

## “We Can Rebuild Him!”: The essentialisation of the human/cyborg interface in the twenty-first century, or whatever happened to *The Six Million Dollar Man*?

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**Abstract** This paper aims to show how recent cinematic representations reveal a far more pessimistic and essentialised vision of Human/Cyborg hybridity in comparison with the more enunciative and optimistic ones seen at the end of the twentieth century. Donna Haraway’s still influential 1985 essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” saw the combination of the organic and the technological as offering new and exciting ways beyond the normalised culturally constructed categories of gender and identity formation. However, more recently critics see her later writings as embodying a Faustian deal between the individual and hegemony, where technology does not enhance but merely returns the subject to a level of normalisation. As such cybernetics is only configured as a form of prosthetic rehabilitation, to ‘re’-able the ‘dis’-abled, that ultimately re-establishes earlier essentialised subject positions through that same evolutionary process. *The Six Million Dollar Man*, which ran from 1974 to 1978, exemplified a symbiosis between the organic and the technological where the broken human body is not just re-made via mechanical prosthesis but through a process of Cyborg hybridity which actually makes it better, faster, stronger than before. In contrast, contemporary films such as *Avatar* (Cameron 2009), *Transformers II: Revenge of the Fallen* (Bay 2009) and *Iron Man II* (Faveraeu 2010) portray an inherent anxiety toward the cyborg body disavowing of any human/cyborg interaction beyond re-establishing their own discrete and separate subject positions. Although human/cyborg symbiosis constructs the possibility for potentialised bodies beyond those previously imagined, contemporary, popular, film represents them as separated and

essentialised. This article looks at what cultural anxieties might produce such an about turn in such representations how this positions human identity in a time of increasing technology and, as a result, asks “*whatever happened to The Six Million Dollar Man?*”

**Keywords** Cyborg · Human · *Six Million Dollar Man* · Avatar · Transformers · Machines

Flight com, I can’t hold her! She’s breaking up! She’s breaking...

Gentlemen, we can rebuild him. We have the technology. We have the capability to build the world’s first bionic man. Steve Austin will be that man. Better than he was before. Better...stronger...faster.  
(*The Six Million Dollar Man* 1973)<sup>1</sup>

This paper aims to show how recent cinematic representations reveal a far more pessimistic and essentialised vision of Human/Cyborg hybridity in comparison with the more enunciative and optimistic ones that were seen at the end of the twentieth century. In doing this it will focus on specifically on American popular representations, mainly television and film, but which still necessarily have a large area of influence throughout ‘westernised’ cultures. Donna Haraway’s still influential 1985 essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, saw the combination of the organic and the technological as offering new and exciting ways beyond the normalised culturally constructed categories of gender and identity formation. However, more recently, critics see her later

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<sup>1</sup> Opening lines of *The Six Million Dollar Man* from Internet Movie Database <http://www.imdb.com/title/H0071054/> [accessed December 11th 2010].