

English 345: Cine/Technology

The Terminator Screening Guide

Background on Telotte's Article

In his article, "*The Terminator, Terminator 2, and the Exposed Body*," J.P. Telotte claims that the films respond to contemporary anxieties about the human body in the postmodern era. The cyborgs in the *Terminator* films underscore the vulnerability of our bodies. However, cyborgs also offer a mirror of humanity, a mirror that serves two functions: 1) to reveal the constructed nature of identity, and 2) to stress the difficulty we have seeing the self. Telotte argues that *The Terminator* features two views of the body. On the one hand, the film expresses technophobia by showing humans threatened by the cyborgs they have created. On the other hand, the film addresses the ways culture gives our bodies particular identities. Telotte connects technology's and culture's impact on the body and self, claiming that "the film ties the shaping, coloring power of technology to that of culture and begins to suggest the similar influence those two forces already wield" (28).

Questions Related to Telotte's Article

As you watch *The Terminator*, pay attention to the following:

1. The similarities and differences in the Terminator's and Reese's arrival in Los Angeles: What is each being's appearance as he materializes onto the street? How easily does each equip himself and blend into the city environment?
2. The shift in the Terminator's appearance: As the film progresses, the Terminator's organic covering deteriorates. How do aspects of mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing underscore his mechanical nature? Why do you think the film presents the Terminator as it does?
3. The portrayal of Sarah: How does the film initially characterize Sarah? How her portrayal connected to cultural stereotypes of gender? How does the depiction of Sarah change over the course of the film?
4. The threat of technology: The film explicitly defines the Terminator as a physical threat to humanity. However, what emotional effect does life in the post-apocalyptic world—a world dominated by machines—have upon Reese? In what ways is he "mechanical," and how does his emotional tenor shift in the film?