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PREFIGURING THE POSTHUMAN: DICKENS AND PROSTHESIS

By Herbert Sussman and Gerhard Joseph

> With every tool man is perfecting his own organs . . . . by means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance. Man has become a kind of prosthetic god.
>
> — Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

DOROTHY VAN GHENT'S "View from Todgers's" classic essay of 1950 (about perspective in *Martin Chuzzlewit*) might be defined as the starting point for what we now accept as the veriest Dickens commonplace: the fact that an interchange between animate human subject and inanimate object characterizes his world view. The boundaries of person and material thing are permeable, are constantly criss-crossing, according to Van Ghent, in a "system that is presumed to be a nervous one . . . . its predications about persons or objects tend to be statements of metabolic conversion of one into the other" (221). But this persistent reading, expressed here in biological terms – "nervous" system, "metabolic conversion" – of Dickens's stylistic habit, itself depends upon attributing to Dickens the critic's sharp distinction between the "human" and the "inhuman" or "non-human."

This essay would like to suggest a new way to think about Dickens, good friend, reader of and correspondent with Charles Babbage,[1] the inventor of the Difference Engine and the Analytic Engine, those Victorian forerunners of computer technology. We would argue that the oscillation in Dickens's work between representing characters as self-acting "things" and as "people," (i.e., as nineteenth-century liberal subjects moved by ethical will), registers a Victorian discursive practice wherein the boundary between the machine and the human tends to dissolve. His novels record the puzzlement he shared with his time about the distinction between the animate and the inanimate. Babbage, for one, imagined his Difference Engine as a form of intelligent life, felt he was communicating with an entity endowed with mind. He speaks, anthropomorphically, of "the real difficulty [in] teaching the engine to know when to change from one set of cards to another" (*Passages* 100).

Dickens's novels reflect his own uncertainty about the living machine, both in the sense of the new self-acting machines as "living" and in the reciprocal sense of human beings sharing this ambiguous state of self-acting machines fusing the mechanical and the animate.[2] In negotiating the machine/body issues of his age by representing in fantastical terms the splice of the machine and the organic, Dickens's novels occupy an important place in the

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historical transformation of the human into what has become known as the "posthuman." Dickens, that is, may be considered a cybernetic thinker *avant la lettre*.[3]

This is especially the case with respect to a theory of prosthesis as a subset of the posthuman. Recently, "prosthesis" has become a key figure in cybertheory, itself an emerging and rapidly spreading division of cultural studies. Cybertheory simultaneously conceives of prosthesis as a trope for the hybridity of the modern world and depends upon prosthetic metaphor to describe fantasies of desire and to interrogate the existence of human agency. For as N. Katherine Hayles has said in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, one of the recurrent ways in which the posthuman expresses itself is in the conception of the body as the original prosthetic container of a putative self: the posthuman cyborgian view, for Hayles, sees the body as "the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing of [defective] body parts with other prosthetic devices [limbs, teeth, artificial implants, etc.] becomes the continuation of a process that began before we were born," i.e., both at the birth of the individual and at the dawning of the human species, with the supplementarity wired into language as itself the most basic of early prosthetic tools (3). To expand upon what she means, we would cite the great opening scenes of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which an animal bone, stumbled onto by a primeval hominid as first a tool and then a weapon, tumbles skyward in its cinematic odyssey to become a twenty-first century spaceship, the prosthetic container par excellence of early post-Buck-Rogerish science fiction. (A key difference between science fiction and the cyberfiction that follows, as in the acknowledged initiator of the genre, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* of 1984, is that prosthetic devices such as microchips are now spliced *in*to the body as implants rather than constituting the outer extensions or containers of an earlier science fiction.)

With respect to prosthesis as material artifact and as metaphor in the Victorian period, Erin O'Connor has recently shown in her discussion of artificial limbs among the Victorians (102–07) that such a template for what Mark Seltzer calls a "body-machine complex" (3) had its origin in that era when artificial limbs were being improved and metaphorized. Consequently, prosthetic extensions of the organic body, whether seamlessly sutured to that body or not, became a figure for discussions of subjectivity and human identity. The mid-nineteenth century thus not only marked the birth of the form we recognize as technological modernity, but also became the basis for what has become one of the defining conceptual formations of the modern, the notion of prosthesis as both a figure for and materialization of a perfectly realized mode of production of things.

Several Dickens works might be cited to exemplify his concern with prosthesis,[4] with the dismemberment and articulation of body parts. Indeed, the word "articulation," whenever we use it, is meant to echo Silas Wegg's search for his missing leg and his dialogues with Mr. Venus concerning Venus's "articulation" of the whole man from his dispersed parts in *Our Mutual Friend* (see Hutter). But the work that exemplifies Dickens's most thorough going interest in both the dispersal and the rearticulation of the body is *Dombey and Son*. As Robert Newsom has rightly said, *Dombey* is a novel about the anxiety generated by the danger of the body going to pieces or violently being torn apart – as it most luridly is in the blasting by the train of Carker's body into mutilated fragments (Newsom 197–219). Our essay thus focuses upon *Dombey* and the characters who demonstrate both the benign and the threatening implications of such a process: Mrs. Skewton, Captain Cuttle, Major Bagstock, Toodle the railroad man, Carker the Manager, and Cousin Feenix. However persuasive any

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given characterological example may or may not be in what follows, the *collective* evidence of prosthetic addition, we would argue, establishes the link to the cybernetic future. In so doing, the novel demonstrates what Mark Seltzer has called "the double logic of prosthesis" – its dialectic of dystopic panic and utopic (in Dickens's case, comic) exhilaration (160).

Dombey and Son intimates its questions about the redefinition of the human in a proto-cyborgian age most emblematically in the character of Mrs. Skewton, Edith Granger's mother, whose attendants "take her to pieces in very shame" each night "and put the little of her that [is] real" on a bed (613; ch. 37). Why "in very shame" if not as a mark of their anxiety concerning the essential nature of what is "real" in her – even as that word no doubt asserts the text's conventional Victorian insistence upon the primacy of an organic base or residue? Is Mrs. Skewton anything other than the congeries of "diamonds, short sleeves, curls, teeth, and other juvenility" within which her maids hesitate to encase her once she has had her stroke (613; ch. 37), once her daily "revivifications" (475; ch. 27) are of little avail?

The novel-long joke about Mrs. Skewton, her Dickensian verbal tic, is that while she prattles on about the decline of the "natural" and the rise of the "artificial" in modern society, she herself epitomizes elaborate artifice not only socially but even more, materially, given this "Cleopatra's" infinite variety of bundled devices, the "pieces" that are regularly falling apart (613; ch. 13; 661; ch. 40), but which come together in their daily reassemblage. Of course from a posthuman perspective, at least as defined by Hayles, there is no significant boundary between the naturalized organic body and its artificial extensions, between, say, original hair and a wig, between original and false teeth. Prosthesis goes all the way down, never quite touching a pre-prosthetic, a natural rather than a naturalized "self." Thus, while Dickens's language usually insists, whether comically or sentimentally, upon a humanist primacy of the natural over the artificial – as in the final elegiac note: "a dumb old woman lies upon the bed, and she is crooked and shrunk up, and half of her is dead" (673; ch. 41), Mrs. Skewton's material existence serves to collapse the distinction, to embody her, quite literally, as prosthetic woman.

The figure of Captain Cuttle even more fully literalizes Dickens's sense of the emerging prosthetic man. His arm sutured to his hook materializes Dickens's sense of the imbrication of thing and body in a proto-cybernetic splicing, though Cuttle's actual behavior suggests that a Victorian prosthesis has complex and often contradictory meanings within the technological imagination. In making Cuttle the savior of Florence Dombey from the emotional hardness of her father and the adult enabler within the comedic mode of her marriage to Walter Gay, Dickens is not denying but rather attempting to reconcile the emergent model of the human as machine with the older moral idea of innate beneficence.

Thus, on the one level Captain Cuttle moves within the ideology of the nineteenth-century free, liberal, human subject, a nostalgic and sentimentalized vestige of the humanist past – indeed, he is something of a throwback to an earlier pre-industrial age of sailing ships. His prosthesis is simply a wooden arm in traditional terms, an artificial limb appended to a natural member (to echo Mrs. Skewton's categories) of the sort that many old salts would have picked up as a result of one maritime accident or another. But from a posthuman perspective Cuttle's combination of flesh, hard wood, and metal functions conjointly, like the wood and iron components of a power loom. In up-to-date fashion, the limb is not a simple but a complex instrument made comically productive and efficient for many purposes by incorporating the great innovation of nineteenth-century mechanization – interchangeable parts. With the efficiency of the other great principle of the factory system, the specialized

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division of labor, each interchangeable element is designed for a specific task: "The Captain was dining (in his hat) off cold loin of mutton, porter, and some smoking hot potatoes, which he had cooked himself, and took out of a little saucepan before the fire as he wanted them. He unscrewed his hook at dinner-time, and screwed a knife into its wooden socket instead, with which he had already begun to peel one of these potatoes for Walter" (180; ch. 9). Thus, for all his ostensible opposition to the machine, for all his satire elsewhere upon the human costs of mechanization (as in, say, *Hard Times*'s scathing condemnation of the dehumanizing factory system of Coketown), Dickens's technological imaginary has here conceived, in characteristically comedic form, the self of the industrial age as a fusion of machine and body, of flesh and wood and metal, of interchangeable prostheses. Within the differentiation between the traditional "human" subject as tool user separable from the implement and the "posthuman" subject in which the tool is so spliced or integrated as to create the subject as body-machine, Captain Cuttle exemplifies the fused subject. The knife as tool is part of the body.

Still, it must be emphasized that for all the literalization of the machine-body, Dickens here retains a modified Cartesian split of body and soul. Cuttle's innate beneficence still runs the prostheticized body; a moral agency is in control. After Captain Cuttle has screwed the knife into the socket, Walter Gay, whom Cuttle is caring for, bursts into tears. "No words can describe the Captain's consternation at the sight. Mrs MacStinger faded into nothing before it. He dropped the potato and the fork – and would have dropped the knife too if he could – and sat gazing at the boy" (181; ch. 9). An instinctive empathy rules the day.

In this figuration, Dickens moves beyond the nineteenth-century Frankenstein narrative, with its cautionary warnings, as in *Frankenstein* itself, against the dangers of crossing the animate/inanimate boundary. Yet such revulsion appears vestigially here in the taboo touch of metal and flesh, the trope of the inhumanity of the feel of metal that becomes a figure for the degraded sexuality of our own future in such a powerful dystopia as J. G. Ballard's *Crash* (both the book and the movie). At a moment of sentimentalized good feeling toward Mr. Dombey, Captain Cuttle "could not refrain from seizing that gentleman's right hand in his own solitary left, and while he held it open with his powerful fingers, bringing the hook down against its palm in a transport of admiration. At this touch of warm feeling and cold iron, Mr. Dombey," who, we remember ironically enough, is hardly a stranger to "firmness" (see Moynihan), to *emotional* frigidity, "shivered all over" (198; ch. 10). But in representing the contact of "cold iron" and flesh as transformed by "warm feeling" or beneficence, Dickens provides in Captain Cuttle the antithesis of the mechanical or cyborgian monster that haunts the technological imaginary into our own age (in, say, the two *Terminator* films). When "the Captain put his iron hook between his teeth, as if it were a hand" (283; ch. 15), the hook is both "iron" and a "hand," in other words, a synecdochic "helping hand," however mechanical. Here as in the character of Toodle to be discussed below, Dickens creates the body-machine, the seamless fusion of hard metal and soft flesh, as the instrument of love and nurturing care.

Thus, while Cuttle undoubtedly looks backwards to a humanist ontology, with his larger proportion of "real" body parts than Mrs. Skewton, he at the same time anticipates in spirit such emanations of the popular imagination in our own time as Robo-Cop and the Six-Million Dollar Man, figures wholly reconstituted by prosthesis, residual flesh strengthened by fusion with up-to-date mechanical parts, to become the ubiquitous heroes of the machine age. Or as that prototypical late Victorian poet of our epigraph, Sigmund Freud, puts it, "Man has become a kind of prosthetic god."

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In contrast to the helping hand into which Captain Cuttle transforms his prosthesis, we have the manipulative, sadistic way with which, Major Bagstock, a former soldier, handles his cane, a version of the soldier's swagger stick, using it as a weapon, thrusting it among his Indian servant's ribs, continuing "to stir him up" (451; ch. 26) and bestowing "bodily knocks and bumps" upon him at the slightest provocation (911; ch. 58). Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* has shown that prosthetic devices of torture and war may be manipulated for the "unmaking" of human being, the subject of the first half of her book, just as in the second half on human "making" she argues that everything "made" in material culture may be seen as an expression of a "self-artifice," of man's need to extend the body onto objects, to amplify the self in a "socialization of sentience," as a prosthetic extension of the self (251–55). While it may be something of a stretch to speak of Bagstock's walking stick as a torture device or weapon and Captain Cuttle's hook as a counter-instrument of benign human artifice, the context of Scarry's dualistic notion of destructive unmaking and creative making certainly suggests such a direction.

The representation of Toodle the railroad man illustrates Dickens's nascent sense of a basic premise of the posthuman, the congruence of the human psyche with the mechanical, more specifically with the Babbage Difference Engine and Analytical Engine. Here, the comic mode enables Dickens to bring to consciousness with lessened anxiety the alarming notion that the mind itself might be seen as a calculating and even a thinking machine.

Consider the account of Toodle's brain: in a novel dominated by the impact of the railroad, Toodle describes to his wife Polly his mental locomotive concerning a particular matter, which started out with his son Rob and then, when she asked about that beginning, chugged along its idiosyncratic track:

> "Polly, old 'ooman . . . I don't know as I said [what I said] partickler along 'o Rob, I'm sure. I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man's thoughts is . . . to-be-sure." (619; ch. 38)

After this "profound reflection," Toodle as thinking engine has expended his mental energy and needs a watering stop. He warns his daughters, some additional "younger branches," "to keep plenty of hot water in the pot, as he was uncommon dry, and should take the indefinite quantity of 'a sight of mugs,' before his thirst was appeased" (620; ch. 38).

In her essay on railway disaster and post-traumatic stress in Dickens, Jill Matus notes the repeated use of "the image of the railway, which frequently crops up as an apt structuring metaphor in explanations of the relation between conscious and unconscious thinking" ("Trauma, Memory" 422). For example, E. S. Dallas writes in *The Gay Science* (1866): "Between the outer and the inner ring, between our unconscious and our conscious existence, there is a free and constant but unobserved traffic forever carried on. Trains of thought are continually passing to and fro, from the light into the dark, and back from the dark into the light" (qtd. in Matus, "Trauma, Memory" 422). Matus notes that the statement of Toodle – "What a Junction a man's thoughts is" – draws upon this general use of the railway as metaphor for mental pathways. Yet, this wonderful account of Toodle's mind is not only a general analogy from the machinery of his age that Dickens's technological imagination draws upon, but may also be a reference to the Babbage Engines that Dickens knew and a sign that Dickens saw the possibility that the mind could operate in part as a thinking

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machine. Toodle's brain appears as a railway with thoughts moving along a set of pathways, a typical Dickensian literalization of the dead metaphor, train of thought. More specifically, however, the mind morphs into a Babbage machine, the geared wheel and rods, the carrying of numbers from one set of geared rods to another in the Difference Engine: "I comes to a branch: I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him."

Yet in depicting an ethical paragon such as Toodle, Dickens rejects the mechanistic determinism implicit in Babbage's sense of the mind and of the programmed universe imagined in his *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*. If Toodle's brain is an engine, it is for Dickens a self-acting engine that retains free will and moral choice: "I takes on what I finds there." Toodle is still a liberal subject, a controlling self or I that "takes on." Such volitional autonomy of the self or soul is inexplicable, cannot be fathomed by mechanics; Toodle the man as locomotive acts "afore I knows where I am, or where [my thoughts] comes from."

Cuttle and Toodle as proto-cyborgs frequently point to the centrality in Dickens's technological imaginary of the condition in which mechanical, fleshly, and mental parts of the self remain under the firm control of a free, autonomous individual subjectivity, the bourgeois liberal humanist subject. But if that is sometimes the case in Dickens, he also evokes the fear that within such a body the self-acting, self-governing component part may take over, may move beyond central control. Our twentieth-century icon of this anxiety is Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove, the mechanical man whose prosthetic arm as independent living entity shoots up at odd, inappropriate intervals into a Nazi salute. In Dickens's imagination, too, parts or sub-systems of the body break from central subjective control; organs behave as autonomous beings. Along with the reciprocity of the animate and the inanimate, a central quality of Dickens's imagination lies in parts of the body acting independently. Throughout Dickens mechanical parts or systems of the body strike out for themselves, become, in Victorian terms, self-acting machines. Sometimes this happens to hilarious effect, as in intermittent perambulations of Mrs. Merdle's bosom throughout *Little Dorrit*. But more often the celebrated tics of Dickens's characters, where a single body part takes over to repeat an action obsessively – say, Jaggers's repeated handwashing in *Great Expectations* – to take one of a multiutude of robotic examples – suggest Dickens's cyborgian anxiety, to allude once more to Robert Newsom's thesis about the threats to the coherence of the body.

In the nineteenth century this fear of body parts both fleshly and inanimate as self-acting machines, as potentially independent systems, informs the reconception of the body as body-machine. In such a light let us look at the teeth of Carker, the manager:

> Mr. Carker was a gentleman thirty-eight or forty years old, of a florid complexion, and with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke; and bore so wide a smile upon his countenance (a smile, however, very rarely, indeed extending beyond his mouth), that there was something in it like the snarl of a cat. (239; ch. 13)

John Sutherland (only half-seriously?) raises the interesting question of whether Carker's teeth are real or false, "natural" or "artificial," to echo once more Mrs. Skewton's categories (of course about the falseness of *her* teeth we have no doubt). In "Does Carker Have False

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Teeth?" Sutherland speaks to the denial of the matter:

> Are Carker's magnificent white teeth his own? Most middle-aged Victorian readers (Dickens was 36 years old at the time of the writing of *Dombey and Son*) would have been very suspicious. We never know for certain. It would be revealing to examine the bodily remains of Carker that only the dogs seem interested in on the railway line. And it may be significant how often the word "false" enters the final explosive quarrel between him and Edith. In the two pages recording their last, melodramatic exchange, "false" comes up six times, and direct allusion is made to Carker's "shining" teeth. Subliminally, the echo thrown back from this exchange is "denture." Myself, I think all that glistens in Carker's mouth is not tooth – human tooth, that is. (84)

Especially since the history of dentistry suggests that there was an enormous improvement in the quality and fit of false teeth and of dental hygiene in the Victorian period, (see J. Menzies Campbell, *Dentistry Then and Now* [Glasgow 1863]; as cited in Sutherland 75), Dickens's focus on teeth is imaginatively appropriate since they are highly visible as well as being the least squishy parts of the body and apparently the least organic, most readily replaceable elements of the organism. Teeth occupy the boundary in the body between the firm and the hard and the wet and the organic, one of the themes of the novel (see Moynihan); they thus appeal to Dickens's imagination of the slipperiness of that boundary in this novel devoted to the body, or to "embodying," to use Hayles's important term. They seem to participate more in the "firmness" of machinery, of the wooden looms and locomotives, of the body as machine rather than organic being. They thus easily figure the sense of the body as composed of inanimate parts that are imbued with animation and volition, not to mention phallic aggression, once the body is imagined as automaton or engine.

Carker then is a cyborgian oxymoron, "the man of teeth" (456; ch. 26), the novel's cyborg par excellence. While Mrs. Skewton may best him with respect to number of devices, he surely outdoes her in palpability and intensity of implication. Whether Carker's teeth are, as Sutherland suggests, known to readers as porcelain (84) or organic parts of the body, from the perspective of Hayles's posthuman regime rather than Sutherland's "human" one, the artificial and the natural, the false and the real don't have much to choose between them. We have already noted how, whether false or real, the teeth still convey Dickens's imaginative idea of the body that we saw in Mrs. Skewton: we see the fear of prosthesis or subsystem taking over control from the liberal subject or will. Uncertainty about the unity and coherence of the body when imagined as a set of systems, the question of what is "alive," emerges as a characteristic nineteenth-century and typical Dickensian slippage between the animate and the inanimate: "It was impossible to escape the observation [of the teeth], for he showed them whenever he spoke." Here is the traditional sense that the "he" as liberal subject remains in control of the teeth, the hard mechanical parts of the body, by directing or showing them. But there is also in the ambiguous phrase "the observation of them" the sense of the teeth themselves as living systems, independent entities outside the control of the subjects who observe other living beings while themselves being the object of surveillance.

But to repeat what has been said about Mrs. Skewton's various prosthetic devices, as the nineteenth-century technological imagination reconceives the human body as congeries of mechanical systems, of rigid parts and flesh presumably under the control of a central subjectivity, there emerges the fear that within such a body the self-acting component parts may move beyond control of the central subjectivity. Hayles writes of the literature of the

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posthuman "that the construction of the posthuman is . . . deeply involved with boundary questions, particularly when the redrawing of boundaries changes the locus of selfhood. Shift the seat of identity from brain to cell, or from neocortex to brainstem, and the nature of the subject radically changes. In a manner distinctly different from that of Freud or Jung, these texts reveal the fragility of consciousness. Conscious mind can be hijacked" (279).

The account, at any rate, of Carker in his daily rounds, when he is named directly, seems to exhibit the ideology of the liberal "human" subject in control of his teeth, as a named Captain Cuttle is in command of his hook. But equally Carker's teeth move as a living independent entity outside the control of an autonomous subject with a proper name: "Mr. Carker the Manager did a great deal of business in the course of the day, and bestowed his teeth upon a great many people. In the office, in the court, in the street, and on 'Change, they glistened and bristled to a terrible extent. Five o'clock arriving, and with it Mr. Carker's bay horse, they got on horseback, and went gleaming up Cheapside" (382; ch. 22). The teeth, that is, are now shown or bestowed as objects by a controlling self, now have an emotional life of their own. That "they got on horseback" indicates Carker as subject and the teeth as subject, both philosophically and grammatically,[5] two separate sentient beings who do as they like. If there is any agency here, it is in what Hayles in her posthuman context calls "distributed cognition"(3, 288) among the various parts of a putative self , an ontological fragmentation that generates considerable anxiety for an audience of readerly selves, whether Victorian or modern, who may still believe in their coherence and autonomy.

In a similar light, there are the ludic, "wilful legs" of Cousin Feenix, come over specifically from Baden Baden to give over Edith Granger to be married to Dombey in the wedding ceremony. At that wedding, "Cousin Feenix, meaning to go in a straight line, but turning off sideways by reason of his wilful legs, gives the wrong woman to be married to this man, at first – to wit, a bridesmaid of some condition, distantly connected with the family . . . but Mrs Miff, interposing her mortified bonnet, dexterously turns him back, and runs him, as on castors, full at the 'good lady:' whom Cousin Feenix giveth to be married to this man accordingly" (524; ch. 31). Cousin Feenix has his intention, his will, but his feet have an intention of their own, which may or may not coincide with his. The traditional or Cartesian subject as volitional automaton, called here "Cousin Feenix," has intention, he is "meaning" to do something, but a submachine refuses to obey, has indeed intention of its own, is "wilful," or full of will, has its own purpose. Thus, "Cousin Feenix, who [at another point in the novel] ought to be at Long's, and in bed, finds himself, instead, at a gaming-table, where his wilful legs have taken him, perhaps, in his own despite" (533; ch. 31). Hayles's distributed cognition between Cousin Feenix and his legs shows, in David Wills's terms, the "double movement" of prosthesis, the "bidirectionality of [its] ambulations" (25) where the prosthetic extension of self, the legs, have run free from the control of a central subjectivity. If prosthesis goes all the way down, as Hayles's posthuman ethos would have it, does the dog wag the prosthetic tail or the tail wag the prosthetic dog, or do we need a post-canine rethinking of the old adage?

Thus, to summarize, if Captain Cuttle figures or prefigures the beneficent cyborg of the cyberfictional imagination (say, Robocop or the sympathetic Arnold Schwarzeneger cyborg of the second as distinct from his villainous role in the first *Terminator* cyberfictional film), then Carker in a melodramatic mode and Cousin Feenix in a comic one foreshadow the posthuman dissolution of the unified human subject as self-acting monad with any sort of centralized control and agency.

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But shall we stop here, especially with respect to Dickens's prefiguration of posthuman prosthesis? Why should we not consider the major thrust of the novel, Dombey's shift from a concentration upon Paul to his final acceptance of Florence as a shift from his male genetic prosthesis to his final embrace of a female one, "Dombey and daughter after all." Or Edith and Alice as comparable prosthetic extensions of their manipulative mothers, Mrs. Skewton and Mrs. Brown? And, even if we are not object-relation Kleinians used to talking about "good" and "bad" breasts, doesn't the substitution of Polly Toodle's wet-nursing breast for the breast of Paul's biological mother accentuate the prosthetic nature of the womanly breast, especially for the fetishizing male imagination?

The pursuit of such proprietary themes is certainly tempting, especially since Wills in his study of prosthesis suggests that "it would be difficult to conceive of a writing of prosthesis that did not deal sooner or later with a wooden leg [and his book-long meditation begins with and frequently returns to an autobiographical meditation on his father's wooden leg], in some relation or another to a question of paternity. For prosthesis is inevitably about belonging, and paternity is an unavoidable model of ownership" (15). Yet if prosthesis is defined within the posthuman context taken primarily from Hayles's notion of the body as the earliest and totalized prosthesis, and secondarily from Wills's impulse to make prosthesis the figure for all differentials, for differential relations in general between any two things (14) – from such an absolute perspective the term is so all embracing that it becomes trivial, in the philosophic sense. This way lies the abyss, and the attendant intellectual vertigo that Wills's book both indulges and invites in his reader. Our own view is that if *every*thing is prosthetic, it's almost the same as saying that nothing is. Thus, in order to avoid such universalizing, such over-metaphorizing of the term, this essay limits itself to those cases where the language of Dickens's text seems to insist explicitly upon bodily extensions, whether they are seamlessly articulated with the carbon-base of the organism or not.

We would like to conclude with a rhetorical turn: to postulate that the distinction between or conflation of two traditional rhetorical figures – metonymy and synecdoche – takes on a new meaning in a posthuman, cybernetic imaginary, and the crucial matter of agency therein. Now, we (and the OED) would have called a predication that the part stands for the whole an instance of a "synecdoche" rather than a "metonymy." There has, to be sure, always existed some indecision about the two figures – and for that matter our survey of recent discussions of the distinctions between metonymy and synecdoche suggests an all but universal disagreement – or confusion, which comes to the same thing about the difference of the two.[6] That is probably because the part standing for the whole (i.e., our sense of synecdoche) and the entity spatially contiguous to a nearby entity (our sense of metonymy, derived primarily from Roman Jakobson's influential metaphor/metonymy distinction) have shaded into each other in significant ways in different historical periods.

As for Dickens, if we imagine the subject entirely in control of his prosthesis (as in Captain Cuttle's total command of his hook) we would call the hook a synecdoche since the part is recognizable as the projection of a controlling, free-willing subject; if we imagine that the part has become either melodramatically (as with Carker's teeth) or comically (as with Cousin Feenix's wilful legs or Mrs. Merdle's peripatetic bosom) dominant, that it has taken over a competing, if not totally independent, agency so that its very "partness" seems to evaporate, then we call it a metonymy, an all but discrete contiguous entity. Another way of saying this is that, within the context of the present discussion, a metonymy is a sort of rogue synecdoche, a part that has broken away – on horseback, as it were – to assert

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its own independent, contiguous existence and will. And that is why Carker's teeth are the most interesting prosthetic case in *Dombey* (and arguably in all of Dickens) since they move, sometimes within the same sentence, between being a managed synecdochic part and a managing metonymic monad – to play with the agential/non-agential implications of the name, "Carker the Manager."

Thus, Dickensian prosthesis can move now in the direction of articulating a kind of carceral condition for nineteenth-century man, now in an articulation of his total freedom. When, to turn once more to the regularity and whiteness of Carker's teeth which are so distressing that "it was impossible to escape the observation of them" (239; ch. 13), whose "observing" perspective is being referred to, that of the synecdochic teeth, weirdly become eyes, or the frozen, deer-in-headlights perspective of the trapped observer of those teeth? Are they expressions of a liberal human agency or manifestations of a kind of voyeuristic, bureaucratic "management" that cannot even manage the collection of its body parts? Both, of course – and within the same ambiguous sentence. And in their bi-directional hovering between those two possibilities, we have, to say it one last time, a Dickensian prefiguration of precisely the Janus-faced condition recent theorists have attributed to that newest of fictions, the prosthetic man/god of *Civilization and its Discontents* and of posthuman cyborg theory.

Indeed, "What a Junction a man's thoughts is." The image of tracks, crossings, connections, prosthetic extensions evokes the switching and neural nets of modern cybernetics and marks Dickens's place in the pre-history of the posthuman. In his comic and fantastic forms Dickens negotiates the limits, the boundaries, and the fusion of the human and the mechanical. Rather than accepting a Ruskinian opposition of the mechanical and the organic, he absorbed the reconstruction of the human in the machine age; the sense of the human/machine splice formed and shaped his imagination. And toward this transformative "articulation," this reconcepualization of the human as engine, of the mechanical body and the brain as thinking machine, Dickens, like his age, was deeply ambivalent. He could imagine ethical will and agency in the human as conscious automation. And yet if Toodle and Captain Cuttle figure Dickensian beneficence, the person as engine out of subjective control, beyond moral volition can figure Dickensian evil, as in Carker, a human locomotive powered by ungoverned phallic energy, a runaway Victorian desiring machine.

New School University

Lehman College and the Graduate School, City University of New York

NOTES

1. Dickens not only owned a copy of Babbage's *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* but also knew the author quite well. He attended Babbage's regular Saturday gatherings (*Letters* 2: 307) and invited Babbage to his own house for dinner parties (*Letters* 4: 134; 6: 113). They sat in the audience for worthy causes (*Letters* 3: 428n.) and corresponded about such controversial matters as the Corn Laws (*Letters* 2: 307), taxation (*Letters* 2: 251), and the Society of Authors (*Letters* 3: 477). Dickens also visited the home of Babbage's champion, Ada Lovelace (*Letters* 3: 458). Anthony Hyman (193–95) demonstrates in detail that Daniel Doyce, the mechanical genius of *Little Dorrit*, was at least partially based upon Babbage.
2. Such a description of Dickens's imagination is of course innocent of what has come to be known as cybernetic system theory, the artificial intelligence informatics analogizing the brain and the computer that was being developed at the Macy Conferences on Cybernetics at the University of Illinois between

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1943 and 1954 by Claude Shannon, Warren McCullough, John von Neumann, Gregory Bateson, and Norman Wiener – precisely at the time of Van Ghent's characterization of Dickens's human/machine crossings. For the proceedings of the Macy Conferences, see Hayles (102–47), who bases her account on the "best study" by Heims.

3. For Dickens's interest in and satire upon Victorian science as a pre-disciplinary culture, see Clayton, especially chapter 3, "Undisciplined Cultures: Peacock, Mary Somerville, Mr. Pickwick."
4. As Clayton shows in *Dickens in Cyberspace*, Dickens first began to satirize the meetings of the British Association of the Advancement of Science in the "Full Report of the First Meeting of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything," in *Bentley's Miscellany* of October 1837, at about the time he was opening *Pickwick Papers* with a comparable satire on "undisciplinary" scientific associations like the BAAS in Samuel Pickwick's grandiloquently titled paper "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats." In the section on the Mudfog Association Report's Second Meeting (in *Bentley's Miscellany* of Sept. 1838) given over to the "Display of Models and Mechanical Science" Dickens, as part of an overall satire on Victorian automata, mockingly suggests the use of mechanical figures to establish an "automaton police" (545) as the ideal targets for young noblemen who, when in their cups , liked to rough up the nearest available constable. Such a "perverse fascination of the prosthetic" for Dickens (Clayton 108) is nicely captured in George Cruikshank's illustration,"Automaton Police Officers and the Real Offenders" (reproduced in Clayton 108), for the *Bentley's Miscellany* pieces on the Mudfog Association collected by Michael Slater in *Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers, 1833–39*.
5. For the argument that grammatical predication itself constitutes an early example of human prosthesis, see Wills. For Wills, whose *Prosthesis* ranges from an initial meditation on his father's wooden leg to an encyclopedic consideration of all writing practices as cognitive extensions of a given author, "one cannot simply write *about* prosthesis when one is automatically just by virtue of writing , writing prosthesis, entering into prosthetic relations, being prosthetic" (30).
6. For a recent survey of such discussions, see Matus, "Proxy and Proximity," 305–26. Matus considers in detail whether or not synecdoche should be treated as a subset of metonymy (her position). Since synecdoche is the means by which the part serves as a proxy for the whole, its totalizing character has been remarked on: hence, de Man's formulation of it as a borderline trope between metaphor and metonymy.

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