moreover, *Star Trek's* writers have not shrunk from their responsibility to question humanist assumptions of technological "progress"; nor have they avoided the question of what Michael Crichton calls "our self-deluded recklessness," which is on track to "collide with our growing technological power" (Crichton x).

The collective efforts of those to whom Roddenberry entrusted his vision upon his death have resulted in an interesting, if not always coherent, conversation across the humanist/posthuman divide. It's a conversation not wholly unlike the one promoted by Hayles when she writes that "[t]he best possible time to contest for what the posthuman means is now, before the trains of thought it embodies have been laid down so firmly that it would take dynamite to change them" (1999 291). Gramsci, as quoted by Badmington, may well be right when he says that the current crisis "consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born," yet this only invites the kind of complacency that has characterized much of our postmodernist critique of the Enlightenment project to date. When Badmington writes that "[t]he present moment may well be one in which the hegemony and heredity of humanism feel a little less certain, a little less inevitable," he might well have used the Captain Picard of *Nemesis* to illustrate the statement (Badmington 21-22). But in reality, the erosion of humanism's hegemony and heredity exhibits little of the dignity with which Picard backs away from some of his most cherished assumptions. Indeed, if the present moment in our geopolitical relations is any indication, those leaders of Western culture who purport to lead in the name of humanism – or "civilization," as Bush calls the avaricious culture unwittingly spawned by it – are not about to go gently into that good night. Extropian-style transhumanisms may well provide humanism

with a renewed lease on life – one even more rapacious and hegemonic than anything its legacy has taught us to expect. We therefore need to shift more of our critical attention from dead and dying traditions to these morally and ethically impoverished futures struggling with such explosive energy to be born.