Alternative Gender Realities in Hollywood Films: Science Fiction and Future Bodies

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Science fiction film portrays future events while also scrutinising conceptions of the future through the prism of cinema. Science fiction has long provided various kinds of sexuality and/or gender identities, making it an appropriate platform for any criticism of gender-biased cultures and behaviours. The genre's alternate worlds and microcosms provide the ideal setting for gender depictions that are both challenging and complex. Popular science fiction films in today's world suggest a clash of gender characteristics, which may be seen in the exterior look of the protagonists. As a result, androgynous bodies, cyborgs, humanoid robots, and hybrid beings lead to a lack of visible distinction between the sexes.

Nonetheless, given that futures are always based on the present, and that science fiction presents polemical ideas in the present day by setting them in future and far away contexts, we will attempt to demonstrate how certain gender identities are challenged in contemporary Hollywood cinema, despite the fact that they are framed by a hegemonic discourse that dictates how femininity and masculinity should be (subjected on many occasions). We will take a critical post-structuralist approach to how images of the body are depicted in popular science fiction films from the last few decades for this aim. This method commits to the deconstruction and analysis of visual visions of future bodies, based on Foucault's premise that the self has become a subject of numerous disciplinary frameworks.

Alternative sex and gender models have long been a feature of science fiction, and it has shown to be a good tool for critically engaging with these concepts. The genre exposes notions about sex and gender that are controversial and/or polemical in the current day and places them in futuristic and unknown contexts for readers/spectators by applying certain narrative, visual, and technical tactics. As a result, science fiction films would be perfect candidates for presenting new gender perspectives and include examples of unusual masculinities and femininities. Indeed, they are filled with human-machine hybrids, heroes terrified of scary "others," androgynous characters locked in cyberspace, as well as visuals that can be classified as "abnormal." For example, films about space exploration and conquest, such as Star Trek or Star Wars, usually feature a white heterosexual hero who is closely aligned with "other" sorts of masculinities and femininities that are crucial to the hero's and humanity's destiny. The conflicting demands toward recognisable structures —such as the conquering white hero Picard—and new conceptions of manhood shown in the film—such as the sensitive prosthetic character Data—lead to a complex process of negotiation in Star Trek. Gender portrayals that are transgendered, posthuman, and challenging coexist with more traditional representations.

It's worth noting that, starting in the second half of the twentieth century, a trend of science fiction films has emerged in which sex, gender, and identity are not depicted in binary terms. Indeed, the ramifications of integration are examined in a slew of Hollywood films released around the turn of the millennium. Other boundary-breaking metaphors, such as time-travel, reproduction, or mutation, help to weaken binary systems apart from the alien invasion motif. Postmodern thought has influenced the way the genre deals with boundary breaking, particularly in more recent films, and we are offered computer-simulated spaces where the line between the real and the imaginary is blurred, affecting the characters' identities and the way gender is depicted on screen. Characters in Tron: Legacy (2010), for example, eventually enter a computer programme, causing their bodies to interfere with computing medium and become a part of it. Quorra, the female protagonist, assumes attributes associated with masculinity in order to demonstrate that she is a powerful, resourceful, and competent female warrior. This blurring of lines provides opportunity to examine traditional gendered body and practise classifications, as well as serve as reflection places for our complex connection with computing and information technology.

In this way, science fiction has the ability to deconstruct the sad reality of women's marginalisation in today's technologically advanced countries. When looking at future visions and virtual reality technology, Ivana Milojevic and Sohail Inayatullah (2010) claim that "women's images and selves are being created and valorised in the minds of adolescent net surfers", the net being "a place for the gathering of sexual harassers and paedophiles" (2010, p.39).

Binary opposition has been defined as "the theoretical model on which language makes its sense: black/white, male/female, left/right, dark/light, night/day and so on. Every signifying term has its opposite, against which it defines itself" (Tauchert, 2001, p.181). This abstract model can be applied to any cultural language and reveals a proclivity to polarise categories in order to make sense of the world and one's own identity. Many discussions of the binary model's nature conclude that there are three viable answers to it:

• to undermine the binary as an allusion imposed on a more general and dehierarchized web of'difference' between a whole range of embodiments and identities, and replace it with the floating free-play of the signifier that is the hallmark of postmodernism, by inverting binary weightings and values (...)
 • to disturb the binary process by introducing a third term (...)
• to undermine the binary as an allusion imposed on a more general and dehierarchized web of'diference

Postmodern feminism advocates for the pluralization of social identity in place of unitary concepts of women and gender identity. The term "gender" becomes problematic and unstable in and of itself. In this sense, science fiction novels and films appear to be the ideal setting for this creative gender representation. Rosi Braidotti illustrates the complicated cultural backdrop with science fiction, emphasising the relevance of "fantasy" alterations in eroding old boundaries. Furthermore, the future planets and alternative microcosms depicted in science fiction become ideal locations for this problematic gender representation. The favoured venues for gender reflection have therefore been "domed space colonies, orbiting space stations, subterranean cities, cities in flight, and the like." Tauchert, for example, proposes a "fuzzy gender" paradigm, which she defines as "a conceptualization that advances beyond the binary either/or, without collapsing into the chaos of free floating subjectivity in difference." Gender isn't completely necessary, but it does play a role. However, a deeper examination reveals that the ostensibly "deviant" representations of men and women given in most Hollywood films are nonetheless at the service of conventional gender. Images of masculinity and femininity, with a few exceptions, do not account for the wide spectrum of genders found in American society. Instead, they're more likely to be built around traditional representational patterns. In "Timing feminism, feminising time," Milojevic argues that in the "postmodern era," hegemonic time begins to break down, becoming disputed by multi-gendered venues and new sciences, yet many of the old narratives persist. This isn't to imply that science fiction doesn't address current issues of gender equality or that it doesn't allow for new ideas. Science fiction films, on the other hand, and in stark contrast to other genres, manage to provide substantial benefits worth mentioning, as this article seeks to demonstrate.

Gender as a created and artificial component of our subjectivities is reflected in science fiction films set in the future. Indeed, in films like Chappie (2015) and Wall-E (2008), the intermixing of sexes and identities in bodies where humanity interacts with technology at dangerous levels is a common device. This blend of old and new technologies is a common postmodern device. Donna Haraway used the image of the cyborg for social reasons in her renowned "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), seeing it not just as a fictitious mix of machine and organism, but also as a "creature of social reality" suggesting "some constructive union." The limits between body and technology are socially inscribed in its figure. Three borders in American scientific culture had been shattered by the late twentieth century: the one between humans and animals, the one between animal and human organisms and machines, and the one between the physical and the non-physical (Haraway, 1991, pp.149-153). It is precisely this blurring of lines that contributes to a positive image of the cyborg identity, as its state defies gender dualism, which favours men over women. The cyborg body's breach of boundaries and shift in viewpoint represents a rupture with traditional dualistic thinking that positioned women as "other." As a result, the technological world liberates women's representations from patriarchal dominance, as seen by her final remark, "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway, 1991, p.181). Haraway's cyborg image has become a popular term among academics who study gender, postmodernism, and science fiction.

Haraway's utopian gender/technology relationship has been adopted by many gender specialists. Indeed, concerns regarding cybernetics, postmodernism, and gender have recently been the subject of "cyberfeminism," a field that praises computing technologies and views cyberspace as a venue for women's liberation.

In science fiction, the one/other dichotomy has served a variety of purposes. Films that explore the dangers of boundary breaking have a tendency to portray the "other" as an evil extraterrestrial who threatens to disrupt the repressive mechanisms of dominance and submission. In this scenario, one could claim that gender-based divisions are in jeopardy. The disturbance of order implied by the binary opposition system is a common theme in many movies. Many science fiction films use the masculine hero's encounter with "different" to great effect. The privileged word of the binary system is occupied by the male protagonist, and the cultural metaphor of the alien and/or monster threatens the hegemonic white patriarchy of the United States. Significantly, these films frequently allude to a dread of female sexuality, particularly in those in which the monster is linked to a woman's reproductive functions. Robin Roberts writes in "Gender in Nineteenth-Century Science Fiction: The Female Alien and the Woman Ruler" that the female alien's ability to breed is what makes her so dangerous to the male protagonist and patriarchal society. The male hero discovers and defines his own and the dominant culture's masculinity by encountering the feminine alien.

In future situations, the alien lady conquering heteronormative power institutions creates dread, as seen in the Alien saga (1979, 1986, 1992, 1997, 2012). Feminist cinema criticism has largely focused on both Ripley (Weaver) and the horrific alien in the Alien franchise—Creed, Newton, Hills, Church Gibson, Tasker, and Sobchack, among others—providing us with a variety of contradicting readings. Ripley is a strong woman who does not merely "imitate" typical male roles; instead, she develops into a new and positive kind, a new image of

woman as a female hero. Because attributes typically associated with male characters (including subjectivity, activity, and resolution) are "taken up" by a female character, this new image of woman undermines male hegemony.Men are threatened twice in the Alien films: by the alien/aliens and by Ripley's superiority and courage as a strong female hero.

The alien presence, in this sense, can be used to characterise Western civilisation as we know it. Many science fiction films set in distant worlds, such as Star Trek or Star Wars, have hierarchical divisions with the white American hero having prominent positions. Despite their attempts to integrate challenging future circumstances, patriarchal ideals remain intact and women are limited to subordinate roles. These films feature conquering warriors on the hunt for legendary quests. These heroes are always regarded as powerful and domineering, but, unlike the classic action hero, they do not possess an extraordinary — and artificial—body. As a result, his superiority is demonstrated by his capacity to complete his task, to dominate space travel and technological growth, and to guard and protect mankind against malicious alien powers.

Characters in contemporary science fiction are frequently depicted as boundary crossers, and postmodern consciousness has infiltrated the genre. The recurring depiction of the "virtual character" inhabiting cyberspace, which corresponds Haraway's third characteristic of the cyborg typology, is particularly intriguing."Cyberspace", has been defined as a "computer-generated space mentally experienced by computer operators whose nervous systems are directly interfaced with the computer system" (McHale, 1992, p.252). Gibson denominates this cyberspace "matrix", and describes it as "a 3D chessboard extending to infinity" (Gibson, 2004, p.70). In reality, this new understanding of space has resulted in a unique visual portrayal of gender.

Finally, there is a film trend that deals with biotechnology and the use of a surrogate body in place of the organic body. The very core of cloning, according to Milojevic and Inayatullah, indicates an achievement within the dominant scientific paradigm, one dominated by men's worldview, in which women's role in reproduction will be reduced over time (2010, pp.38-39). Films like The Island (2005) and The Surrogates (2009), which challenge traditional notions of the "natural" body, present this ethical quandary. They spark discussion on the ethics of modifying genes for specific objectives as well as the social implications of gene science. Sexed and gendered identities are manifested in the altered/manipulated body, evoking recognisable gender rules. The Surrogates is set in a futuristic society where humans live in seclusion and communicate using surrogate bodies that have been constructed according to Western aesthetic standards. Surrogates are beautiful people, neatly dressed and physically appealing, supporting patriarchal notions about sex and gender, after all. While real humans are depicted as having obese and unfit bodies, surrogates are lovely beings, nicely dressed and visually appealing.

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