

TECHNO-HUMAN: NEW FORM OF HYBRID HUMAN; FROM SCIENCE-FICTION CINEMA TO THE POST-MODERN SOCIETY

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This paper discusses the process of how human body and identity has become hybrid of human and machine being affected by technology and how this alteration has been materialized from science-fiction cinema to the post-industrial society. The term “techno-human” is used to define this new hybrid version of the human including implanted bodies, artificial organs, prosthesis, digital identities and avatars.

Introduction

Cinema has always been an art form which reflects what and how has happened in this world from the human point of view using various way of audiovisual communication to interact with the viewers; with us. Therefore, the questions and answers that people ask about everything have always been important for the cinema. Considering every film genre asks the questions and gives the different answers; according to Vivian Sobchack; science-fiction is “a film genre which emphasizes actual, extrapolative, or speculative science and the empirical method, interacting in a social context with the lesser emphasized, but still present ... in an attempt to reconcile man with the unknown.” [1]

In the post-industrial society, technology has become the unknown figure for our today and future, as technology and science improve rapidly. Every day, there are new machines and tools that we have to be exposed. Therefore, mainly, the role of SF genre has become exploring how these developments and tools affect human and what kind of interaction there is between human and technology. In other words, science-fiction cinema has had significant role as an art form to define and discuss the unknown and possible future of interaction between human and technology. As science-fiction cinema promises, today, in the non-fictional world, human being is exposed by machines; computers, mobile phones, the Internet, television, cars, prosthesis and any other machines. This new exposed human being is defined in theoretical and practical way since modern and post-modern periods have occurred.

Obviously, there are very important similarities between the human of post-industrial society and the represented human in the world of SF cinema in terms of physical body and personal identity. According to similarities of these two converted human being concepts; this paper aims to examine representations of altered human body and identity by technology in science-fiction cinema and how these representations have become real in non-fictional post-modern society today. In addition, the paper explains and uses a new term “techno-human” to define new hybrid human version which has similar identical and physical features with the represented human from science-fiction cinema and the real world of today. In the book “Terminal Identity,” [2] Scott Bukatman claims significance of altered human figure by technology in SF cinema using his own term *terminal identity* which is related with the identity of techno-human and Bukatman says: “terminal identity is a form of speech, as an essential cyborg formation, and a potentially subversive reconception of the subject that situates the human and the technological as coextensive, codependent and mutually defining.” [3] Considering the notion of techno-human, there is a strong relation between two human figures in SF cinema and the actual world; both are modified and their autonomies are awakened as Bukatman emphasizes the same for his *terminal* concept. Besides, to define the human of the post-industrial society, Giuseppe O. Longo uses the term *homo*

technologicus: “a symbiotic creature in which biology and technology intimately interact” and he explains this term as “homo sapiens transformed by technology” which is a new transformational type in a new space. [4]

In this regard, today, techno-human is the version of homo technologicus and considering these both definitions of Bukatman and Longo; -Bukatman’s is for SF cinema and Longo’s is for the non-fictional world- techno-human links these both notions concentrating on the alteration of body and identity by technology of human comparing with representation of the human in SF cinema. Furthermore, in structural meaning, techno-human does not only belong to the world of today or the world of SF cinema, it belongs to both of them; its area and time are also hybrid as itself.

Techno-body

The human body is reconstructed through technology in the postmodern period, and Stelarc explains this reconstruction as reposition of the body from the psycho realm to the cyber zone of interface and extension and he claims that the body needs this transformation to become the hybrid of human-machine. [5] In addition, to be exist and integrated in the world of techno-culture, one needs to improve his/her body but the nature does not help to regenerate the body. For this reason, the human is constrained to use the advantages of the new technology to accommodate the body for our own time and for the future. Thus, in the way of becoming techno-human, interpenetration between body and technology; one allows technology to penetrate into one’s body so the body is implanted, extended and altered by machines. Furthermore, Stelarc mentions that redesigning of the body altering, implanting and extending it ends with the redefining the human saying; “it is no longer meaningful to see body as a site for the psyche or the social, but rather as a structure to be monitored and modified (...) the body is an object for designing.” [6]

Additionally, techno-body might be considered similar with the cyborg idea of Donna Haraway, the cybernetic organism [7] and, the cyborg is generally defined as a presence which is a union of the cybernetic and organism at once, and also a blend of flash and inorganic. [8] Similarly, techno-body is a human body which is converted by technology, a new form of the human body, therefore, it is possible to say that cyborg is related with the techno-body and there is an interaction between both. However, specifically, techno-body approaches the machine and body relation involving the organic human body as the beginning point to discuss the techno-body in the conditions of the both fictional and non-fictional world.

In this case, the SF movie; *Repo Men* (Miguel Sapochnik, 2010), adapted by the novel of Eric Garcia, discusses the paradox of belonging and having the artificial organ in the near future which does not seem so far from today. Significantly, I choose this movie for the reason that it argues the artificial organs from the human body point of view; we see human bodies which become techno-bodies. In the future of *Repo Men*, one buys the artificial organs as same as today, and also if one does not have money; he can buy the organs with credits from a company. The buyer pays the instalment every month and if he does not / cannot pay the instalment, “repo men” take the organ back from him and he dies. This situation brings the question of belonging of the body with the artificial organs. Considering the movie, implanted body of techno-human does not belong to oneself concretely, and personally; one cannot feel that the mechanic part of the body belongs to oneself; the organ is just a new attached property of the body. If you have techno-body with the artificial implants, you cannot feel that your body does not completely belong to you like when you were born; inside of your body, there is something which makes you

have a techno-body; it is something implanted by technology, not by nature and physically, you are different than you were before. When the future of the movie is compared with our actual life today; it is possible to see people having techno-body with prosthesis and artificial organs. As people get used to lose their natural organs, they are getting used to have artificial ones inside of their body which will make them have a techno-body.

Robocop (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) movie is another example for the both fictional and non-fictional world for the reason that the protagonist of *Robocop*. Police officer Alex Murphy is human whose body is recreated with the machine prosthesis; *Robocop* had human body before having a techno-body. In this regard, *Robocop* movie can find its reflections and feedbacks on the real world immediately. *Robocop* brings a different perspective recreating the human body with machine prosthesis without covering it and also the movie shows the reasons and results of having a new machine body. Further, *Murphy* does not only come back to life, he also has improved and strong body than before so other police officers call him as “super-cop” also. In addition, without his new machine body, he also cannot live anymore, so he is obliged to his new body; he must have the techno-body to survive and his new body will not completely die, it just might be destroyed because it is a partly machine. This is also one of the contradictions of techno-human for the reason that any prosthetic parts of the body will not be vanished but the human will die and the human body will be rotten. Therefore, it is a contradiction of one is wearing something which will exist longer than one’s body. In addition, the shape of *Murphy’s* new body is not different than his former body functionally; it has still human body appearance with his two legs and two arms because the main reason of recreating his body is not to produce a new existence, the aim is to make a human body which is stronger than the organic one and he just becomes a hybrid and his new human shape body also bring the functional advantages to him, because he still looks like a human with the shape of his body. Likewise, in the society of today, if one has prosthesis, he/she is not very comfortable to take attention in the public because of the prosthetic part of the body. This is the reason why the prosthesis technology has to imitate of the organic body as well as the real and original one. For why, it is difficult to wear a prosthesis which is very different than the organic body because even just wearing the prosthesis has already possibility to make one a scary object in public; as it happens when the skinned body of *Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) is seen on the screen.

Identity of Techno-human: Digital Me / We

The idea of Michael R. Heim; “Digital We – Digital Me” (DW / DM) is the initial point of the altered identity of techno-human from SF cinema to the recent day. I want to use the term for more general issues than just the digital environment covering the area of all technologically exposed new identity of human, thus, with the new identity of human. For this reason, DW is directly related to what has happened to human personality with the invasion of technology in daily life and penetration of the human into the digital world of machines. Evidently, the alteration of human identity is not caused by one way direction because when the machines exist in our daily life, we enters in their area too, hence, the identity is affected by its own environment and also the environment of machines; digital environment and virtual world. Significantly, becoming DW has been undeniable by the techno-human of the 21st Century for the reason that we live with the machines, inside of the machines and machines are inside of us.

Michael R. Heim gives the title of the poster of *Minority Report’s* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) “You can’t hide, - Get ready to run” as an example for the warning of DM of new human whose data profile is adapted by the computer with credit card purchases, online shopping, e-mail correspondence, health records [9] and today we have become closer to the DW with the social media/networks (Facebook,

Twitter) and blogs, mobile phones, video games and such. Obviously, we have alternative personalities inside of the machines and networks; they identify us as we introduce ourselves to them. For official usage of the digital technologies we have to become the real us but for other areas, our digital altered identity does not have to be the exactly what we are. DW/DM may be someone or something else different than our own. In this regard, Heim claims, "I" is transformed to "Me" being objectified in the virtuality. In addition, DM can be designed with "fake names, feigned interests, and fabricated references" hiding the real "I" behind the screen. [10] This is very much like what *the Matrix* (Andy & Lana Wachowski, 1999) brings the new idea of the combination of real and virtual world. Even we are not being penetrated by the cables to connect to the network with DM as it happens in *the Matrix*; we connect to the network with an altered identity. How the main character of the movie, Neo, is not exactly the same person in both virtual and real world, we have a digitized identity in the world of networks, or a video game. In this regard, it is possible to say that alternated identities have started when the computer has changed from calculator to the multimedia machine equipped with networks, games, and even televisions. [11] I mean, digital identity of techno-human has been created with personalizing computer and then use them as an entertainment and social device. In this process the non-fictional and fictional world of SF cinema has been developed concurrently and the boundaries between the DW and the real we has become more transparent.

As an illustration; in *TRON* (Steven Lisberger, 1982), the protagonist *Kevin Flynn* is transported from the real world to the cyberspace of the video game physically and spiritually, and if we think about the real time technology when the movie was produced, this transition from the real self to the virtual self is something new for the beginning of the 1980s. Almost twenty years after *TRON*, *the Matrix* brings another explanation to the concepts of real and virtual world and so the identity. Not like *TRON*, in *the Matrix*, the real body does not need to be transported to be in virtual space, the real "we" stay and the DW exist in the virtual area. Therefore, considering the technological developments in the world during twenty years; from *TRON* to *the Matrix*, it makes sense that we can have virtual identity without losing the real one. Obviously, the story of *the Matrix* is affected by growing usage of the Internet and virtuality on real life during the 1990s and the movie asks the question about the reality, and importantly; if there are two realities as the real and virtual one, where is the line between these realities?

When we consider more recent SF films, DW has changed, again with the development in the non-fictional world. Since *the Matrix*, 1999, also the deadline of the 20th Century, the virtual spaces and machines have invaded the space, everyday life and our body, rapidly, also the Internet environment and virtual space have played important role in our lives and virtuality has become popular such as social networks/media, blogs, video and photo sharing sites, virtual online games, video games and so on. In addition, "avatar" as a notion has become popular in the computing terminology and it is generally defined as the virtual representation of the user as a character on the virtual area. For this reason, the meaning of DM has been changed again as it is happened in SF cinema. For instance; the recent SF films such as; *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009), *Surrogates* (Jonathan Mostow, 2009), or *Gamer* (Mark Neveldine & Brian Taylor, 2009) are generally tells the story about using the real avatars in the real world. *Avatar*, the human can control the body and identity of another existence, Na'vi, in the planet called Pandora, therefore Na'vi people's identity has become the avatar identity of the human. Similarly, *Surrogates* movie is about the future that people exist in the public with their surrogate robots so people just sit on the sofa and control their surrogates in daily life and in this situation people may seem different then their physical appearance or they may have different job than their real job. Likewise, in the future world of the movie *Gamer*, people play video games controlling the bodies of real people, for instance the main character *Kable / John Tillman* is a prisoner and he works as the avatar of the young boy *Simon Silvertan* in a game called *Slayers*. Further, to become an avatar is also a job to earn money in

the world of real people and real avatars. Without reservation, we also have had similar levels from the 1980s until today, and considering the recent movies that I have mentioned, not completely the same but we have our avatars in virtual area; we can control our avatars as we have different personalities and we can be someone else on the Internet. Michael R. Heim explains the notion avatar as “flexible and fluid identity that reveals chosen aspects of the real I. Avatars can range from the simple e-mail nickname with graphic icons to the animated body about in virtual worlds.” [12] It is maybe early to say that we can control other humans’ bodies as our avatars, but we control the machines now; cars, industrial machines, computers, and also with our body we control the our avatars on the game on Nintendo Wii or Xbox Kinect, however, for the issue of DW; the identity of techno-human is more significant than the body, because the identity does not need to wear, touch or hear something to be changed, it is just changed from the environment and surely, we have similar environments with the movies that I have noted. In this regard, if we can behave like someone else in virtual area, we already have our DW, and maybe in the near future, it is soon that we will see our DW in the actual life, just like looking to the mirror. In brief, if we finish with the words of Heim, he says; “the avatar becomes a graphic embodiment of the world citizen, the Digital Me that attains freedom through deeper engagement.” [13]

Conclusion

All things considered; techno-human is a notion to define new human who is exposed by the technologies and machines comparing the representation of altered human concept in science-fiction cinema with human concept in the post-industrial period of non-fictional world. The reason of my insistence to use the notion of techno-human is that we are not a completely machine "yet". In my opinion, the term has described the situation of today’s human better including the human word and also signifying the effect of technology (machines) on human body and identity. In SF films and actual life, the human becomes the first object to represent and for this reason all technologies I have mentioned are produced and used for human being. In addition, the human body is used as the represented realm to proclaim the future possibilities of the technology and human relationship asking a question which is that is this relationship good or bad?

In general, considering the dystopian SF films, their proclamation is that the machine and human interaction will grow negatively and there might be a so-called war between human and machines. As there are not any distinctive proof that the technology is good or bad for people, the term techno-human also covers the both effects of technology considering negative and positive results of human and machine relationship. As techno-human keeps the human parts physically or identically, he/she also is exposed by the technology using its advantages and disadvantages. In this case, techno-human might be someone who has prosthesis, or someone who sits in front of computer without doing anything, or someone who uses a technological weapon, or someone who walks around the city with his/her Bluetooth earphone. Therefore, including the words *techno* and *human*, techno-human becomes the hybrid, as it does not matter where he/she comes from, or where he/she lives in; maybe in the world of ours or in the world of science-fiction.

References and Notes:

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