

(Re)/(Dis)Embodying Love: The Cyborg in *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*

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ABSTRACT

Fritz Lang's ground-breaking science-fiction film *Metropolis* (1927) has long held a particular fascination with film critics because of its exploration of the exploited proletariat and the dangers of human-machine interaction. While much academic interest in the film has focused on it as capitalist allegory – seen in the separation of the bourgeoisie above-ground from the proletariat underground – less attention has been paid to the film's representation of the cyborg, and, more specifically, the cyborg femme. Drawing on posthuman theory, and in particular cyborg theory as proposed by Donna Haraway, this article investigates to what degree the film denies the true symbolic potency of the cyborg by casting its creation as reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster. It asserts that Lang denies the film an imaginary, visual space within which the cyborg femme, though seeming human, is not afforded any agency—as Derrida asserts about the machine-animal—or her own will towards self-determination. Though interrogating what it means to possess human capacity, the article further asserts that Ridley Scott's characterization of the replicants Rachael, Zohra and Pris in *Blade Runner* (1982) casts these cyborg femmes as expendable or dependent on the human to protect them, thereby denying them love.

Keywords: posthumanism, *Metropolis*, *Blade Runner*, cyborg, Donna Haraway

INTRODUCTION

The visual space of cinema is dedicated to spectacle and the sensations of pleasure. Enclosed within the margins of the screen, cinematic narratives play themselves out, and modern screen audiences have come to appreciate what Tom Gunning refers to as the 'self-enclosed fictional world' as it is preserved and delineated by the 'realistic illusion of the cinema' (2006: 382). Within the science fiction genre, the most enduring legacy of the fictional, dystopic worlds represented on the cinema screen is the cyborg.

Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' (of 1985, see Haraway, 2016) constitutes probably the most well-known theoretical work dedicated to understanding what it means to be a cyborg, and will theoretically ground my analysis of the two films. Her work is indicative of a twentieth-century *zeitgeist* that celebrated the production of a being disconnected from the historical and mythological past that could destabilise the boundaries between male and female, organic and inorganic, human and machine.

In light of Haraway's cyborg theory, and posthumanist concern with doing away with the 'anthropological universal', as described by Donald Brown (1991),¹ in this article I will scrutinise how Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) embody (and re-embody) the cyborg femme as capable of manifesting human empathy and affect. These films represent benchmarks in the evolution of science fiction film-making. Both films depict technological and industrial progress at the expense of suffering. In Lang's film, it is the suffering of the subterranean human workers; but in Scott's, it is the suffering of the cyborg Replicants themselves. In comparing the two films, I will show how the cyborg femme is a victim of her own design, is devoted to serving a specific purpose, and is ultimately rendered expendable or designated for what Scott's film refers to as 'retirement'. Though, in *Blade Runner* (1982), the expendability of the Replicants is experienced by both male and female versions, the cyborg femmes are rendered particularly expendable by Scott's noir-styled story. In *Metropolis*, the resemblance of

¹ The anthropological or human universal is defined by Brown (2004: 47) as constituting 'those features of culture, society, language, behavior, and mind that, so far as the record has been examined, are found among all peoples known to ethnography and history.'

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robot Maria to her human counterpart, and her antagonising quest to sabotage the liberation of the human workers, render her expendable in the end.

The theoretical foundation for my analysis of the films draws on both feminist film theory — in particular, the work of Laura Mulvey — and posthuman theory. En route, I note Haraway's contribution to defining the cyborg, and I orientate this theoretical lens towards the representation of the cyborg femme in both films. I consider the robot Maria who, though *like* the human Maria, is distinctly Other in terms of narrative purpose, as setting the cyborg up as an archetypal villain in *Metropolis*. Thereafter, I scrutinise the narrative purpose of Rachael, Zohra and Pris in *Blade Runner*. They are motivated by self-preservation and the fear of death, thereby feeding into the philosophical debate concerning what it means to be human in the film.

LAURA MULVEY AND THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN (AND THE CYBORG FEMME) IN CINEMA

In her article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey offers a critique of what she terms the cinematic representations of 'sexual imbalance' (1975: 11), which arise from the controlling male gaze. She cites the words of filmmaker, Budd Boetticher, in describing the power that this gaze wields, and for what purpose:

What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance. (1975: 11)

When directing this sentiment towards an analysis of *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*, the viewer is presented with the spectacle of women — human or cyborg — now rendered in visual archetypes and fantasies. However, the film femme is two-dimensional: she is oversimplified and denied knowledge of all aspects of womanhood because she cannot fully embody what it means to be a woman. In Lang and Scott's films, the emotional capacity of both human and cyborg women to be authentic, as opposed to being objectified or relegated, is restricted. They serve an archetypal purpose within male-directed narratives and are not permitted three-dimensionality.

The complex spectrum of experiences, feelings and thoughts that constitute humanity are reduced to a binary: a woman may be either a madonna or a whore, but she cannot be both simultaneously. When this understanding is applied to Lang's and Scott's films, and to their representation of the cyborg femme, the two cinematic science fiction narratives reduce these characters to the archetype of the seductress, who is not presented as whole. Rather, the cyborg femmes are transformed by the prescripts of an archetypal cinematic rendering: they are relocated and represented within the surreal space of science fiction, and are subservient to the male gaze. Posthuman feminist, Rosi Braidotti, critiques the dominant humanist view of 'Man as the measure of all things' (2013: 2), and, certainly, within both films, this view seems to prevail.

Through this dominating, colonising, capitalist male gaze — including those of the male directors of and male characters from each film — the human woman is, paradoxically, afforded some dignity in her embodiment on the screen, though she is objectified and venerated. In order for her to be protagonised, she must adhere to the prescripts of an archetype. In so doing, she can become an idealised hybrid of a human and a goddess. However, when the cyborg femme is invented and produced, though she is cast as beautiful and ideal in superficial ways, she can never enjoy the same veneration. She is established as that which must be feared, relegated and antagonised as a threat. And, when she demurs, she is, as Emily Dickinson states, 'straightway dangerous and handled with a chain' (1983: 809).

The cyborg femme, therefore, symbolises the complication that arises when looks deceive. Cyborgs are seen by humans as posing a threat to the nature of humanity in their capacity to feel and understand, and must, therefore, be either enslaved or exterminated. This is justified because, though the cyborg femme seems to be *like* a human woman, it is neither of these things: though it is anthropomorphised, it is nonhuman; and although it looks like a woman, it is actually devoid of sex. Yet, there is irony in embodying the cyborg femme on film, which is drawn from a diegetic-extradiegetic tug-of-war. Though characterised as machines, the cyborgs in Lang and Scott's films are portrayed by human actors: the filmic cyborgs dissolve the boundaries between human and technology, and the act of representation offers a means through which the cyborg is disembodied as absolutely existing as machine, and is re-embodied as a hybrid capable of humanness. The cyborg femme that *seems* to be 'she', but *is* actually 'it', aligns to Donna Haraway's observations.

DONNA HARAWAY'S CYBORG

In *Discourse on Method*, René Descartes evaluates the likeness of animal to machine, but also proposes a means through which a machine can be tested and exposed as nonhuman:

Of these the first is that they could never use words or other signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others (...) [and] that although such machines might execute many things with equal or perhaps greater perfection than any of us, they would, without doubt, fail in certain others from which it could be discovered that they did not act from knowledge, but solely from the disposition of their organs. (1995: n.p.)

According to Descartes, machines lack the capacity to reason and to exhibit morality. Such Enlightenment reasoning persisted in advocating that the machine, like the animal, was without a soul and, therefore, was hierarchically inferior to humans and incapable of reason. The term 'cyborg' emerged as the lexical means through which the debate regarding what it means to be human and, by contrast, machine, would be engaged and the distinction between human and nonhuman machine dissolved.

In her seminal 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Haraway offers the cyborg as a means of understanding the hybridised human-machine form. She identifies the cyborg as

a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction (...) This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (2016: 5-6)

Haraway points to the binary that is inherent in the cyborg's existence: it is simultaneously free but oppressed; real but illusory; and seemingly gendered while also devoid of gender. This is also true of the science that forges the relationship between human and technology. As physicist Heinrich Rohrer (2013:13) observes:

Science means constantly walking a tightrope between blind faith and curiosity; between expertise and creativity; between bias and openness; between experience and epiphany; between ambition and passion; and between arrogance and conviction – in short, between an old today and a new tomorrow.

This empirical dichotomy that Haraway and Rohrer identify in relation to the cyborg and science destabilises patriarchal notions of the material absoluteness of knowledge, causing it to inhabit a suspended state where knowing and not-knowing are simultaneously engaged. This is where fear of the Other arises. Blurring the boundaries between the machine and the human also destabilises other binaries. Haraway points to this hybridised state as constituting a '*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction' (2016: 7, original emphasis). It is an Other state, although it is not inscribed with Otherness from beyond, but developed from within and through transcendence, simultaneously disembodying and re-embodying. Haraway describes the purpose of the cyborg as 'both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories' (2016: 67). Though Lang is not comfortable with the blurring of boundaries in the same sense as Haraway proposes, preferring to represent this confusion as breeding dissent and highlighting ignorance of consequences, modern audiences have a stronger and more varied cinematic experience to draw from in finding value in the cyborg state. Scott is more willing than his predecessor to explore this.²

Haraway's famous declaration at the end of her essay — 'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' (2016: 67) — is challenged by Leman Giresunlu in proposing the cyborg goddess. She regards the cyborg goddess as a universal manifestation across multiple spatiotemporal dimensions which 'allow for fact and fiction to intertwine' (2009: 163). The cyborg is a hybrid, liminal being, that functions as a '[carrier] of good and evil, beauty and gore all at once' (2009: 175). Though seeming to align with Haraway's notion of the cyborg as dissolving boundaries, Giresunlu argues that 'the cyborg goddess imagery instead purports to achieve the very transformative aspect, by means of compensating for the spiritual side deemed to be missing within the high-tech environment' (2009: 161). Unlike Haraway, she embraces the feminine image of the goddess, and casts the cyborg goddess as protagonist.

While the image of cyborg goddess is, to some degree, an appropriate description for Lang and Scott's cyborg femmes, the representation of these characters falls short of Giresunlu's description. This is because they are not protagonised and, though aspiring towards autonomy, do not fully achieve self-determination within the context of the patriarchal order.

Other thinkers have also challenged Haraway's ideas. Within the twenty-first century, Julia R. DeCook notes that '[in] studying global digital cultures, Haraway's notion of the cyborg is deeply Western in its theorization, and leaves behind those who do not exist in Western conceptions of personhood' (2021: 1160). DeCook argues that debates surrounding the cyborg, gender and sexuality draw towards themselves issues of race as well. In positioning Haraway's theory in relation to the two films that constitute the focus of this study, I must, therefore, acknowledge

² Though Haraway's essay is considered by some to be outdated, there is an enduring cult fascination with this work, evident in several nuanced homages in visual culture. That *Metropolis* predates Haraway's work is a profound testament to the enduring legacy of the philosophical intertextual cycle that is created in a 'text rereading itself as it rewrites itself' (Kristeva, 1980: 86).

that they are products of and subscribe to a Westernised worldview, and will demonstrate how their representations of the cyborg are imbued with this sociocultural and geopolitical worldview.

FRITZ LANG'S *METROPOLIS* (1927)

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) presents a world as archetypal as it is audacious in its ability to imagine a future mechanised dystopia. Set in the futuristic city, Metropolis, the film introduces an idyllic and hedonistic utopia, the above-ground domain of the ruling class under the leadership of the ruthless Fredersen.³ Beneath the surface, the working classes are suffering at the mercy of the machines and need a champion to save them. Despite efforts to sabotage meaningful political change—as instigated by Rotwang and his creation, the robot Maria⁴—the working classes do find such a champion in the human Maria,⁵ who, along with Fredersen's son, Freder,⁶ brokers positive change for the working classes. The film incorporates the *gravitas* of the myth narrative by giving the city a generic name rather than offering a specific geographical location, and by drawing on the underground and above-ground locations as analogous to the lower and upper classes respectively. Furthermore, the film shows explicit displays of human-nature-technology compatibility, superficially layered over the levels of human suffering, as the cogs and wheels of industry are animated by weary human hands.

Much critical engagement with the film has centred on its representation of Marxist themes relating to capitalist exploitation of the proletariat.⁷ Its political agenda is reinforced through class stratification. Where gender has been discussed, for example by Jerold J. Abrams (2004) and Gabriela Stoicea (2006), more often than not, it has been tethered to class. In Abrams and Stoicea's work, as in other works, gender has tended to inform readings related to class exploitation, rather than being explored for its own sake. I acknowledge that attempting to centre gender in analysis is problematic because of the intersectional imperative to situate gender concerns within a wider sociocultural and political context: the layers of Self and Other are multi-faceted and, therefore, cannot be read as separate. And yet, Self and Other have also been oversimplified in terms of their ability to encompass social stratification and the complexity of specific relationship dynamics. Certainly, Lang articulates a heterosexual vision in his film, which is established through the visual discourse of gender archetypes and establishes the *Metropolis* itself as a panoramic space that is as vast as its representation of gender is narrow.

I propose, in offering a predominantly gendered reading of the film, to show how gender not only influences the way the city is structured, but can also be read as the overarching reason other binaries exist, and how love and lust are, consequently, binarised in the film. I will focus on the positioning of two key female characters in relation to fixed points of archetypal masculine characterisation and influence within an overarching mythological hero's journey. I will also show how the film femmes of *Metropolis* function as liminal points that promise a progressive feminist destabilisation and suspension of absolute Self and Other categories, while shifting focus away from the masculine. While the film's conclusion does not necessarily present a catharsis in this regard, I will offer a means of reading how more contemporary views of the human-technology interface achieve a retrospective catharsis, which paves the way for stronger characterisations, in particular of the cyborg film femme. In *Blade Runner*, for example, we see the cyborg as capable of emotions associated with the human, including love. Guiding my analysis of *Metropolis*' two female characters will be three key relational themes: representation and the gaze; mediation and the liminal persona; and the cyborg as the integrated feminine heart that challenges the integral masculine-driven Heart Machine of *Metropolis*. The latter theme points particularly towards posthumanist concerns, as promoted by Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'.

Much of my analysis relies on the fact that the literal and symbolic meanings of the image or visual projection dominate filmic readings. This is even more significant when analysing films from the silent era, such as *Metropolis*.

³ Fredersen is the leader of *Metropolis* and the creator of the machine that drives the functioning of the city. Imperious and ruthless, he oppresses the working classes for the benefit of the ruling class, and expresses a desire to replace the workers with robots.

⁴ Created in the human Maria's likeness by the eccentric scientist Rotwang, the robot Maria is designed to cause chaos and sabotage Fredersen's plans. Unlike the idealistic human Maria, she is seductive and uses her sexuality to corrupt. She, along with Rotwang, are regarded as the antagonists of the film.

⁵ The human Maria, as she is often distinguished, is the female protagonist of the film and is the maternal champion of the working classes. She dedicates herself to alleviating the suffering of the workers and may be seen to be a political idealist and a symbol of purity.

⁶ Freder is the son of Fredersen, the leader of *Metropolis*. Freder falls in love with the human Maria and is strongly influenced by her radical beliefs regarding class equality. As the 'prince' of *Metropolis*, he possesses the capacity to enable positive political change in reconciling the working and ruling classes.

⁷ In her article, 'The top, the bottom and the middle: Space, class and gender in *Metropolis*', Deirdre Byrne (2003: 2) explores how the spatial organisation of the *Metropolis* is analogous to class divisions and how such stratification further informs a rather conservative regard for gender identities and roles.

The icon, as derived from the Greek word *eikēnai*, meaning ‘to seem or to be like’, reveals that what is seen is not presented to us in terms of what *is*, but is rather represented to us in terms of what *seems*. The film has a specific representational value, and semiology provides a useful means through which the film may be understood. Semiology, the study of signs as co-developed and defined by Ferdinand de Saussure as ‘*science that studies the life of signs within society*’ (1959: 16, original emphasis), offers useful tools for understanding how Lang’s film gains a feminine *gravitas*. If we apply the semiotics model to the image most associated with Lang’s film — the promotional poster — we see that much of the film is derived from the presence of the feminine cyborg and not the masculine human. The city itself is symbolically cast as the mechanised feminine through this; and this association becomes more and more entrenched within the ‘collective unconscious’ (Jung, 1964) as the film becomes more and more incorporated within a new, industrialised mythology.

It is interesting to note how Lang, ironically for a self-declared atheist (Gunning, 2000), invests his film with spiritual *gravitas* through incorporating religious iconography, which requires the audience to make active inferences, draw these into the present, and direct them towards the future: an intertextual gesture of ‘a text rereading itself as it rewrites itself’ (Kristeva, 1980: 86). Such associations are both context- and character-driven, but are all directed towards a sense of stratification represented in the form of a tiered triangular model. This is seen in several frames in the film, such as when human Maria delivers her sermon, or when the robot Maria is elevated above the people as she dances, which draws heavily on the artistic golden ratio and symbolises the city’s rigid power hierarchy.

Lang’s film is regarded by scholars such as Tom Gunning (2000), Deirdre Byrne (2003) and Joe McElhaney (2015) as a modern allegory. This is defined as a narrative that operates at a symbolic level to communicate a truth or reveal a moral and, as J. R. R. Tolkien observes, is strongly informed by the ‘purposed domination of the author’ (2001: xvii): in this case, the director. Allegory subscribes to hierarchy in preferring the author’s (or in this case the filmmaker’s) understanding of truth over the reader’s (or viewer’s). The masculine-derived allegorical imperative is not only promoted in how the film’s Metropolis is structured, but also through Lang’s incorporation of characters like ‘The Creative Man’ and ‘The Machine Man’, ‘Death’ and ‘The Seven Deadly Sins’. These point to a higher moral message promoting Christian virtues, which rely on the acceptance of God as masculine. As an allegorical space, Metropolis serves as a means of stratifying society according to the culturally accepted locations of heaven above and hell below. Even the transition between these spaces is effected through a scrolling title card where words are ordered into a triangular shape stating (translated into English): ‘As deep as lay the workers’ city below the earth, so high above it towered the complex known as the “Club of the Sons,” with its lecture halls and libraries, its theatres and stadiums’ (Lang, 1927). This declaration does achieve a significant class distinction, but it is worth noting that the entire hierarchical arrangement of the Metropolis, as narrated through the title cards, has a dominant masculine presence above and below. This is evident in the title card identifying the complex as ‘The Club of Sons’, excluding the feminine. Furthermore, the masculine Fredersen is positioned as the presiding deity of the whole Metropolis.

The heavenly level above ground is represented as a pastoral paradise infused with images of Greek and Roman civilisation and the cult of pleasure. Hedonism holds sway and nature is its context. This is ironic because Nature is associated more readily with the feminine and the presence of prostitutes in the Eternal Gardens, a source of sexual pleasure for upper-class men, reinforces this association. However, this association is superficial because Nature is only a pawn for the benefit of man. Such a realisation brings to mind Barad’s posthumanist critique of the assumption that nature is inferior to culture:

Posthumanism does not attribute the source of all change to culture, denying nature any sense of agency or historicity. In fact, it refuses the idea of a natural (or, for that matter, a purely cultural) division between nature and culture, calling for an accounting of how this boundary is actively configured and reconfigured. (2006: 136)

The posthumanist lens, which proposes that nature and culture are entangled, offers a means through which the nature-culture binary in *Metropolis* may be critiqued because it corrupts the nonhuman agency of the cyborg femme for patriarchal, bureaucratic advancement. The mastermind, Joh Fredersen, asserts his hierarchy as a dominant masculine will, serving the imperative of culture, and so the paradise above and the wheels of industry below must follow his directive. The audience is encouraged to see the world of *Metropolis* through masculine eyes: a central, regulating, phallogocentric gaze governing the enclosed urban system of the Metropolis. More importantly, the masculine gaze of Lang, as director, infuses the eye of the camera lens with a particular masculine imperative to see the world of the Metropolis through *his* eyes, rather than through a woman’s gaze.

Lang’s patriarchal representation of the two Marias is particularly noteworthy in terms of the binary between human and machine. Stoicea describes the revelation of the human Maria as a sequence of ‘seeings’ that reveals the above-ground level as being artificial as well as superficial, but destabilises the notion of a dominant male gaze

in that the transition between surveyor and surveyed makes it 'unclear who watches' and who is being watched (2006: 33).

Stoica also shows that the human Maria is presented as a spectacle. She is beheld by Freder and the prostitutes who, though female, have internalised the male gaze. However, the human Maria challenges the male gaze when she asserts herself intrusively within a space, with the film's frame seeking to objectify her, with the defiant call to 'Behold'. Her guiding children into a space associated with sexuality and pleasure poses a threat, not only to the upper classes, but also to the innocence of the children, despite her affinity to the divine matriarch archetype; and her caring for the proletariat poses a threat to the authority of Fredersen and to the artificial paradise he has created to placate the upper classes. Her democratisation of the space through using the word 'brothers' rather than 'masters' casts her, not just as a religious icon, but a revolutionary one: she becomes an embodiment of Liberty, leading the people.

Probably the most cited analysis of the two Marias is offered by Andreas Huyssen, who explores the threat the human Maria poses to Fredersen and the control he exerts from above, as opposed to the robot Maria and the seductive influence she wields from below. He takes a Freudian approach in evaluating the threat each poses, and represents their significance as a triangulation of human, nature and technology. He writes that: 'Woman, nature, machine had become a mesh of significations which all had one thing in common: otherness; by their very existence they raised fears and threatened male authority and control' (Huyssen, 1982: 226).

The robot Maria also receives the scrutiny of the male gaze, which projects its dominance over her in an act of colonisation of the cyborg as sexual spectacle. Huyssen comments on this as follows:

The montage of male eyes staring at the false Maria when she emerges from her cauldron and begins to cast off her clothes, illustrates how the male gaze actually constitutes the female body on the screen. It is as if we were witnessing the second, public creation of the robot, her flesh, skin, and body not only being revealed, but constituted by the desire of male vision. (1982: 230)

As indicated previously, the audience is encouraged to view the world of the Metropolis from a masculine point of view. This is affirmed by Jean-Louis Baudry, who states that '[t]he spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees; this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay' (1985: 540). The robot's wink is projected at the audience. The wink is seductive, positioning the cyborg as an object of lust rather than love. However, the one eye could perhaps indicate the singular vision (the all-seeing eye) of the controlling panopticon gaze that the robot is subservient to.

Some critics disagree with this reading. Lane Roth contradicts this by stating that the creation of the robot Maria is an act of silencing the masculine. Roth writes that '[t]he machine is (...) represented as an agent that corrupts and that robs the image of man, and thereby the image of God, of identity' (1978: 344). Roth perceives power in the feminine, which Huyssen (1982: 226) also perceives as being a threat to masculine order. However, though the cyborg is created in man's image, and is fashioned as woman, it is not woman. Rather, it seems to be woman, in the same way as it seems to be human. The robot Maria's creation is nothing more than an effective illusion, and although she appears to possess agency, she is still serving a man's will.

The effect of this human, nature and machine 'mesh of significations' (Huyssen, 1982: 226), and the reinforcement of the Other on all three levels, ultimately reinforce masculine hierarchy. This is seen in how iconic images of the two women tend to place them at points of convergence or intersection that are centrally located. Indeed, the creation of the robot Maria is derived from Fredersen's own fear of reconciliation between what is above and below. Huyssen, for example, quotes Maria's own words in emphasising her liminality: 'Between the brain that plans and the hands that build, there must be a mediator' [and] 'It is the heart that must bring about an understanding between them' (1982: 228-229). Though Fredersen's son, Freder, is called the mediator, who reconciles the worlds above and below through the mediation of the heart, and acts as an intermediary between the wills of two men and of the worlds above and below, he is not the only person in this role. The human Maria initially takes up this mantle as a torchbearer for reconciliation. Fredersen's fear reveals, according to Huyssen, that master may become slave, capital may become labour, and the will of man may become the will of women. The two Marias are torch-bearers for change, albeit in different ways. Their light promises reconciliation through love, but is either colonised to affirm the phallogocentric order of the monomyth, or destroyed, and the tableau of what an alliance between head, heart and hands is fractured, broken and silenced. Freder's mediation becomes more effective than that of the human Maria. She becomes a religious icon, a symbol of divine love, as when she addresses the workers in the catacombs in a tableau that echoes the biblical sermon on the mount, but she is ultimately reduced to being only a promise of reconciliation. This failure to achieve the reconciliation that Freder later manages is further corrupted by the robot Maria, because of her resemblance to the human Maria.

The robot Maria is animated into life in a process that strongly resembles the creation of Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's work. It requires the vision of the 'Pride and efficiency and modernity' (Wells, 1927: 186) of the

ambitious patron, and the genius of the stereotypical mad scientist. Fredersen and Rotwang both wield their influence over the robot Maria and, in so doing, turn her into an object of their designs. She is overtly sexual in contrast to the human Maria's chaste virtue, and so robot Maria seems to affirm the polarising 'Madonna'/'Whore' classification of the archetypal feminine. The cyborg uses its likeness to the human Maria to gain acceptance. H. G. Wells writes that the robot Maria should 'look and work like a human being, but it is to have no "soul"' (1927: 185). The process of transformation into the likeness of the human, Wells (1927) asserts, involves trapping the human (in this case the female human) and exploiting her, akin to raping her of her essence. This is ironic in light of the fact that the robot Maria presents herself as cynically sexual, a parody of the prostitutes in the Eternal Gardens. Both she and the prostitutes represent warped versions of love.

The interface between humanity and technology is presented as an abomination in both Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Lang's *Metropolis*, and so the film may be seen as a cautionary tale. However, I wish to propose another interpretation. The two Marias dissolve the boundaries that fix humans and technology on opposite sides of a spectrum. According to this logic, we cannot deny the interdependence between humanity and technology. The human Maria's likeness has been captured through a process of dissolution and re-embodiment, and feeds into Mulvey's assertions that recognition is misrecognition, and that misrecognition envelops what already exists instead of replacing it. Huyssen refers to this in terms of how the machine is 'constructed from the inside out', with human physical qualities 'projected onto the robot' afterwards, and that the 'technical process in which woman is divided and fragmented into inner and outer nature' is undone when the robot Maria is burned at the stake (1982: 230-231). The film does not evoke any empathy for the cyborg. Its purpose is fulfilled, and it has no part in the love between Freder and human Maria, or in the hope of reconciliation.

The robot Maria does enjoy one final extradiegetic victory. The most famous image from the film is the image of the robot Maria: the cyborg femme stripped of her humanity, exposing the naked machinery below. It has become entangled with western visual culture, and has also become increasingly anthropomorphised and idolised. Therein lies the victory of this image: its gaze meets our own as the machine encounters the human. The cyborg is a hybrid, a liminal being. The cyborg femme, now anthropomorphised and rendered a neutral space on which the virtues and vices of humanity are imprinted, possesses the potential to love and be loved. The human Maria thus acts as a mirror reflecting her robot counterpart's unfulfilled potential. The cyborg represents a potential unleashed on humanity, with a limited vision for what it is and what it could be: a nonhuman being that is exploited and denied liberty, despite being self-aware and desiring self-determination. This debate is picked up in Scott's *Blade Runner*.

RIDLEY SCOTT'S *BLADE RUNNER* (1982)

Based on Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Scott's *Blade Runner* brings to life the cinematic spectacle of an imagined, dystopic twenty-first century, where the advancement in cyborg technology has created both immense off-world opportunity and a critical threat to humanity. In this world, cyborgs are termed 'Replicants' and are described in the prologue as '[beings] virtually identical to a human' (Scott, 1982). Six of these Replicants have managed to escape from the off-world colony and have returned to Earth in an act of defiance that is deemed illegal and grounds for termination (euphemistically called 'retirement'). The Replicants pose a real threat to the Tyrell Corporation that created them because they are self-aware, and aware of their limited lifespan. In this sense, time, motivates the urgency of their decisions — what would, in human terms, be akin to fear — and their violent actions to preserve what life and dignity they have left. Rick Deckard, the titular Blade Runner, is hunting them.

Though the film is quintessentially a cat-and-mouse chase, it is also grounded in answering the question, 'What does it mean to be human?', and humanity's capacity to love, hate, and self-determine seem to be at the heart of answering this. J. P. Telotte states that *Blade Runner* explores 'the problematic nature of the human being and the difficult task of being human' (1983: 44). The cyborg's indistinguishability from the human provokes the audience to look within both the nature of the human and the programming of the cyborg to determine the distinction. I return to Wells' words here in terms of a restrictive view of what a robot should be: to 'look and work like a human being, but (...) to have no "soul"' (1927: 185). This understanding is echoed in the words of Bryant as he briefs Deckard on the need to retire the rogue Replicants:

They were designed to copy human beings in every way except their emotions. Now, the designers reckoned that after a few years they might develop their own emotional responses. You know, hate, love, fear, anger, envy. So they built in a failsafe device (...) four-year lifespan. (Scott, 1982)

Based on Bryant's description, the cyborg Replicant's capacity to adopt human qualities and to be unpredictable and uncontrollable is what Deckard must respond to. As he himself states: "They are either a benefit or a hazard" (Scott, 1982).

As in *Metropolis*, the space of the cyborg Replicants is grounded in an industrialised hierarchical order which represents them as objects of manufacture, subject to patriarchal bureaucratic control at the Tyrell Corporation. In a possibly unconscious echo of the recurring triangular shapes in Lang's film, the company's headquarters is shaped like a tiered pyramid, alluding to an entrenched, phallic, hierarchical system.

Much like the robot Maria, the rogue Replicants are designed to be fit for purpose. Of the six who escaped, only two female Replicants remain on earth: Zohra and Pris. Though Zohra is designed for military purposes, when Deckard manages to track her down, she has re-embodied herself as a temptress, the exotic, snake-charming dancer, Salome. Deckard, in the guise of a member of the Confidential Committee of Moral Abuses, asks Zohra whether she felt exploited or coerced into her current occupation. The irony is patent: Zohra's escape to earth was no doubt motivated by her need to escape her off-world exploitation. She is, for the most part, semi-naked throughout Deckard's questioning, her exposed body revealing how the nonhuman visually embodies humanity. Whether she knew from the beginning of his questioning that he was a Blade Runner is open to speculation, but once she initiates her military programming to full effect in attacking Deckard and flees into the street, the audience witnesses her shedding the Salome persona and re-embodiment Zohra once more. However, the chase is short-lived, and Deckard shoots and retires her. Her lifeless body is found among shop window mannequins, her will towards self-determination silenced, relegating her to a lifeless doll. The dichotomy between sexuality and military combat in Zohra's presentation in the film is taken up by the only other female replicant, Pris.

Pris, a military-leisure Replicant, is the closest in design to the robot Maria. However, unlike the robot Maria, who deceives people through her likeness of the human Maria, Pris has no human counterpart. In this sense, she might be free to self-determine because she is 'unique'. Because her design sought to ground her purpose in being desired by others through rendering her beautiful, her self-determination is demonstrated in her remaking the visible traits of her identity in an Other way. Pris re-embodies herself as a harlequin, the black and white colouring of her re-imagined visual form eventually provoking the 'fear she inspires in the hero' (Mulvey, 1975: 11), rather than lust. However, this process of un-becoming and re-embodiment is not demonstrated in a singular event: it is a gradual transition that seems to move from innocence to experience, which initially deceives the audience through its 'confusion of boundaries' (Haraway 2016:7). Pris's words, 'I'm lost' (Scott, 1982) signal the threshold between her mask of innocence and her unmasked experience. The audience sees that this coincides with her meeting J. F. Sebastian, the genetic engineer responsible for her nervous system. This meeting is not accidental and is orchestrated to further the Replicants' goal of extending their lifespan.

Later, as Sebastian is surrounded by his cybernetic creations as he sleeps — the friends that he has 'made', in his terms — Pris un masks herself. The irony is not lost on the audience, as her 'unmasked' form is represented through her spray-painting her eyes black, like a harlequin. Her skin is also painted white to imply innocence or purity, with clothing that complements the black-and-white scheme. Symbolically, this could be seen to intimate that she is a character of extreme states of being, of innocence and experience, as well as amplifying the *noir*⁸ aspect of the film. All this is grounded in the visual perception of who and what she is. When Sebastian awakes to see her remade, she asks him, 'How do I look?', to which he responds, 'You look beautiful' (Scott, 1982).

The act of looking is constitutive of meaning in film. *Blade Runner* contains several close-ups, in particular of Deckard's and the Replicants' eyes: perhaps a nod to these being popularly described as the 'windows to the soul'. The eyes are the means through which Replicants are typically identified: they have inhuman optical responses. As María del Mar Asension Aróstegui notes: 'through their eyes replicants can be unmasked' (1994: 24). In this way, the importance of the gaze — the one who looks and the one who is being looked at — and its capacity to unmask (revealing the 'truth' of a person's identity) weaves throughout the film. It is a sexualised unmasking for the female Replicants, and shows how Replicant women are subject to the eyes that desire them.

Pris's sexuality and beauty deceive men into desiring her before truly seeing her for who she is, in much the same way as Zohra uses her disguise as Salome to her advantage in keeping hidden and safe, and the robot Maria uses her sexuality in *Metropolis*. David Desser comments on how Pris initially uses her sexuality as defence in her confrontation with Deckard. He notes the movement from perceived innocence to sexualised violence as follows:

[The] image of female sexuality as a weapon wielded by women is made explicit (...) Such blatant sexual symbolism is surely to be noted, even amidst the spectacular gymnastics. Deckard manages to throw her

⁸ J. P. Telotte describes *film noir* in terms of the stark contrasts between light and dark. He states that 'the *noir* films are noteworthy neither for their subtlety of expression nor their muting of our cultural problems; to the contrary, they deploy the darkest imagery to sketch starkly disconcerting assessments of the human and social condition' (1989: 2, original emphasis).

off him and shoots her. (Pris's paroxysms in her death throes is one of the film's most riveting moments.) (1985: 175)

In Desser's description, Pris uses the sexuality that she had been imbued with in her manufacture as her best defence against the threat of retirement. Unlike the robot Maria, who is never truly liberated from her creators, Pris demonstrates her absolute determination to defend her desire for liberation alongside her fellow Replicants, with whom she shares a form of familial love. In this sense though her purpose is sexualised, her heart is devoted to a genderless, non-sexual love.

Described by Haraway 'as the image of a cyborg culture's fear, love, and confusion' (2016: 60), Rachael offers a counterpoint to Pris's violent sexualisation. First introduced to the audience when Deckard meets Tyrell at the Tyrell corporation, 'she is portrayed as an erotic object for the hero's gaze' (del Mar Asension Aróstegui, 1994: 35). However, while Pris moves from being perceived as an innocent to revealing her true nature, Rachael's character arc takes her from being perceived as a *noir femme fatale* to an awakening that she is a cyborg, and the quest to redeem herself through her own vulnerability to Deckard's intentions. Del Mar Asension Aróstegui writes that this is symbolically enacted as follows: 'seeing Deckard asleep, Rachael sits by the piano, takes off her padded-shouldered jacket, undoes her 40s hair-style and starts playing the piano, suggesting that underneath her removable mask of *femme fatale*, she is really a sensitive and scared woman' (1994: 35, original emphasis).

Several scholars have analysed the representation of the femme fatale in *Blade Runner*. Among these are Christian David Zeitz, who comments that 'Rachael first behaves like a strong femme fatale, boldly facing and challenging Deckard, but later submits to him and accepts her place as his passive lover' (2016: 87). Her façade of manufactured sexuality is undone or dis-embodied, and she becomes a re-embodied human who is capable of eliciting love beyond desire, despite (or possibly because of) her passivity. Nigel Wheale comments on Rachael's character arc as directed by empathy and affect:

The first Nexus-6 which (who?) Deckard meets is Rachael Rosen, and she very nearly passes the empathy-test ordeal; more difficult still, she ceases to be an inanimate object for Deckard, because he finds himself attracted to 'her'. Rachael also turns the tables on Deckard, accusing him of being *inhuman* because of the instrumental, cold way in which he tries to deal with her. (1991: 300)

In this extract, Wheale highlights humanity in flux in its encounter with the cyborg Other. Deckard's inhumanity is contrasted with Rachael's ability to reason, and the Cartesian understanding of the distinction between human and machine is unravelled.

Unlike Zohra or Pris, Rachael is afforded dignity and protection because she could be loved by Deckard, who would have otherwise relegated her to retirement. Whether she reciprocates Deckard's love or is motivated by the need for self-preservation is not resolved in the film. But her leaving with Deckard offers the promise of hope in reconciling the human and nonhuman cyborg to each other as an act of love.

While Pris, Zohra and Rachael are denied the opportunity to offer a holistic understanding of the nonhuman cyborg experience, Roy is afforded this agency in the end. The human gaze, which the *Blade Runner* uses to discern optical cues that distinguish humans from Replicants, is inverted and becomes Roy's dying gaze as he relates what he has seen to Deckard:

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die. (Scott, 1982)

Through witnessing his experiences, Roy's final words affirm the Replicant's capacity to remember and feel: qualities we would deem essentially human. The relational dynamic between the human and cyborg supplies the catharsis that *Metropolis* lacks, because neither is reconciled to each other in Lang's film: the human exploits the machine and silences the cyborg's agency, autonomy and capacity to inspire love. The cyborg looks like the human, but is not grounded in the sociopolitical systems that bind humans to the importance of their own experiences. *Blade Runner* overrides this by affirming the needs of the nonhuman machine. Lars Schmeink draws on Haraway's insight regarding the cyborg's symbolic value when he writes:

As a cultural metaphor the cyborg thus presents us with the realization that we are embodied in a technoculturally determined body, that our bodily identity is multiple, active, and changing, and that the posthuman 'might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints' ('Cyborg Manifesto' 154). (2016: 36-37)

To borrow from Haraway, the body (and, by extension, the heart) of the cyborg reveals the possibility for coexistence because it possesses an awareness of how its presence transcends boundaries between human and machine, through an awareness that ‘their construction and deconstruction’ is perpetually in flux (Haraway, 2016: 66). The exclusively human emotional capacity to love and be loved is also true for the cyborg and, more broadly, the nonhuman. A new relational dynamic emerges as the cyborg symbolically dominates the popular imagination: one that finds no fixed bodily form, but is constantly being dis-embodied and re-embodied.

Schmeink’s understanding of the potency of potential is taken up by the sequel to *Blade Runner*, Denis Villeneuve’s *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). Though bureaucratic conflict and corruption are still evident in Villeneuve’s film, the overarching message in answering the question of what it means to be human lies in the capacity for the cyborg and the human to coexist, collaborate, and to enjoy love and kinship.

CONCLUSION

Lang’s and Scott’s films form part of the enduring debate in speculative fiction around what it means to be human. Though enacted as a mythical narrative, *Metropolis* advocates for the heart and its capacity to achieve reconciliation. These human qualities are denied the robot Maria. Her condemnation and extermination by fire ascribes to her the archetypal qualities of a witch. She is the actor within the mythical play who must be sacrificed in order for the protagonists to live. As Donna Haraway observes, though positioned within this industrial myth-tale, the robot Maria is deprived of an historical and mythological past and is also not given a future within the human world of the *Metropolis*.

This is also true of the cyborg Replicants in *Blade Runner*. Though they seem to have a limited experience of the past, Scott emphasises memory, the recall of the past in the present, as a means through which humans and nonhuman cyborgs find mutual ground. However, this realisation comes too late for Zohra and Pris, who are the victims of the *Blade Runner*’s mandate to identify and retire the Replicants as liabilities to the human world. However, the human audience of this film feels empathy for the Replicants in the end. Through our visual experiences, we dismantle the machine as soulless and re-embodiment it as cyborg: closer to humans, but also more than human. Haraway speaks of the value of encountering cyborg characters in fiction: ‘Cyborg writing [and film] is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other’ (2016: 55). The seeds of debate, sown by Lang and Scott, they have been eloquently taken up by twenty-first-century films such as Alex Garland’s *Ex-Machina* (2014) and Alex Proyas’s *I, Robot* (2004).

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