

Robots Are Taking Over the World by Addison Nugent

I find it strange that the Jetsons are so happy. Planet Earth has become overpopulated, and humans are now forced to live in the sky. The Jetson children will never see the ocean; they will never lie in the grass and gaze up at the clouds, for they are already in them. George Jetson is a slave to his white-collar job, and his stout holographic boss can pop in at any moment to make sure that he is constantly working. There is no privacy or human dignity in this so-called “utopian” society. It is interesting that we view this way of living as fantastic and somewhat admirable. We rejoice when an invention comes along that will make our lives better, and we think it silly that members of older generations do not take advantage of these shortcuts. The more remedial tasks a machine can take over, the better. We as humans seem to be becoming more and more like the machines we love so well. Just as the personal computer can be updated, upgraded, and rebooted, so too can the human body through plastic surgery. We are slowly drifting away from our humanity and could not be more pleased.

As a society, we constantly dream of the future. We stand at the threshold of an entirely new era, and what is ahead seems to be greater than we could have imagined. Today, humans constantly look forward, seldom glancing behind at our past. What is ahead of us is far more appealing than musty, dull history. From this idolizing of the future, a worship of youth has arisen. The young are beautiful, fresh-faced, and forward thinking; they represent what is yet to come. The idea of aging and losing the envied youthful status is becoming increasingly frightening. I am only nineteen and already find myself fearing the future. My friends once laughed at me when I told them that my greatest fear is growing older, but I do not find this phobia to be unfounded. Today, the elderly are looked down upon and at times ignored. Once regarded as sages and in some cultures the most revered in society, they have now become ashamed of their age. It is perhaps this shame of lost youth that leads one to plastic surgery. The wear and tear of a natural life on Earth can easily be nipped, tucked, lifted, tightened, and, most importantly, hidden.

My grandmother is one of plastic surgery’s most valued customers: over the span of thirty years, she has gone under the knife countless times. Now, at age eighty-five, her skin has been pulled so tight that it is nearly transparent, her eyes lifted to the point that they are nothing more than slits, her lips and cheeks pumped with collagen, and her hair brightened an artificial red. She looks more alien than youthful and certainly not human. I have often watched her apply makeup in the morning. She looks in the mirror, attempts to frown despite the numbing effects of her latest Botox injection, and then proceeds to glop on as much makeup as possible. Such desperate attempts to cheat the aging process are not uncommon in modern society. The elderly remember a time when they too were desirable and perhaps envied. Some will do anything to recapture this state of youthful bliss even if it means having invasive surgery. Modern society seems to have forgotten that the process of aging is entirely natural and, more importantly, is entirely inevitable.

I sometimes wonder what Joan Rivers thinks when she looks in the mirror. Does she see the man-made monster she has become or merely herself thirty years ago? She must notice how frightening she is, but if that is so, why does she continue to get work done? Plastic surgery is meant to improve the patient’s physical appearance, but in cases such as Ms. Rivers’, I suspect it goes deeper than that. At seventy-three, she has now entered the twilight of her life. Soon she will have to face the concept of her own death. Perhaps plastic surgery addicts like Rivers view their implants, their injections, their lifts and their tucks as ways of postponing death. They are so desperately trying to avoid their true age that on some level, growing old must be the cause of

fear. On some psychological level, the surgically enhanced aliens must believe that by looking young, they are young and therefore are farther from death than a person who has aged naturally.

I recently went to a plastic surgeons' website and was struck by the slogan: "Don't look a day over 30, unless you want to." This banner, though obviously intended to appeal to its reader, gave me an eerie feeling. "Don't look a day over 30, unless you want to." Perhaps it was the idea that we can now in a sense stay young until the day we die that made me feel so uneasy. Our bodies can wither and die on the inside while on the outside we maintain a veneer of youth and prosperity. The concept reminded me of Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*. The inhabitants of his futuristic fantasy stay young forever; they are quite happy but know nothing of the ways of the human soul. They live their lives in a superficial bliss, never having to see themselves decay and therefore never fearing death or what comes after. In one excerpt, a leader of the utopian society reflects upon a passage from nineteenth-century theologian Cardinal Newman: "You can only be independent of God while you've got youth and prosperity; independence won't take you safely to the end" (qtd. in Huxley 83). To this sentiment, Mustapha Mond, the character who read the lines, responds, "Well, we've now got youth and prosperity right up to the end. What follows? Evidently, that we can be independent of God" (Huxley 83). Humans have always feared death and have therefore attempted to soften the blow through the idea of God and heaven. Previous generations have taken comfort in the fact that, after death, we do not really die, but rather are given a pair of wings and sent to paradise. It seems as though humans today are attempting to make death a bit easier by maintaining a state of eternal youth. The statement that we no longer have to age if we do not want to implies that our destiny is now in our hands. Perhaps humanity is becoming its own God. We no longer turn our heads to the sky in search of an explanation; the seekers of the past have already found the answers to most of Earth's terrestrial questions. The vast and tumultuous world of our ancestors no longer exists—it has since shrunk, and the need for a divine entity to make sense of everything has diminished. Beautiful eyes, lips, and cheeks were once thought to be gifts from God: today we can buy plastic versions of these gifts for ourselves. We must now question if we are truly "playing God" by postponing the aging process or merely establishing our independence from Him.

Humans, namely Americans, have not always so virulently feared the process of dying. The very first occupants of this continent viewed it as the most important part of life. It was to them a beginning rather than an end. The elderly were revered as the wisest and treated with the highest amount of respect, for they carried the wisdom of the ages. I would imagine that these elderly wore their wrinkles with pride. They were signs of their accomplishments, their hardships, their life. We have forgotten that deep lines around the eyes symbolize a life full of laughter. The furrows in our brow indicate the times we have cried and the sorrow we once felt. They remind us that we once lived a life full of powerful experiences; they remind us that we are human.

Works Cited

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. London: Picador, 1932

