LIFE THROUGH THE LENS: CYBORG SUBJECTIVITY IN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

This study uses the character of the cyborg, as it is invoked in Science Fiction film, to understand representations of identity, focusing on gender, from a perspective that is embedded in both social and material contexts. The cyborg deconstructs the dichotomies that define the Humanist subject, such as subject and object, real and fantasy, technology and culture. However, as society transitions from a Modernist, to Postmodern and beyond, cyborg fantasies reflect differences in ideology and values. These social changes can be tracked on the bodies of cyborg images.

In this research, I use the cyborg, a figure of rich cultural significance, as a heuristic to research representations of gender from a perspective that accounts for cultural and material contexts. Scholars specializing in feminism, anthropology and cultural studies continue to theorize how the rich cultural significance of the deconstruct(ed)(ing) cyborg body. This research contributes to this on going discussion by focusing on the cyborg’s significance in film discourse and feminist discourse.
I argue that the cyborg, as a subject of film, conflates the false opposition between empowerment and victimization. My research method uses the cyborg character to illustrate that these two terms are not opposites, but connected in an intricate weave. This weave between power and powerless materializes through the cyborg’s gender performance, the representation of her body, and context of the mise-en-scene. In addition, I argue that with social and technological shifts, the dynamic between empowered gender performance and victimized performance changes.

Specifically, this research complicates the notion of objectification. Laura Mulvey’s argument presupposes that ‘object’ indicates passive and repressed while ‘subject’ indicates active and powerful. Women are passive because they are framed as spectacles or objects. The foundation of Mulvey’s theory of the gaze presupposes that objectivity must be a passive position. The cyborg does not totally disrupt this filmic code, but it does present an active spectacle. The cyborg reveals that object and subject are false distinctions. Object or body is the basis of the subject; embracing that leads toward new experiences and ontology.

While I remain more reserved then Haraway’s utopianism, I do take up Haraway’s challenge to reject the describing all women as victims by closely analyzing these cyborgs’ performed and programmed gender. This research
contributes to previous feminist analysis, but it also critiques feminist discourses that maintain the opposition between empowered and victimized. Instead, both positive and negative trends come into focus through the cyborg as a lens thereby creating a two dimensional perspective of gender performance.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

This study uses the character of the cyborg, as invoked in Science Fiction film, to understand representations of identity, focusing on gender, from a perspective that is embedded in both culture and materials. The Humanist subject, an autonomous rational mind, has been the dominant ontology of Western society since the Enlightenment. This subject, however, does not account for the complex network of cultural, political, and material forces co-constituting identity. The cyborg deconstructs the dichotomies that define the Humanist subject, such as subject and object, real and fantasy, technology and culture. The cyborg character invalidates the Universalism of Descartes’ subject because it does not fit into strict dichotomies separating object and subject.

However, as society transitions from a Modernist, to Postmodern and beyond, cyborg fantasies reflect differences in ideology and values. Technology, media, as well as concepts of identity, are in a period of transformation. As diverse media, distinct genre, and unique cultures circumfuse in contemporary media, once natural and defined categories of identity coalesce. Without clear distinction of what constitutes identity categories like gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and what represents the Other, once stable hierarchies of identity and subjectivity are leveled.
These social changes can be tracked on the bodies of cyborg images. Reading the cyborg’s body, scholars use this subject to interpret the relationship between identities and technology. They have investigated how the cyborg subject develops as the technology and mechanics change. In addition, cyborg figures represent radical subject positions since the Enlightenment. Because the cyborg integrates bodies and machines, fantasies of sexuality and gender are also projected onto the cyborg body. This opens a second line of questions that feminist have posed such as, what does the cyborg’s gender and sexuality performance reveal about gender roles in society. In this research, I will contribute to this discourse by elaborating on the relationship between the film technology and the cyborg identities produced in that medium. In the pages that follow, I interpret cyborg figures from both a film studies perspective as well as cyborg theory position. From this analysis, I illuminate locations where both perspectives do not fully represent the consequences of the cyborg’s identity. By incorporating two theoretical positions, I illuminate new depth of these characters and their significance in film and feminist discourse. Before venturing further into this analysis, I will define how I will use three key terms: technology, cyborg, and gender.

**Definition of Terms**
Technology, in this research, is to be understood as more than a tool or mechanical instrument, but as a cultural artifact or work of art intended for practical or industrial use. Following the precedent set by other media theorist, technology in this study includes not only tools, but also the network of materials and institutions connected and co-creating industrial, communication, or science artifacts. The term technology, as it is most often used today, evokes images of tools, industry, specialized tasks, communication systems, and mechanical devices. Although all of these things are technologies, they do not encompass the full significance of the word. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the original usage of the word as, “A discourse or treatise on an art or arts; the scientific study of the practical or industrial arts” (OED).

Technology is not just an object but an object attached to political, economic, and social networks. Hence, when writing about film technology, I am referencing not only the camera, celluloid reel, computers, or sound equipment, but also, the conventions dictating the use of the tools and the network of people required to make the tools function. I adopt this use of the word technology after Mediologist, Regis Debray’s use of the work *Mediology*. He defines the area of study for Mediology when he writes, “Our interest, then, does not concern an object nor an area of the real (e.g., the media), but the relationship between these objects or these areas. Between an ideality and a materiality, a thought and a machine, a plan and a device” (1). Likewise,
my interest in film technology focuses not on the material object alone, but on how the object connects to a network of discourses.

Although Chapter 1 defines and historicizes the figure, establishing the basic definition of the cyborg here creates context for the rest of the introduction. I define the cyborg as a figure of imagination and a living being whose body is composed of both organic and in-organic, often technological, components. For this study, I focus on cyborgs as characters of imaginations. As fixtures of our imagination, I understand the cyborg embodies human’s relationship with technology. Since the enlightenment through to now, the cyborg figure embodies the cultural, material, and economic tensions that characterize a society’s relationship with technology. This definition is meaningful because it highlights the cyborg’s most often theorized cultural significance: conflated dialectical opposites. Object/subject, real/fantasy, physical/metaphysical, no longer opposing each other, rather these opposites collapse. Framing the cyborg as the embodiment of human/technological relationships allows me to use the cyborg’s body as a point of entry to identify the connections between identity and technology.

A third focal point of this study, I refer to gender as a performance of learned and deeply entrenched social and cultural norms, rather than a biologically determined category. While the cyborg represents our relationship with technology, it also
conflates technology with gendered bodies. The mechanical integration does not sterilize or de-sexualize these characters. Rather, the opposite is most often evident; they represent exaggerated gendered stereotypes. Although gender is often discursively associated with nature and naturalness, for the purposes of this paper, gender is an identity category that develops through discourse and remains relatively stable through discipline and reinforcement. I ground this use of the word gender in Michel Foucault’s argument in *History of Sexuality Volume I* that the sexuality is a discursive construction. I also base this definition on Judith Butler’s argument in *Gender Trouble* that gender is naturalized by "the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them” (140).

**Defining the Subject**

I read thee unique cyborg figures as embodiments for our relationship with technology, as well as performances of gender and sexual fantasies. Maria, Rachel, and Kusanagi, from Fritz Lang’s 1927 *Metropolis*, Ridley Scott’s 1982 *Blade Runner*, and Mamoru Oshii’s 1995 anime film *Ghost in the Shell*, respectively, are the names of the three characters at the center of this study. Cultural imaginations play out on the
bodies of these figures, which are alike in some ways, dissimilar in many others. These characters are fantasies of technology and of sexuality.

Although there are other cyborgs in film that could have been included in this study, these three mirror each other in popularity, fantasy cities, and visual themes. All of them have been financially lucrative. Although *Blade Runner* did not achieve success until a decade after its initial release, *Metropolis* continues to fascinate audiences after almost 100 years. AFI includes *Blade Runner* on its top 100 films in 100 years and top 10 Science Fiction films. *Ghost in the Shell* received several awards at the time of its release and is considered a groundbreaking use of computer and digital imaging to create a rich fantasy world. The large quantity of scholarly attention, volumes in the cases of *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*, also indicates these films’ significance in cinematic history.

All three films construct similar urban spaces, marked by exaggerated class disparity. The films open with similar establishing shots over the cities souring towers and gradually introduce the viewer to the urban decay on the ground. This economic gap is so great that the wealthy are physically separated in souring towers from the poor inhabiting the dirty crowded streets. Effects of urban decay and industrialization appear in every scene. All of the spaces on the street level are congested yet richly
detailed. This stands in stark comparison to the expansive, open, and clean penthouses of the wealthy.

These three films also represent similar cyborgs: all young, beautiful, strong, and dangerous. The cyborgs display similar, highly sexualized, gender roles. They are all sexually explicit, proficient seductresses, often shown undressed, to reveal idealize female bodies. These characters are all also deceptive. They confuse the difference between human and non-human, subject and object. This confusion is a productive space to discuss changing fantasies of sexuality and technology and performances of gender that play across boundaries.

In terms of film technology, history and visual genre, however, they differ significantly. They cover filmic technology from its early application to ground breaking uses of new media. Modernist, Postmodern as well as post-postmodern cultural shifts appear in these three films. In visual genre, *Metropolis* is a early, yet stereotypical science fiction, *Blade Runner* is a unique hybrid of film noir and dystopic science fiction, and *Ghost in the Shell* represents the specific sub-genre of anime *Mecha*. This variety presenting an opportunity to compare the changes in film technology and the image of the cyborg. These characters are not new to scholarly research. Rather, two primary scholars lay the groundwork for theoretical interpretation of the gendered cyborg, as well as women’s role in cinema.
Theoretical Grounding

The foundational texts for this study are Laura Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* and Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*. Laura Mulvey’s feminist critique argues that film privileges heterosexual male viewers by positing male characters as active subjects while women are positioned as passive objects. Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* argues that cyborg subjectivity, which works to break down the binaries between subject and object, is potentially empowering because it breaks down dialectics. This is empowering because it allows for more variety and multiplicity than a dialectic construct. If Haraway’s argument is correct, it should follow that the cyborg likewise collapses the binary between the male subject and the female object identified by Mulvey. When we look at the popular cyborgs in film, however, they appear to contradict Haraway’s utopic vision. They continue to be objectified, passive and submissive to male desire. They do not stand for radical feminine independence or empowerment. Why then, are cyborgs representing conservative gender roles that privilege male desire and objectify women? If the cyborg is empowering, why are the men active while the women often passively accept their attention?

Although the cyborgs in film do not immediately resonate with Haraway’s description of radical feminism, I identify situations where these characters do disrupt
the conservative codes representing women in film. I argue this based on and analysis that uses the cyborg as a heuristic to view cinema as an artifact co-constituted by culture and technology, imagination and reality. Using this cyborg lens creates a multifaceted perspective to interpret cinema as a composite of society and the technology.

While I remain more reserved then Haraway’s utopianism, I do take up Haraway’s challenge to reject the describing all women as victims, thereby complicating Mulvey’s argument, by closely analyzing these cyborgs’ performed and programmed gender. A complex understanding of the subject does not allow the cyborg, male or female, to fit into static binary Mulvey sets up as the basis of her theory. Instead, this analysis looks at empowering and victimizing trends as related terms, not opposites. Because the cyborg is characterized by a collapsed binary, it is an ideal heuristic to demonstrate how gender is performed across and through binaries. In this research, I identify exact scenes where the cyborgs disrupt binary constructions of gender described by Mulvey.

**Preview of Analysis**

I develop this argument in the following four chapters. In the first chapter, I review the history of the cyborg and established literature following Haraway’s model
of cyborg feminism. In this chapter, I discuss a range of texts in order to present a nuanced definition of the cyborg. This also demonstrates how feminist and media theorists have used the cyborg as a theoretical lens to interpret technology as an element of culture. In addition, the cyborg reveals how identity as culturally embedded. I adopt this cyborgian position for interpretation in the proceeding three chapters.

Each of the three next analytic chapters focuses on a single film and a specific period in film history, in order to describe how the cyborg conflates a specific binary once considered natural and oppositional. Chapter 2 analyzes Maria from Fritz Lang’s 1927 film Metropolis. This film is situated at the climax of the silent film era, a time shortly after narrative cinema and the continuity system became the established code for filmmaking. In my analysis of this first film, I establish how the cyborg conflates the difference between subject and object in film language. Chapter 3 analyzes Ridley Scotts’s 1982 Blade Runner. This postmodern cyberpunk was produced at a turning point in film production. Shot exclusively in camera, it is one of the last Science Fiction films that does not utilize computer graphics or digital film. Building on the argument of Chapter 2, I posit that not only are subject and object indiscernible in this film, but that fantasy and reality also loose clear boundaries. In the final chapter, I analyze Mamoru Oshii’s 1995 anime film Ghost in the Shell. This feature-length
anime represents a turning point in film history toward a new model of film toward New Media production. Film is no longer produced from analogue recording. Rather, it is a composite of digital images and computer animation. Further deconstructing binaries, this film represents a moment in film technology and cyborg subjectivity where physical and metaphysical collapse.

Mirroring the nature of my subject matter, the argument developed a hybrid form in the following pages. I draw on fictional, scientific and academic descriptions to illustrate the interconnection between our imaginations and lived experience. This form reflects the cyborg body is a hybrid mix of flesh and machine, fiction and reality, and, culture and science. By intertwining the cyborg models of differing discourses, I compile a description that is multidimensional and rich with semiotic associations.

The form of this thesis also mirrors its subject by frequently weaving between real and fantasy, object and metaphor. The cyborg is both an object of reality and a figure of imagination. Its hybrid body serves to blur the distinction between reality and fiction, object and imagination. Likewise, I will also alternate between grounded discussion of media artifacts and abstracted discussion of fantasy and illusion. I have adopted this writing style after the precedent set by other theorist of cyborg ontology. Most significant of these is Haraway who introduces her Manifesto as an “ironic political myth” (1). She builds her argument on irony -- the ability to say two contrary
things simultaneously. When she writes, “Irony is about humour and serious play” it is clear to the reader that, although her Manifesto contains radical political implications, she utilizes serious, as well as, the playful arguments. Other feminist and media theorist employ similar playful, metaphorical, and ironic methods, notably, Sadie Plant, Anne Balsamo, Scott Bukatman, and Allucquere Rosanne Stone. Cyborg theorist blur the distinction between fictional, academic and scientific discourses is also evident in various academic anthologies that include works of fiction. David Bell and Barbara Kennedy’s *The Cybercultures Reader*, David Trend’s *Reading Digital Culture*, and Chris Hables Gray’s *The Cyborg Handbook*, all three of which contain seminal essays on cyborgs and cyberculture, devote a substantial section to works of cyberpunk and science fiction short stories. Forms of argument that utilize serious as well as word play and metaphor are not unique to cyborg studies, Marshall McLuhan is a notable example in Media Theory. However, this form is uniquely suited method of analysis to represent the hybrid meaning imbibed by the cyborg metaphor.
Chapter 2. History of Cyborg Subjectivity and Subject

The cyborg’s long rich history in literature and science, which this chapter expands on, represents the cultural significance of the cyborg’s body as a specific figure which revealing identity as unstable and unknowable. The following literature review is composed of three parts. In this chapter, I will first review the history of the cyborg. I start this history with Frankenstein’s Monster and move forward through cyberpunk and Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*. In this history, I outline characteristics that define the cyborg and connect the diverse array of cyborg subjects. Also through this history, I historicize the cyborg by discussing the significance of embodiment relationship between culture and technology. Throughout the history of the cyborg, I outline locations where the cyborg disrupts once solid binaries. In the second section of this chapter, I review contemporary feminist and cultural theory literature that analyzes cyborg subjects. In this section, I review feminist discourse that appropriates and critiques of Haraway’s utopic cyborg woman. I focus on how the cyborg is used as a heuristic of cultural and feminist studies. Finally, I parallel these cyborg discourses with major Media Studies scholars who look at media in a culturally and materially embedded way. These parallels provide precedence for using the cyborg as a heuristic to research film and New Media.
Narrative of Cyborg History

They cyborg’s history reveal diverse figures and transverses fiction and science, yet these characters display a similar opposition to static binaries, notable the mind/body separation. The Cartesian subject, the dominant ontological model since the Enlightenment, is a central concept to understand the source of the cyborg’s power and threat. This concept is central to the cyborg’s definition because the cyborg’s subjectivity is defined by its body. This opposes the Cartesian mind body dualism. The Cartesian subject is characterized by the mind body dialectic where the mind subordinates the role of the body to near insignificance. After inductively reasoning what defines humanity, Rene’ Descartes concludes, “Cogito ergo sum” or “I think therefore I am”. The cogito, the autonomous mind that defines the man, has become the dominant ontology through and after the Enlightenment. It posits the abstract over the physical and the content over form.

The cyborg confuses this because its subjectivity is composed not only of “I” but also of ‘it’, i.e. technology. It represents subject positions in the fringes of society dominated by Cartesian logic. Nick Mansfield, in his ontological genealogy Subjectivity, explains the significance of the Cartesian subject

“That the key to knowledge was to be found in a formulation about the word ‘I’ shows the beginning of a new understanding of the human place in the world… Consciousness has been identified with the controllable,
knowable, daylight functions that Descartes finds at the end of his list: intellect and reason” (14-15).

The identity of the cyborg is inseparable from its body and its tools. Contrasting the autonomous cogito, its body and material context define the subject. The genealogy of cyborgs below highlights the significant locations where the mind/body dualism breaks down.

Frankenstein

Prefiguring the postmodern cyborg subject, Mary Shelley’s Monster represents the most basic characteristic of a cyborg: man made creation that compounds human and non-human parts. Shelley’s famous Romantic narrative critiques unbridled Modernist progress. Dr. Frankenstein’s creation is the result of a technophile’s unchecked fervor. The creation is beyond Victor Frankenstein’s ability to control. Unlike the monster in films, Shelley’s monster is articulate, intelligent, and empathetic. Although he demonstrates humane attributes, the monster elicits fear, hatred, and dread from all humans he encounters. Displaying human affects and born by nonhuman process, Nina Lykke argues that Dr. Frankenstein’s creation is feared because of his hybrid body in-between human and nonhuman. She writes, “The mixture of human and non-human dimensions is what constitutes the monster’s monstrosity.” (Lykke, The Gendered Cyborg 76) Lykke attributes the dread of the monster to Bruno Latour’s
description of “modernity as a process of purification…With overzealous perseverance
the moderns try to made sure that any monster or hybrid that threatens to transgress the
border is reclassified and ascribed to either the human or the non-human sphere” (76).
The monster, like the cyborg, cannot be clearly classified as either organic or
inorganic. This instigates fear in modernist human society based on clearly defined
boundries. In response at least for the monster, the human creator must hunt and
destroy the creature. Like later cyborgs, the monster is part human and part non-
human.

In this modernist instance, that confusion is the source of anxiety and fear.
Humanity ultimately proves superior and annihilates the creature or machine. Although
the word cyborg is not coined for another century, the Dr. Frankenstein and the
monster become the prototypical Mad Scientist and out-of-control invention. Since
then, science fiction literature and film have appropriated and adopted these figures.
When the cyborg eventually appears, however, the scientists are no longer mad and the
invention is no longer a nightmarish fantasy. The next significant step that we will
follow in the cyborg’s evolution will plant us in material reality.

**Cybernetics**

In 1960, the cyborg character reemerged, no longer the product of a mad
scientist; instead, Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. Kline were scientists specializing in
the hybrid discipline Cybernetics. The scientists who first coined the word highlighted
the second component of the cyborg’s highlight that the figure typically reaches for
possibilities beyond the natural human body. When the word cyborg was first coined,
the machine-human subject, was a hybrid body like Shelly’s monster. Unlike Shelley’s
narrative, the cyborg is not a critique of progress, but a manifestation of the great
success possible through scientific progress. Unlike Frankenstein, the creators
received this cyborg with eager anticipation as a soon to be realized emblem of
scientific and technological exploration. Katherine Hayles describes this
interdisciplinary science:

“Cybernetics was born when nineteenth-century control theory joined with
the nascent theory of information… Cybernetics signaled that three
powerful actors – information, control, and communication – were now
operating jointly to bring about an unprecedented synthesis of the organic
and the mechanical” (Hayles, 8).

This origin is significant because its emphasis is on regulation and control. This cyborg
was not, in the eyes of its inventors, a threat to humanity on the loose. Instead, the
cyborg was a regulated system based on controlled logic that integrated technological
advancements order to improve human existence.
According to Clynes and Kline, a cyborg is a hypothetical space-ready human based on established biological, chemical, and technical knowledge. They posit the definition:

“For the exogenously extended organizational complex functioning as an integrated homeostatic system unconsciously, we propose the term ‘cyborg.’ The cyborg deliberately incorporates exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments. (27)

Clynes and Kline conceived a cyborg that is a possibility for lived reality. Clynes and Kline’s cyborg presupposes two things: one, that humans possess an innate drive for experience beyond those possible through our bodies alone and two that that drive is productive and positive. Decades after first proposing the cyborg, Clynes maintains the importance of the possibilities “the cyborg concept helps man overcome the limitations of his earthly birth and adapt himself to space by using the accumulated experience of mankind plus his own courage and inner drive” (8). In this context, the cyborg subject is a lived experience combining human and technology in order to achieve experiences impossible with our organic human bodies. Clynes and Kline clearly imagined they cyborg as an invention to improve human experience, body, and further knowledge. The cyborg represents human ambition to extend life and human
capabilities. In the case of the cybernetic cyborg, those developments are positive and desirable. After emerging in the realm of material reality, the next stage of cyborg history recedes once more into the discourse of fantasy.

**William Gibson and Cyberpunk**

Building on the previous two criteria, cyberpunk writer William Gibson contemplates the darker side of the cyborg as a subject that invalidates the distinction between body and mind dualism as well as the difference between subject and object. In 1984, William Gibson released, in the cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*, a new model of the cyborg subject into the world. Gibson constructs a futuristic world, dialect and identity. He bases these predictions on emerging computational and Internet advances, which he coins Cyberspace. In this world, everyone is more or less cyborgian. The main character, Case, is a hacker, a cowboy of cyberspace, with enhanced neurology. His love interest and bodyguard, Molly, is a street samurai in black skintight garb, reflective glasses implanted, and retractable razor blade fingernails. Mark Derby, in his analysis of cybertulture, *Escape Velocity*, asserts, “William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, the urtext of cyberpunk, can be read as a lengthy meditation on the mind-body split in cybertulture” (Derby, 248). In this mind-body split, Derby argues the flesh is static and controlled while the machines are lively, wired, and prospering. In the end, Derby
points out that, “it is the machines who command their won destinies in the truest sense” (252).

In Gibson’s world, identity and subjectivity are not bound to a body, instead the physical body is a location on which the characters mold and display identity. Case considers his body merely ‘meat’ because, as David Tomes, points out “information is a new form of blood in this post-industrial cyborg world” (131). The body is just a first draft on which the characters construct their identities through morphing and cyborgian adaptations. “Cyborg technophiles define themselves, their activities and their relations with others in tandem to the cutting edges of information and biotechnology” (Tomas, 134). In extreme cases, the body is superfluous: a person’s consciousness can be downloaded, stored, and retrieved for future use, while the body dies. As Gibson imagines them, the cyborg’s physicality is insubstantial to the person’s identity and consciousness.

Gibson’s cyberspace ignited the imaginations of other writers with in the sub-genre of cyberpunk including Neal Stephenson, Bruce Sterling, Pat Cadigan, Rudy Rucker, and John Shirley (The Cyberpunk Project). Like other cyborg predecessors, Gibson incorporated human and machine to make new experiences possible, but Gibson’s cyberpunk narrative contemplates the effect of these advancements to human life and the body. In this dark fantasy, technology is ultimately dominant. Returning to
scientifically based arguments, the dominance of technology over organic flesh is augmented in the next step in the cyborg’s development.

**New Cyborg Sciences**

Just as Clynes and Kline focused on advancing human experience, Professor of Robotics at Carnegie Mellon, Hans Moravec, suggests a cyborg, like the machine-mind in Neuromancer, that is completely post human. This highlights another element of the cyborg taxonomy: the cyborg promotes advancements to technology as well as humans. In 1988 publication *Mind Children: the Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*, Moravec predicts that machines will soon achieve and potentially surpass human capacity for intellect and reasoning. He foresees; “As your original brain faded away with age, the computer would smoothly assume the lost functions. Ultimately your brain would die, and your mind would find itself entirely in the computer” (Leithauser, 1). Moravec imagines a transition from body bound human existence toward a cleaner, more efficient consciousness free of the messy, vulnerable, mortal body. This would be a form of subjectivity that is integrated into computer medium and completely free of flesh. Moravec argues society is already on the road leading toward the technologically determine future he describes.

All of the cyborg discourses create a tension between human and technology, historically trending toward greater technological power while humans move toward
obsolescence. In Frankenstein, the monster is a threat but humanity eventually prevails. Clynes and Kline completely control the technology to better human experience. After this, the power dynamic shifts in favor of the technology. In Necromancer, the characters and plot are in constant flux between human life and cybernetic progress. In the end, the humans appear subordinate while the technologies prevail. Developing technologies dominance further, Moravec predicts a future where computers and robotics will render the human body obsolete. He writes, “Our DNA will find itself out of a job, having lost the evolutionary race to a new kind of competition” (2). This 1988 cyborg model, built from extensive scientific knowledge and technological expertise, advances the technology toward the ultimate end of disregarding the body.

Countering the shift toward technological determinacy, literature proliferated arguing not only that Moravec’s disembodied subject is not desirable, but also that it is not plausible to separate consciousness and body, information and medium. Notable among these arguments are Katherine Halyes’ *How we became Post Human* which focuses on the cybernetic discourses and Rosi Braidotti’s *Metamorphoses: Toward a Materialist Theory of Becoming* which focuses on feminist and media theory. Cyborgology moved toward a new theory of cyborg subjectivity that does need to destroy the technology (Frankenstein) or disparage the body (Gibson and Moravec).
The physical and informational co-constitute each other and in doing must be understood in tandem. While the previous stages in cyborg development traveled from fantasy to reality and back again, this next step in the cyborgs history will straddle that distinction with one foot firmly on each side.

**Donna Haraway**

Less then a decade after Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Moravec’s technological deterministic prediction called into question the viability of the body in the cyber age, Donna Haraway uses the cyborg as a rhetorical devise to reassert the body into the center of cybernetic discourse. The objective of her polemic introduces technology within feminist discourse. Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction" (149). The blurred distinction between subject and object opposes technological determinism and feminist essentialism. Rather, the cyborg requires us to re-think concepts of subjectivity and identity. Identity, in Haraway’s polemic, is no longer an autonomous, cogito, but is in a co-constituting relationship with technology and society. By integrating the role of machines and culture, we accept that identity is always in flux with shifting culture and technologies.
The organic body and technology network are in a tense yet symbiotic relationship, but not a relationship of absolute dominance and submission. Haraway writes, “My imploded story insists on the inextricable weave of the organic, technical, textual, mythic, economic, and political threads that make up the flesh of the world” (Cyborg Handbook, xii). Haraway intertwines reality, fiction, science, technology, culture and nature in her construction of the subject. By doing so, she implicates all of those elements in the complex weave that constitute individual identity.

Haraway loaded the word ‘cyborg’ with political significance and introduced the concept into feminist and cultural studies discourse in her landmark "Cyborg Manifesto". By positing identity in a symbiotic relationship with technology, she asserts that the breakdown of conservative dualisms can be used for polemic advantage for women. There she posits, "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools" (181). Anne Balsamo, in her book Technologies of the Gendered Body, asserts that cyborgs are inherently disruptive to patriarchal structures because,

"cyborg bodies are definitionally transgressive of a dominant culture order, not so much because of their ‘constructed’ nature, but rather because of the indeterminacy of their hybrid design. The cyborg provides a framework for studying gender identity as it is technologically crafted
It is powerful because it disrupts stories about our bodies and our identity. Haraway posits that the cyborg requires a re-imagining our concept of subjectivity that rejects Cartesian concepts of the superior ‘cogito’ and essentialist feminist who assume all technology restrict the power and freedoms of the ‘natural’ subject. 

Haraway’s cyborg is a useful heuristic interpret the connections between technology and gender embodied in the subjects. Many scholars have used to imbue the cyborg with positive political power. "So my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (154). The progressive people Haraway points to have responded to her call to adopt the myth of the cyborg. Zoe Sofoulis, a former student of Haraway, surveys the significance to conclude, “A Manifesto for Cyborg, which behaved more like a seismic center of an earthquake that jolted many out of their categorical certainties as it shifted the terrain of debate about culture and identity in the late 20th century” (365).

By studying cyborgs and cyborgian systems, we investigate the relationship between our politics, culture, and technics. The cyborg weaves together technology and culture, as imbricated factors constructing to our identity and subjectivity in a
useful way to interpret how different cultures connect these factors. Specifically within feminist discourse, adopting this subject as the focal point to study identity implies rejecting essentialist concept of identity as stable or natural. In addition, it implies accepting that identity, society, and technology co-constitute each other and as such exists always in a constant state of transition. Specifically for this research, the cyborg metaphor allows us to study film as both technological apparatus and cultural artifact. Since the publication of “Cyborg Manifesto”, sociologists, anthropologist, and feminists studies adopted the cyborg as a popular figure to analyze contemporary culture and society.

**Cyborgian Feminism**

The previous research reviewed below is significant in this thesis for three reasons. First, all of the diverging histories of the cyborg share one aspect: The cyborg’s form - objects, flesh or technology - determine the subject’s identity. The distinction between subject and object becomes negligible. Second, it illustrates how previous research employs the cyborg as a figure to analyze the symbiotic relationship between technology, culture and identity. Third, it illustrates locations where cyborg represents conservative gender roles and where she represent a disruption to traditional gender roles, as Haraway would look for.
Haraway leads us to using the cyborg as a tool or a method for analysis of the relationship between material history and society/identity. Since Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto", the study of what has become known as cyborg anthropology prospered across disciplines. These theorists have developed Haraway's hypothesis that the cyborg is a polemically useful metaphor. These scholars focus on how the cyborg, by combining fantasy and reality, reveals unique relationships with technology. These studies re-conceive the subject as unstable and inextricable from discussion of material history and the human body. Feminists use the cyborg as a theoretical model to interpret representations of gender, make conclusions about idealized or radical women. Many continue to imagine a form of technological utopia for female empowerment. Others complicate this vision by identifying ways conservative gender roles are re-inscribed on to the cyborg body. Likewise, I will argue that a cyborgian method is useful for film studies because it conflates the binaries of medium/message and reality/fiction. Instead of interpreting the cyborg on the screen alone, this research incorporates a historically, technologically and materially imbedded perspective.

The parallels cyborg theorist draw between social and material history conceive of subjectivity and identity as constructed and fluid. Claudia Springer examines cyborg characters as gendered and sexual beings across media to conclude, “I argue that popular culture plays out contemporary cultural conflicts over sexuality and
gender roles in its representation of cyborgs” (10). Likewise, Anna Balsamo offers a definition of the cyborg based on its status in between conceptual binaries of mind over matter:

"hybrid entities that are neither wholly technological nor completely organic, which means the cyborg has the potential not only to disrupt persistent dualisms that set the natural body in opposition to the technologically re-crafted body, but also to refashion our thinking about the theoretical construction of the body as both a material entity and a discursive process" (11).

The story of the cyborg is not of an autonomous ‘hero,’ rather it is imbricated in the social and material context. Therefore, changes in the cyborg reflect changes in material culture. Haraway argues that the cyborg is oppositional to traditional narratives of the body as the site of 'natural' human existence.

Even as a character in fantasy, the cyborg hyperbolically represents real relationships between humans and our machines. The fears and fantasies of the cyborg’s creator are woven through the cyborg's enhanced body. As our fears and desires change, we evolve our cyborgs to represent new social realities. Christian Metz's posits; "Myths are always true, even if indirectly and by hidden ways, for the
good reason that they are invented by the natives themselves, searching for a parable of their own fate" (Metz, 90). The myth of the cyborg is no different.

Although the cyborg is a myth, it reflects the assumptions, desires, fears and real social anxieties of the context from which it emerges. Anne Balsamo and Jenifer Gonzalez perform transhistorical case studies of cyborg subject. These essays illustrate changes in cyborg identity in tandem with material and technological changes. Anne Balsamo looks at new technologies and VR to interpret how gender distinctions are re-inscribed into new technologies. She also looks for places where the hybrid body creates locations of potential confrontation with older conventions. "Cyborgs bodies, then, cannot be conceived as belonging wholly to either culture or nature; they are neither wholly technological nor completely organic… Cyborgs are a matter of fiction and a matter of lived experience" (33). Jennifer Gonzales illustrates how with dramatic social shifts or disruptions, the cyborg subject is often utilized as a metaphor to express changes in lived experience. "When the current ontological model of human being does not fit a new paradigm… The cyborg body thus becomes the historical record of changes in human perception" (270). This metaphor is so pervasive, Gonzales goes on to assert, "The configuration of the cyborg, which changes over time, will virtually chart human encounters with a contradictory, lived experience and
continue to provide a vision of new ontological exploration" (278). Gonzales explains that, even as a figment of imagination, the cyborg is also a metaphor for social reality.

Scott Bukatman offers the neologism *Terminal Identity* to describe the new subjectivity created at the crossroads of science fiction, lived-fiction and post-modernity. Bukatman starts by positioning the cyborg as an embodiment of the crisis between technology and culture. (3) Bukatman argues that SF film and cyber punk prefigure the dominant truths and crisis of the Postmodern era. If we accept Scott Bukatman assertion when he writes "There is simply no overstating the importance of science fiction to the present cultural moment, a moment that sees itself as science fiction" (6) then investigating SF technology and representation of technological bodies will have implications for cyborg's lived reality as well as social fictions.

These theorists are not technological determinist. Rather, they connect a co-constituting relationship between human agency and material history. Emphasizing the close mutual relationship between humans and our technologies, Koen Vermeir investigates the cyborg’s hidden origin story starting before the Enlightenment. He calls this a time when “fiction and reality… symbolic expression and practical action were inseparable” (232). Through this new history, Vermeir calls for a return to conceptualizing technology as an artefact as well as a tool: “Technology is not an alien inhuman force; it is part of ourselves and we are part of it. This is one sense in which
we are all cyborgs. Technology transforms us, but we also make and transform technology” (242). For this research, Vermeir’s re-imagining technology as a cultural, even artistic, artifact is significant because it portrays implies technology and culture have never been separate. Rather, the cyborg merely reveals a close connection between fantasy and reality that has always existed.

Although a fantasy, an imagined future, cyborgs transform and adapt with social contexts and material artifacts, notably technological ones. In 1997, biogenetic researcher, Charles Laughlin, refocuses the plethora of cyborg applications to save the word from definitions so broad as to be meaningless. The definition Laughlin argues for is a phenomenology of cyborg consciousness where the integration of human and technics is so complete that the distinction between tool and consciousness is indistinguishable and replaced by a new phenomenological experience not possible before. (152). Central to his definition, human and technics must be in a symbiotic or co-existing relationship so that new experiences are created that affect human consciousness or physical composition. Using the cyborg as a lens, these theorists reveal that nature, technological, subject, object are interconnected and co-constituting concepts.

A second major theme found in cyborg discourses following Haraway, the model of the cyborg locates body and flesh of the subject as a site of identity
construction. These descriptions argue that the cyborg complicates what we understand to be a body or medium. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* traces concepts of disembodied subjectivity in cybernetic, science fiction, and medical discourses. She argues that Moravec's, along with generations of writers and scientist, arguments in support of disembodied consciousness is completely infeasible. She explains,

"The point is not only that abstracting information from a material base is an imaginary act but also, and more fundamentally, that conceiving of information as a thing separate from the medium instantiating it is a prior imaginary act that constructs a holistic phenomenon as an information/matter duality" (13).

Although Hayles argues that separation of information/medium and mind/body is impossible, sees some advantage in the cyborg as a postmodern subject that incorporates information and technics into our concepts of self. In the introduction to their *Cyborg Handbook*, Chris Gray, Steven Mentor, and Heidi Figueroa-Sarriera stress the importance of cyborg studies because, "Cyborgs remind us that we are always embodied, but that the ways we are embodied aren't simple" (7). After sharing moments when Allucquere Rosanne Stone fell in love with techno-bodies, she remains grounded in the body as the location for phenomenological experience. In "Will the
Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures", Stone writes, "No matter how virtual the subject may become, there is always a body attached… Historically, body technology and community constitute eachother" (Stone, 451).

While Braidotti does not focus specifically on the cyborg subject, in *Metamorphoses: Toward a Materialist Theory of Becoming* she argues the subject is a product of material bodies and culture. She weaves between the theories of Irigaray and Deleuze to explore possibilities of being in the flesh while embracing technology to "reinvent ourselves and display some creativity" (257). Anne Balsamo takes a Foucaultian approach to the study of Biotechnologies in "Technologies of the Gendered Body".

While celebrating the possibilities made possible through technological advances, she as no illusions of disembodiment. Rather, she maintains, "Just as women never speak, write, or act outside of their bodies, cyborgs never leave the meat behind" (40). These scholars all argue the body is the site of identity. Bodies, material, and technologies, then co-constitute our identities as cyborg subjects.

Although many support Haraway’s Manifesto, several writers counter Haraway’s utopic vision. Instead, several scholars have identified how the cyborg has been an image of the subjugated, not the radically liberated. Anne Balsamo argues that technology can be re-inscribed with politics of domination and perpetuate hierarchies. Likewise, Claudia Springer posits the thesis of her book *Electronic Eros*, “I argue that
the newer electronic technologies have inspired changes in techno-erotic imagery in some popular-culture texts but that other texts recycle techno-erotic conventions derived from Western society’s industrial past” (8). Focusing on race in cyberspace, Cameron Bailey in the Trend “Reading Digital Culture” points out the numerous ways in which “cyberspace is a racialized domain, this sort of virtual transvestism is by no means neutral” (344). Reflecting these theorists’ argument, the cyborg characters I focus on in this thesis are not utopic visions or free of the objectifying force of established codes of narrative cinema. In the framing and the narrative, these cyborgs maintain conservative fantasies of feminine sexuality that privilege male pleasure.

**Parallel discourses**

The cyborg figure reflects larger trends in the 20th century including the return to form as the basis of meaning. For this research, the most notable in theorist is media theorist Marshal McLuhan. The cyborg, by conflating technology and subjectivity, is a location of overlap between discourses of embodiment and McLuhan’s argument that the medium is the message. McLuhan’s argument parallels the cyborg subject whose body defines its identity. Like the feminist who argue material form and bodies co-constitute identity, McLuhan argues the form of the medium structures content. For example, Hayles and Braidotti argue that the subject and identity can never be understood or separated from the body. Likewise, McLuhan compares the medium of
information to the organizing power of material products, “cotton and oil, like radio
and TV, become ‘fixed charges’ on the entire psychic life of the community”
(Understanding Media, 21). Just as cotton organized the work and by extension the
culture of the American South, McLuhan argues the medium producing film structures
the content. These arguments share a similar objective: to redefine the subject, gender,
or information, as materially and context dependent. Both in material feminism and
media studies, scholars argue that methodology must focus on the material form to
begin understanding the content produced.

An important location of dissonance between McLuhan and many of the
feminist I have outlines is that McLuhan promotes technological determinacy. The
cyborg scholars promote a concept of technology in a symbiotic or co-constituting
relationship with human agency. In contrast, McLuhan demotes humans to extensions
of technological progress: “Physiologically, man in the normal use of technology is
perpetually modified by it and in turn finds ever new ways of modifying his
technology. Man becomes, as it were, the sex organs of the machine world” (The
Medium is the Message, 46). Cyber-punk fictions reflect a similar technological
determinacy and often construct worlds and narratives where human culture fades
under the over-abundance of technological logic.
Unlike McLuhan’s technological determinacy, Regis Debray is useful for this study because he defines media and technology as artifacts of culture co-constituted in network of political, economic, and cultural institutions. He looks for the connection between media and the network of social and cultural establishments attached to the object. The goal of this method is to eventually,

“Proceed by abandoning the ancestral oppositions which direct what we write like a remote-control: original/copy, potential/actual, internal/external, underlying substance/phenomenon, spiritual/material. These antiquated tandems reproduce themselves over and over again in other more techno forms: real/virtual; support/code; signal/message” (33).

The volumes of cyborg theory reviewed previously demonstrate that the cyborg embodies Debray’s methodology. The oppositions Debray seeks to disregard are the same oppositions the cyborg deconstructs. These figures conflate the binaries Debray calls ‘antiquated tandems’. Hence, the cyborg heuristic I adopt, parallels Debray’s Mediology.

These parallels are significant in this research because, I argue the ‘body’ of the cyborg in film parallels the cinema: they are both constituted by the medium of film, as well as the imaginations of the film’s creators, culture, politics and economic contexts. Using the cyborg as a case study to study cinema allows me to intertwine discussions
of the material reality of our media and the rhetorical impact of the fantasy presented through film. Marshal McLuhan connotes this fact in his ironic statement: "The movie is not only a supreme expression of mechanism, but paradoxically it offers as product the most magical of consumer commodities, namely dreams" (Understanding Media, 291). By focusing on the material form of film media specifically, this study will look beyond the messages on the screen to the technological form organizing the film. I will look specifically at how, as the medium of film shifts from analogue to digital, the content, specifically the representation of the cyborg, changes in kind. In the analysis that follows, film, cyborgs, reality, and fantasy combine, creating a multidimensional perspective of the cyborg as a significant artifact of film and a fantasy of gender.
Chapter 3. Metropolis

At the height of the silent film era, cinema emerged as a new artistic and creative force. Filmmakers began to explore the medium's potential as the fifth art form. Although film theorists and makers in the late 1920's sought to justify film as a discrete art form, several theorists began to analyze film as more; film was now a form of language. Sergei Eisenstein asked: "Why then should cinema in its forms follow theater and painting rather than the methodology of language, which gives rise, through the combination of concrete descriptions and concrete objects to quite new ideas?" (60) Similarly, André Bazin later asserted, "The film-maker is no longer the competitor of the painter and the playwright; he is, at last, the equal of the novelist" (40). The conventions of classical cinema, primarily narrative and character-driven feature films, structure the fundamental vocabulary for filmmakers. A variety of characteristics constitutes film language, but paramount among these is the concept of concealed artifice: the ability to hide the mechanical means of production, i.e. the camera and direction. "Hollywood's style effaced the techniques of making film… It was a cinema of concealed artifice. Rather than a display of the apparatus and art of filmmaking, the standard was the story and what was lifelike, or verisimilar" (Bordwell, 109). Although the conventions of narrative filmmaking became the basic
grammar of film language, I identify locations of divergence from Hollywood's established conventions when representing a truly divergent character – the cyborg, an embodiment of technological and sexual fantasy. This essay explores the disruptive potential of the cyborg character in Fritz Lang's 1927 film \textit{Metropolis}, one of the earliest and most famous cyborg films. Parallel to the cyborg's destructive influence on the city of \textit{Metropolis}, the following analysis will explore the disruptive potential of the cyborg version of protagonist Maria to the language of film.

\textbf{Film Synopsis}

Fritz Lang's 1927 film \textit{Metropolis} was produced at the climax of the silent film era, a time in which the conventions of classical cinema were becoming cemented into the cinematic language. \textit{Metropolis} was internationally regarded as a landmark in its time, due in part to the scale of production and striking visual landscapes. The film has continued to attract viewers throughout the last 80 years with its rich mise-en-scene and phantasmal narrative of technological spaces and bodies. The film opens with kaleidoscopic establishing shots of the city's façade and unfolds into industrial depths, eventually revealing a mechanical underworld where the human workers seem as automatonic as the machines that propel the techno-city. The viewer discovers that these impressive skyscrapers and idyllic gardens conceal the city's mechanical substructure where men are used as exchangeable parts.
John Frederson (Alfred Abel) is the visionary patriarch who created and controls the fictive city of Metropolis. Commanding complete control over the city and its citizens, he enslaved all of the lower-class men in order to maintain the city, while an elite upper class of people enjoy the city’s splendor. From bourgeoisie in heavenly gardens to workers enslaved in mechanical factories, the characters ruling and maintaining the city are all male. While the men in the city appear in every scene and inhabit every level of the city, most of the women residents of Metropolis remain unseen for the greater majority of the film, only to emerge from the city’s lower levels towards the film’s conclusion. Women do not appear to have any role in maintaining or governing the city. In the Celestial Gardens, richly adorned women serve as entertainment and playmates for the city’s elite, including Metropolis’s protagonist, Freder (Gustav Fröhlich). Common women remain largely hidden in the film, but the film suggests that they reside in the city’s lower level to remain in the home with children. The only lead female character, Maria (Brigitte Helm), is a priestess residing underneath the city in dark catacombs. From her home far beneath the souring towers of Metropolis, Maria preaches peace, passivity, and virtue to the city’s spiritually helpless proletariat class. Maria, as a human protagonist, supports the patriarchal system, but when the mad scientist, Rotwang (Rudolf Klein-Rogge), deploys her cyborg-double into the city, the machine-woman version of Maria is suffused with
power that appears to exceed the patriarchal system. In this city, where the patriarchal social structure subjects women and machines alike, a woman and machine combined creates a lethal potential for the destruction to the social as well as the mechanical system.

**Gendered Cyborgs in Film**

The cyborg seamlessly integrates the machine and the woman so that the boundary between machine and human, organic and cybernetic becomes blurred beyond recognition. Donna Haraway not only describes cyborg subjectivity, like Maria, but also famously advocates for it as a liberating force for women. Like Haraway's theory, Maria's cyborg double is indistinguishable from the human Maria: the workers who she preaches to and the bourgeois at the nightclub become helplessly seduced by the human-ness of the cyborg. Even the protagonist, Freder, who has fallen in love with her is completely deceived. The cyborg of *Metropolis* is often more human and fleshy while the human Maria appears frigid and stiff. The deceptively human quality of the cyborg Maria illustrates one of Haraway’s central theses: the cyborg disrupts static boundaries of natural and constructed. Haraway bases her argument on the confused difference between human and machine. She posits, "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools" (181). Similarly, the cyborg can suggest a way out
of the maze of dualisms in which classical cinema has represented sexual difference in film. Fritz Lang’s film represents the destructive potential of one such hybrid body to his fictional city. The following analysis explores the disruptive potential of the cyborg version of Maria to a patriarchal and mechanical system outside of the city of Metropolis: to film itself.

To explore the cyborg Maria's affect on film language, I will contrast how sexual difference is discursively constructed through cinematic language in two sets of scenes while Maria is a human and while Maria is a cyborg. Through a close reading, shot-by-shot analysis, and focusing on the visual elements as opposed to the narrative elements, I take up the objective Laura Mulvey describes: "It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged" (67). By breaking down the individual shots and contrasting these scenes, I identify how cinema's codes function in these scenes, locate places where divergence occurs, and expose a potential disruption of cinema's established code of sexual difference. Based on this analysis, I argue that while Metropolis conforms to the conventional representations of gender in the human scenes, the hybrid body of the cyborg does not conform to the conventional boundaries of sexual difference and creates a disruptive fissure in the conventions of narrative cinema. I show how the codes of sexual difference are established while
Maria is a human, how the cyborg subject disrupts these codes, and finally how the disruption to the filmic code disrupts the filmic language, concealed artifice and the experience of the spectator.

**Sexual Difference and Film language**

Like the mechanical city of *Metropolis,* classical cinema is a mechanical system which embodies, for the vast majority, male vision and desire and maintains a strict binary between masculine and feminine roles. The language of film, through convention, developed patriarchal structures of sexual difference. Feminist film theorists have described the sexist conventions utilized in film in a variety of ways including the two significant contributions to this body of work are Laura Mulvey’s theory of the gaze and the system of suture as explained by Kaja Silverman.

Mulvey uses a psychoanalytic framework in order to argue that film is a product of male fantasies and desire where masculine subjectivity dominates and women are passive and objectified. The male gaze controls the narrative flow, the movement of the camera and, by extension, the gaze of the viewer. Conventions of sexual difference in film language represent women as objects of three related gazes: the masculine character gazes at the woman within the screen, the camera focuses on the body of the actress, and the audience members gaze at her as an object of desire and the focus of spectacle. Mulvey writes, "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture
as a signifier for the male other, bound by the symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions... tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (15). Mulvey’s interpretation of the gaze reveals how gender roles in film are ossified into dialectics of active males and passive females where the active male possesses the gaze and the passive female is its object.

Building on Mulvey's theory and Daniel Dayan’s concept of suturing, Silverman examines how suturing, which maintains concealed artifice, structures representations of gender differences. The system of suture explores the way in which the language of film speaks and the spectator's experience of being spoken, or sutured, into the film. Inferring an absence in each shot that anticipates a future shot and retains a previous one creates a sense of suturing. "The cut guarantees that both the preceding and the subsequent shots will function as structuring absences to the present shot. These absences make possible a signifying ensemble; convert one shot into a signifier of the next one, and the signified of the preceding one" (205). Film language manufactures a sense of completeness through suturing where shots alternate between actively viewing subject and passive viewed object. This convention reinforces gender differences when the active subject is a man gazing and the object of his gaze is a passive women. Alternating subject and object shots hide the means of production by passing the signified off as a signifier with whom audience members identify.
Silverman explains, "the viewer is encouraged to establish a relationship not with those apparatuses themselves, but with their fictional representations – i.e. that the viewer's real relation to the cinema is concealed by an imaginary one" (216). Film’s mechanical means of production are concealed when the male character, the active gazer, becomes the character the audience identifies with and the signifier of the film who looks at signified objects -- often objectified women.

Although the phalocentric systems of gazing and suture described by Laura Mulvey and Kaja Silverman can be consistently identified throughout the classical period of film and remain relevant in cinema today, these theories can be disrupted by cyborg subjectivity. Because hybrid composition of the cyborg body confuses once defined boundaries, cyborgs in film disrupt the binary codes of sexual difference that conceal the means of production. How is a hybrid character like the cyborg Maria in Metropolis represented in the strict binary of sexual difference? What side of the binary would a cyborg conform? To begin discussing these questions, I will first review how four film theorists, whose research has focused on Maria's character and sexuality within Metropolis, interpret Maria's gender and her role in the binary system of sexual difference.

Previous research of Metropolis has typically discussed the dialectical tension between old and new, technological and organic, science and magic symbolized
throughout *Metropolis* and embodied in the cyborg Maria, but have interpreted Maria’s
gender into static binary. Ludmilla Jordanova argues that Maria, whose femininity can
be both nurturing and destructive, metonymically represents both the good and bad
potential of science, knowledge, machines and sorcery. In this analysis, Maria is either
a good, organic mother or bad, mechanical mother, but always feminine. From a
psychoanalytic approach, R. L. Rutsky explains that castrated bodies like the human
Maria and the workers are without desire and the castrated genitalia like the cyborg
Maria and Rotwang represent pure desire and libido (226). This interpretation assigns
different types of castration to the human and cyborg Maria but they are both
incomplete in some way: one void of desire, the other unrestricted desire. In Andreas
Huysssen's analysis of *Metropolis*, the fear of both women and machines as others in the
phalocentric system of signification, condensed into the figure of the vamp cyborg.

Huysssen unwaveringly interprets cyborg Maria into the feminine role. According to
Huysssen, the cyborg obeys all the norms of feminine subjects in classical cinema. She
is interpreted as passive, controlled by male gazes, objectified, and fragmented in the
way classical cinema are typically portrays women characters.

Jordanova, Rutsky, and Huysssen's analyses of *Metropolis* contain a
contradiction between the destructive effect of the hybrid Maria as a subject in the
narrative and her relegation to benign feminine objectivity within the conventions of
classical cinema. Roger Dadoun's analysis diverges from the above theorists by suggesting that the cyborg is not represented as exclusively feminine or masculine but a hybrid hyper-sexualized integration of both genders. He argues that she is not fully a woman and not fully a man: "The robot is in part the phallus, a mobile, inner core. But it is also – the second aspect of the construct known as the False Maria – the primordial maternal skin… the hot, protective envelope, swollen by the heat, engorged" (143).

The cyborg represents integration of subjects who have entered the symbolic order and others who remain outside the symbolic order and remain partially in the imaginary. Cyborg Maria symbolically represents congruent discourse of subjects and others in the form of embodied-copulation: a destructive and powerful cyborg is based on the integration of phallic and maternal metaphors to discursively construct a radical new subject. Dadoun's description of the cyborg is not simply integration of subjects and others but an interplay, a powerful but unstable coupling of dialectically opposed gender differences.

Roger Dadoun applies this analysis to the subject's access or denial to the system of signification and Maria's role in the film's narrative. He attributes Maria’s destructive influence on the citizens of Metropolis - rich and poor, male and female - to the hybrid subjectivity represented in the cyborg body. I extend this argument by describing how the hybrid subject ruptures conventional codes of language of film.
This point of rupture is significant because, with a rupture in film language, the hybrid subject threatens the dominance of narrative and offers alternative ways of viewing that privilege spectacle. Both the fictive city of *Metropolis* and the physical film (recording and editing techniques, the film reel, and projector) *Metropolis* are technological systems that have been structured and controlled by phalocentric norms. As a character in the narrative, cyborg Maria is highly disruptive to the patriarchal techno-city. As a subject to cinematic signification, film theorists typically analyzed the cyborg as passively conforming to the conventions of sexual difference. To the contrary, I will identify parallels between the disruptive presence of the hybrid body in the narrative and her effect on conventions of narrative cinema.

**Media and Feminist Frameworks**

In order to discuss the cyborg's effect on cinematic norms, I focus on the importance of visual spectacle in film, apart from narrative. Although narrative and visuals have co-constituted film language, cinema is essentially a visual language and conventionally a narrative art form. Supporting this distinction, Tom Gunning’s re-visions early cinematic history in “Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde” theorizes early cinema as an art form devoted to pleasure in new ways of viewing made possible through film technology. Gunning explains, “cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and
supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself” (384). For Gunning, visual spectacle was the primary motivation for making and viewing early cinema. Narrative film later superseded cinemas of attractions, yet pleasure in spectacle was recoded in a variety of ways. Scott Bukatman, in his essay “Spectacle, Attractions and Visual Pleasure” draws parallels between Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure” and Gunning’s “Cinema of Attractions” when he identifies the woman, an erotic spectacle, as one location where attractions have been recoded in narrative cinema.

"If Mulvey pointed to the something else in the film text, Gunning suggests that it was there from the outset: cinematic spectacle preceded and subtended the emergence of a stable (and stabilizing) set of narrative structures… If Gunning will argue that attractions will continue to exist within narrative cinema in a 'tamed' form, then Mulvey provides a gloss on how in the case of the spectacular attraction of female sexuality, that taming has occurred." (79)

Both Gunning and Mulvey describe a tension between spectacle and narrative where narrative dominates or controls spectacle. According to Gunning, narrative tames or conceals attractions. (387). Mulvey describes spectacle as a threat that must be punished or ascribed guilt by the narrative (64). Because narrative cinema structures
film language, the taming and punishing of spectacle can be identified, in part, through the codes of film language. By identifying scenes where spectacle temporarily takes precedence, I locate places where the spectacle disrupts narrative and, by extension, the conventions of film language. This distinction between spectacle and narrative is central to my argument because, while it is clear from the narrative of *Metropolis* that hybrid bodies disrupt social structures based on strict dichotomies, I show how the cyborg creates a spectacle that threatens the dominance of narrative and film language that represents women as passive objects.

In order to focus on the role of spectacle in *Metropolis*, I focus specifically on the visual elements of the mise-en-scene, montage, and the relationship between shots that work to create meaning. I focus this analysis on how the gaze and suture are employed in two sets of corresponding scenes while Maria is a human and while she is a cyborg. The first sets of scenes take place in identical settings: the chapel in the catacombs where Maria delivers sermons to the workers of *Metropolis*. The second set of scenes corresponds to each other thematically. Both of these scenes represent the woman's role as pure spectacle for the masculine gaze. In the first, the predatory light of a hidden aggressor overtakes the human Maria. In the second, the cyborg Maria performs an erotic dance in a nightclub. I look specifically at whose point-of-view each shot is from, the relationship between these shots, and whose perspective the
audience adopts. By analyzing individual shots and their relationship to interlocking shots, I compare how the film represents different forms of subjectivity. From there, I begin describing the relationship the viewer has with the film and how the spectator's experience changes. Isolating visual forms of film discourses, I explore the cyborg's effect on the phalocentric system of film apart from Maria's role as destructive cyborg in the city of *Metropolis*. Based on this analysis, I argue that Maria's disruptive power is not limited to the technological system of the city, but rather it is an analogy of the cyborg’s power to disrupt the conventions of sexual difference as represented in the technological system of film. The hybrid body circumvents phalocentric codes of narrative cinema, freeing the spectacle - the cyborg - from the taming force of narrative and reveals the voyeuristic position of the spectator.

**Human vs. Cyborg – The sermon**

In the first set of human and cyborg scenes, the differences between point of view and shot-reverse shot illustrate how these basic elements of film language are deployed differently when Maria is a human compared to the scenes of her cyborg-double. Both scenes are set in the underground chapel and repeatedly use shot reverse-shots and point of view shots. The shot reverse-shot is central to the system of Suture as a vital place where "the subject of the speech passes itself off as the speaking subject" (Silverman, 204). In Mulvey's theory of masculine gazes, shot reverse shots
establish who is controlling the triple gaze between the characters, camera, and audience. These techniques also define the object of the gaze, the spectacle who "connotes to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 62). By comparing how these shots are deployed, I identify which characters control the gaze of the camera and describe how they employ the power they wield over the camera’s gaze.

The Human Code

Looking down on human Maria and Freder, a long high angle shot from the Mad Scientist Rotwang's point of view establishes the scene in the catacombs. His presence is undisclosed to the couple he watches while the audience is aware of his voyeuristic intrusion. The audience enters this scene initially through the eyes of a clandestine male voyeur. This shot from Rotwang's point of view establishes not only the setting of the scene, but also the male voyeur's power and control over the gaze of the camera and the audience.

After this initial shot, the camera cuts to Freder on bended knee as he slowly looks up. When Freder sees Maria turned away (from him and the camera), he calls to her. Freder's call initiates a series of fifteen consecutive shot reverse-shots during which the object of his gaze responds to his call. As if caught in a tractor beam, Maria turns, walks to face him, and descends to his location. In this series of shots, Maria
starts in a long shot on right and gradually moves to the center, to medium shots, closer and closer into an extreme close while she leans to kiss Freder.

This scene represents prototypical codes of gender difference in cinema. We see that the male subject controls the camera, the female character, and the audience. The scene launches from the perspective of the hidden male voyeur, and Freder's gaze initiates the series of shot reverse-shots. Freder's gaze controls the camera as it unwaveringly alternates between Freder and Maria, the object of his desire. His gaze controls the body of Maria who responds by moving, slow and steady, to meet his gaze and descend to his location. Consistent shot reverse-shots cue the audience to identify with Freder and accept his desire as their own. Maria submits to his call by walking closer and closer to him as the camera cuts into a close up on her face. Reiterations of the shot reverse-shots suture the spectator into the film in the position of the active controlling gazer. As the object of the gaze is drawn closer and closer, the scene collapses into an intimate moment between two lovers- all the while their spectators are enveloped into the moment.

The Cyborg code

When we compare this scene to one with Maria after her cyborg transformation as she delivers a sermon to the workers, we find that the gaze of the camera, the gaze men in the film, and the position of the audience are drastically different. The first
difference is in the establishing shot. Like the human scene discussed above, this scene has a long shot from an identical camera position. This time the shot does not correspond to the gaze of the voyeur, Rotwang. The establishing shot of this cyborg scene is not associated with any point of view. Rather, the camera moves to this perspective without motivation from a character's look. A second difference is that Maria's gaze is active and assertive. Maria controls the camera's gaze: as she turns her head to look left or right, the camera responds by following her gaze. She also captivates the homogenous mass of male workers. Maria moves freely and almost erratically around an elevated platform. At the same time, she has captivated and locked in place the gaze and bodies of the male spectators. As she intensifies her performance, the men lean in closer and crane their necks as she reaches her arms out to them. Again, we see the use of the shot reverse shots but with a very different quality. The cyborg Maria is the directing source of this set of shot reverse-shots. The object of her gaze is not singular: we never make contact with an individual character but rather the cyborg's gaze faces a mass of identical men who move and act in unison. The reverse, toward Maria, looks up while enmeshed within the crowd.

This scene utilizes many of the same techniques as the first - identical long establishing shot, consistent use of shot reverse-shots and point of views - but the application is drastically different. First, the cyborg woman controls camera with an
active gaze, but the cyborg's gaze is not toward a single objectified subject but rather
toward a mass of identical men. The second difference is the active gazing cyborg is
still a spectacle. She possesses the "to-be-looked-at-ness" that Mulvey describes but
she has power in her spectacle to control the minds and bodies of the workers. In the
human scene, the male gaze controlled Maria's body. In the cyborg scene, Maria is a
feminine spectacle to be looked at, but she is not controlled. Rather, she controls her
spectators.

The Spectator's Experience

The camera is the literal perspective that controls the gaze in cinema, but
identification with an active viewing subject in the film, who in turn gazes at another
object or spectacle, conceals the audience's real relationship to the technological
apparatus. According to the conventions classical cinema, concealed artifice is
paramount. Identification with active men who gaze at women as the source of visual
pleasure conceals the original gaze of the camera. The cyborg's sermon scene confuses
the audience's identification and suturing to the film. There is no male character to
identify with, only a mass of de-individualized viewers. Maria controls the gaze, the
camera, and the men who watch her but she is still a spectacle for visual pleasure and
conscious of her "to-be-looked-at-ness." The cyborg subject does not destroy the gaze
or experience of suturing, but this scene confuses how these techniques are employed
and with them confuses the conventions of sexual difference. In the scene with the human Maria, the role of the active and controlling spectator and passive controlled spectacle are conventional. The cyborg scene reverses the role of the spectator and spectacle. The male spectators are passive and controlled while the spectacle is active and controlling. The narrative progresses in this scene, but the presence of narrative flow does not punish or control the spectacle. The viewer can identify with the mass of men in the audience or with the powerful spectacle being watched. Either potential identification ruptures the illusion of being sutured. In this scene, as with others, the visual form flirts dangerously close to destroying the illusion of a hermetically sealed world for our pleasure, forcing us to identify ourselves as either one of many in the audience or a controlling spectacle.

**Human vs. Cyborg – The spectacle**

Spectacle and attractions potentially threaten the dominance of narrative, but conventions of sexual difference in film language mitigate the power of spectacle in film. Women, as erotic spectacle, represents a lack or void, but also the captivating power of spectacle with the potential to disrupt the narrative because it "exists outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone" (Mulvey, 64). Narrative film cast women, the spectacle, as passive recipients of the man's gaze. Mulvey identifies two primary cinematic conventions that obviate the disruptive and absorbing
potential of the spectacle: first denying the spectacle the gaze and second, by visually
dismembering her body into compartmentalized zones of erotic pleasure. The second
set of scenes discussed both exemplify woman as spectacle for visual pleasure.
However, the cyborg scene, once again, has a disruptive, this time almost violent,
effect on the characters, the camera, and the audience.

**The Human Code**

After Maria and Freder part ways, Maria remains alone in the catacombs. She
carries a single candle to illuminate the scene while Rotwang lurks unseen in the dark.
He first frightens her by making a noise. Rotwang, the perspective of the camera,
continues surreptitiously following her until we see a hand reach down and squelch the
flame of her candle. For the remainder of the scene, a rigid beam of light pursues,
overtakes, and controls Maria's body. The camera does not fully reveal the Mad
Scientist as the source of the beam of light until the last shot. Maria becomes the
spectacle dominated by the control of the male gaze. The male gaze is not represented
through shot-reverse shots, but pierces into the scene as a unyielding beam of light,
which visually rapes her body.

This scene exemplifies erotic spectacle and the codes that tame the spectacle:
lingering gaze, deferred plot, male control of the gaze, and fragmenting the spectacle.
The narrative of the film does not progress during this scene; rather, it remains
transfixed on Maria’s body for visual pleasure through the violent gaze. For the
duration of this scene, with only two brief exceptions, the camera represents the mad
scientist’s point of view. The light that he controls moves up and down Maria's body,
fragmenting her body as it isolates on one part, then another. The direction of his light
does violence to Maria and eventually traps her. Rotwang wields exclusive control of
the camera, forcing the audience to identify with him. The spectator can only see the
scene from the perspective of the film's antagonist who drags our gaze with his as he
visually violates the feminine protagonist.

**The Cyborg code**

The final scene that I will analyze opens onto a group of men in tuxedos milling
about a nightclub while they await the erotic performance of the cyborg Maria. Their
attention draws toward the stage as an ornate urn emerges, opens, and releases the
almost naked cyborg Maria. As she begins dancing, the alternating shots between
Maria and the spectators accelerate and climax at a dizzying speed. As the scene
progresses the shots of the men grow closer and closer to their faces until they become
a swirling collage of eyes. In contrast, Maria appears either in full body shots or in an
extreme close up as she stares directly into the camera.
This scene is similar in two ways to the scene when Rowtang's light pursues Maria in the catacombs. First, we do not see any shots from Maria's point of view. The shots of men are from the side or collaged into a mesh of faces and eyes, but we never see the men from Maria's perspective. Second, Maria is a spectacle for the visual pleasure and male fantasy. The significant difference is the effect of the spectacle on the viewing men. In the first scene, the gaze does violence and contorts Maria's body. In the second scene, Maria's spectacle does violence to the men. The men deconstruct into fragmented eyes and faces. Typically, films assuage feminine erotic spectacle by fragmenting the woman's body, but the cyborg has an opposite affect. The men are fragmented while the spectacle remains whole. More than that: she stares directly at us.

**Spectator's Experience**

The three rapid shots where Maria looks directly into the camera are brief yet significant because they threaten to disrupt film’s established codes. Conventions of narrative cinema preserve concealed artifice by avoiding an actor’s direct gaze into the camera thereby acknowledging the camera’s presence. Women especially do not look directly at the audience without the assurance that a male character on the other side is catching her gaze. We do not have this assurance in this scene. The men have been turned into a kaleidoscope of desperate eyes and the angle and proximity does not relate to the position of the men who are below her at a distance. Earlier I noted that
Maria does not have a gaze in this scene because we never see from her perspective. When the cyborg Maria looks directly into the camera, and by extension, directly at the viewer, the shots suggest that the object of Maria’s gaze may not be the spectators in the film’s nightclub. Could the spectator watching the film be the object of the cyborg’s gazes? Are we the recipients of the cyborg’s gaze? This analysis suggests, based on the direct gazes into the camera that Maria, by acknowledging the camera’s presence, also calls attention to the spectators in the theater.

These shots are brief but result in a momentary feeling that Maria sees her viewers watching her. The cyborg spectacle looking into the camera disrupts the spectator’s sense of safety as an innocent, unseen viewer in a dark room. These shots destroy the illusion Mulevey describes as a source of the spectator’s cinematic pleasure:

"hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of
screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world." (Mulvey, 60).

Mulvey's description of spectators in a theater is very similar to Rotwang's role as hidden spectator in the catacombs while Maria is a human. His gaze from the dark establishes from afar the love scene between Maria and Freder. He hides and projects a light upon Maria's body for his voyeuristic erotic pleasure. Spectators of film, like Rotwang in the cave hiding from above or projecting a penetrating light, desire to observe as long as they (we) remain concealed from the gaze of the spectacle. The cyborg spectacle does not ignore the clandestine viewer but acknowledges the spectator. The spectacle cannot see us, but by looking into the camera and into the place of the audience, the spectacle disrupts our suturing into film and calls attention to the constructedness of film. The purpose of suturing is to create an illusion in which identification with an active subject conceals our relationship to the technological apparatus. The cyborg's look disrupts the security of suture's illusions and makes us aware of our role as spectators.

Maria is a spectacle with power. During both of the scenes discussed in this section, Maria is the spectacle yet her performance in the cyborg scene is unique and disruptive because it endangers the preservation of concealed artifice and the dominance of masculine vision. The cyborg is a spectacle and avoids punishment or
taming by the narrative. This scene, like others in cinema, reinforce Kaja Silverman’s assertion that spectacle is not synonymous with subjection.

"The identification of the female subject with specularity and the male subject with vision does not necessarily assure the latter a dominant position. The construction of woman-as-fetish carries with it certain dangers for male subjectivity. Not only does that construction facilitate the detachment of the female image from narrative control, but it can challenge the very assumption upon which the existing symbolic order depends – the assumption, that is, that woman is castrated or lacking."

(229)

The hybridity of this character, conforming to neither feminine nor masculine codes of film language, ruptures the fourth wall and recognizes film as a spectacle with spectators. The attractions that Gunning describes are momentarily dominant from behind the veil of narrative. Gunning posits; "In fact the cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground " (57). The cyborg disrupts the language of narrative cinema, briefly giving precedence to spectacle and changing the viewer’s position from voyeur to spectator. She acknowledges the spectators, and by extension accepts her role, and power, as the spectacle.
Conclusion

The film *Metropolis* first sets the standard of sexual difference, then visually speaks the cyborg as an oppositional and destructive force. The human and cyborg scenes share many of the same qualities, but with the cyborg, techniques common to narrative film are appropriated in a way that disrupts the conventions of film language to maintain concealed artifice. Narrative cinema has structured strict dichotomies of sexual difference into the grammar of film language. The cyborg does not conform exclusively to one side of the dichotomy, but blurs once defined boundaries. Because the cyborg does not fit into the binary code of film language, this hybrid character creates a fissure in film's grammatical structure and its codes of sexual difference.

Gunning and Mulvey argue that narrative cinema tames and punishes spectacle, but the cyborg circumvents the dominance of narrative, disrupts conventions of film language, and flaunts the captivating power of spectacle. The cyborg is not tamed by the codes of narrative cinema that maintain concealed artifice. Instead, the cyborg subject exposes herself as a spectacle, captivates the viewer, and connects with the spectator, formerly concealed in a voyeuristic position in a darkened theater.

The changing role of the spectator is analogous to Maria's different spectators in the film. In the scene in the catacombs, the human Maria is a spectacle but a helpless one under the control of a beam of light. She is controlled by a hidden force and observed for the pleasure of the voyeur. Similarly, narrative film creates a sealed
world that moviegoers peer in on, with the aid of a projection of light on the screen. The viewer remains in the dark; the spectacle remains contained in a sealed world unaware of the presence of an observer. This is drastically different from the cyborg spectacle. The cyborg commands not only their attention but also their bodies and eyes. While preaching to the proletariat or dancing for the elite gentlemen, Maria's spectacle locks the men in place and into one unified and almost identical mass. While preaching in the catacombs, the cyborgian Maria controls the bodies and eyes of the men while she moves freely. Likewise, as the dance scene intensifies, the men are reduced to eyes swirling around Maria – a powerful spectacle indeed. In this scene, the spectacle controls the spectators. This is analogous to the captivating power of cinema, which commands an audience, locked in their seats, their eyes captured by the spectacle on the screen.

The power of this spectacle suggests that Mulvey’s theory inaccurately presupposes that objectivity must be passive and powerless. The cyborg’s subjectivity is determined, not by abstract concepts, but by the materials and object that constitute her body. Identity, then, is not depended on subjectivity, but also on the body and objects of culture. By embracing her objectivity, Maria embraces a form of subjectivity that opposes the body/mind dualism. She no longer conforms to the gendered code of narrative cinema that Haraway describes. The cyborg rises above
through her objectivity, not despite it.

I must conclude by admitting that the narrative eventually catches up with the cyborg Maria. The narrative ascribes to the cyborg the guilt of destroying everything ‘good’ and ‘Christian’. *Metropolis* citizens call her a witch and the harlot from the Book of Revelations, and they finally burn her at the stake. Through a psychoanalytic framework, we understand that this is an obvious acknowledgement of her power and threat. The Machine-Woman within the narrative is so disruptive to the patriarchal social structure that she must be destroyed before she destroys *Metropolis* and all its inhabitants. The cyborg Maria, as a subject of film language, is likewise disruptive to the conventions of classical cinema that maintain phalocentric representations of sexual difference. Despite the punishing force of the narrative, this analysis argues that the confused boundaries represented in the cyborg's hybrid body threatens to disrupt the hermetically sealed world of narrative film and expose a constructed attraction for visual pleasure. By recognizing where the divergence occurs, I have sought in this analysis to identify alternatives to narrative film language to explore the effect hybrid subjects have on the experience of viewing film. I have argued that cyborg Maria's filmic representation does not fit into strict binaries of male and female, human and machine, and that the confusion of sexual difference affects the experience of spectators. The cyborg reveals film's construction and the power of untamed
spectacle. Maria the cyborg, a sexually and materially hybrid creature, disrupts the voyeuristic position of the viewer and places him or her as a spectator subject to the gravitational attraction of cinema and spectacle.
Chapter 4. Blade Runner

*Man Has Made His Match... Now It's His Problem*

Half a century after the release of *Metropolis*, Ridley Scott’s 1982 cult classic *Blade Runner* mirrored Lang’s cityscape as a setting to project the fears and fetishes of contemporary society. Ridley Scott adapted Lang’s spiraling towers and kaleidoscopic opening establishing shots, to create his vision of Los Angeles in the year 2019. The tagline cited above introduces the problem at the heart of *Blade Runner*. Scott imagines a future where the Promethean desire to empower through invention reigns freely. While seeking to empower humankind, the inventors Dr. Tyrell (Joe Turkel) and J.F. Sebastian (William Sanderson) replicate genuine humans with such genius, they risk making humankind obsolete. Through technology, man creates his Doppelganger. Now, the inventor must face his double, a perfected reflection of man and the threat attached to the perfect replication. When humans create their perfect match, the difference between original and replication become indistinguishable. Like in *Metropolis*, the cyborg double destabilize the social order. For this, they must be destroyed. Also like *Metropolis*, the cyborgs irresistibly attract their spectators, both those in and viewing the film. They function as a mirror, a perfected reflection, of humanity. Through their reflection and their struggles, they raise the central question of
the film: what does it mean to be human? I will describe the performed gender and sexuality of the main characters to reveal how these represent long familiar conservative stereotypes. That is not the end of the description. With close examination, I argue that the cyborgs, as doppelgangers, mirror human subjectivity, including gender, but in a way that is uncanny. It is familiar and long known, but somehow different and possibly threatening.

**Plot Synopsis**

The film introduces Los Angeles in 2019 from high above the city as it lights up with skyscrapers twinkling like dark stars and capped with fiery pillars. Later, the middle layer of the city is revealed from the vantage of a flying car. Enmeshed between the city’s towers and surrounded by twinkling lights, the viewer glides past an electric billboard beaming with the face of a beautiful woman. She stands in bright contrast to the smog-filled world around. The final layer of the city, the claustrophobic and chaotic ground level, is densely populated by the dominantly Asian lower classes. This dirty urban center reminiscent of a film-noir Chinatown introduces the film’s hero.

Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), the hero of this detective story, is a *Blade Runner*: a replicant hunter, on assignment to hunt and ‘retire’ four escaped replicants from the off-world colonies. His detective work brings him to the home of Dr. Tyrell, the inventor of the advanced Nexus-6 replicants and his beautiful niece Rachel (Sean
Young). Deckard finds himself irresistibly attracted to Rachel, even after the Voigt-Kampff test conclusively reveals she is not a human, but a replicant with implanted memories. Deckard’s hunt for the rebel replicants leads him to shoot and ‘retire’ the replicants Zora (Joanna Cassidy) and Priss (Daryl Hannah). While defending Deckard, Rachel shoots her fellow replicant Leon Kowalski (Brion James). In the closing fight scene, Deckard and Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), the strongest replicant, engage each other in a cat and mouse fight scene. Finally, Roy saves Deckard’s life just before his preprogrammed lifespan expires.

While the film establishes Deckard’s search for rouge replicants as the driving force of the film, quickly the replicant and their desire for life and ‘humanness’ captivate the audience, the narrative flow, as well as Deckard’s sympathies. With the introduction of the replicant Rachel, the film establishes the strongest feelings of compassion and confusion between replicant and human. Deckard finds himself irresistibly attracted to her, despite her non-human condition. Rachel, likewise, returns to Deckard seeking love and connection to natural humanness. Their relationship is the initial step that moves the narrative away from Deckard’s investigation and toward a tale of the replicant’s search for meaning and value in a constructed body and programmed mind.
As far as the other replicants, the plot positions them as frightful enemies but as the film progresses; even the enemies solicit the viewer’s compassion and empathy. We begin to identify with their search for life, meaning and love. Dr. Tyrell’s response to Batty’s request for more life – ‘the facts of life’ – highlights the shared experience and desire between human and replicant. Deckard’s investigation recedes to the background as the audience identifies with the non-human characters and their very human search from meaning in life and desire to extend their lives. In the final fight scene, where the role of hunter and hunted is confused, Roy Batty the replicant’s fierce leader, saves Deckard’s life as he hangs from the ledge. Batty performs the ultimate act of empathy: he saves the life of his enemy. This display of empathy is a moment of climax in the complicated subplot of the replicant’s quest to be human.

*Blade Runner*, through the plight of the replicants, questions who and what it means to be human. In the conclusion, the viewer is left with more questions then answers. Could Deckard also be a replicant? When will Rachel die? Why are the city streets so crowded while the interior spaces vacant? Why did Gaff (Edward James Olmos) go to Deckard’s apartment and why did he spare Rachel’s life? These technical and plot questions are left open as well as larger themes left for the individual movie go-er to ponder. What is more human: to be ‘natural’ or to act humane? The problem posed by the film’s tag line ‘Man has made his match… now it is his
problem’ is left unresolved. The very definition of human and the nature of identity are left in the balance. The difference between the original and the doppelganger, the creator and the created remains ambiguous. To explore how this longstanding literary model is significant, I will first discuss what the Doppelganger represents and how it is employed in Blade Runner.

Doppelganger in Postmodern Cyberpunk

The doppelganger is a literary and mythic character that doubles, in spirit or physical form, another ‘real’ or original character. Doppelganger characters appear throughout literary history. German legends holds that doppelgangers, often ghostly or spirit being, are harbingers of death and that facing one’s double is a bad omen signaling death. The doppelganger creates an uncanny reflection the human creator. In The Uncanny, Freud defines the uncanny as anything in the “class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (195). The Doppelganger frightens by forcing confrontation with long familiar yet repressed fantasy, anxiety and fear. Andrew Webber, in his book theorizing the Doppelganger in 19th century fiction argues:

“The Doppelganger, then, serves as a test case for the dialectically complicated conflict between realism and fantasy. The duplication, I will argue, points up an essential lack which must be supplemented, a lack
within the ‘real self’, and by extension within the order of the real… The realist project can be said to rely upon a repressible fantastic, a source of profound insecurity against which to gauge and assert its security; the two are dialectically interdependent” (9).

The fantastic double reflects humanity. In that reflection, the real is shown to be dialectically connected to fantasy. This moment of confronting repressed fantasy is the root of the Doppelganger’s uncanny affect and the tie that binds the real and fantasy. Dialectical conflict between real and fantasy then lead to questions of the validity of the real. This character not only reveals the repressed fears and fantasies of a collective consciousness; it forces us to question the reality of the original identity. “The Doppelganger is characteristically at once permissive and prohibitive, both a vicarious agent and a frustrating usurper of the subject’s pleasures. At the same time, its performative character undoes expectations of he knowability of identity” (Webber, 7). Doppelganger, in literature as well as film, leads us to question the original and the real.

Both the doppelganger and the cyborg are characterized by their ‘in-betweenness’: in-between dialectics of identity, gender, monster and savior, master and slave. Webber’s description of the doppelganger is congruent with Donna Haraway’s cyborg character. The focal point of her argument is, likewise, the power or fear
created in collapsed binaries. In addition, both the doppelganger and the cyborg are powerful because they resist the naturalness of identity and bodies. Joseph Francavilla draws parallels between the replicants, Batty in particular, and the literary tradition of the doppelganger. “The replicants are metaphorically and metonymically bound together with the humans and represent the return of the repressed in man, or ‘the uncanny’” (Francavilla, 14). The doppelgangers in *Blade Runner* mirror the condition of ‘natural’ humanity and in their perfection, they become threatening. “These replicants function as mirrors for people, by allowing examination and moral scrutiny of ourselves, our technology, and our treatment of other beings, and by defining in their struggle what is truly human” (Francavilla, 14). As the Doppleganger Webber defines, the replicants forces the original, the human, to be redefined. The character left un-theorized is the original human in *Blade Runner*. Where is the original ‘natural’ half of the doppelganger? The film appears to be all Mr. Hyde’s and no Dr. Jackal.

Dialectic bonds, like those between doppelgangers, are structured on the predominance of one ‘master’ party and another ‘slave’ party. It could be argued that the hero of the film, Deckard, represents natural humanity, but his ontological status, as real human or replicant, is never certain. The replicant Rachel questions him “have you ever taken the test (to identify replicants) yourself?” The film leaves the viewer without any certain sense of who may or may not be an original human. In this way,
the replicants, as Doppelgangers, call into question the possibility of original identity. The subjugated replicants carry the plot and become the focus of the film while all genuine or natural humanity fill the few supporting roles. Cyborgs embody reality and fantasy, the long familiar and the threateningly radical. These perfect replications make the original humans obsolete in the world of the film. In the text of the film, their allure captivates the attention of the viewer, no longer interested in the plight of the humans on the street. This dual ontology is possible by the juxtaposition of conservative characters against the radical and bazaar world they emerge from. They fold together the original and ghostly parts of the doppelganger. This effect is created by doubling their gender role. They represent both conservative gender roles out of 1940s and 50s film noir. At the same time, they perform radical gender roles that are insecure and in transition. They are conservative figures cut out of Ridley Scott’s future noir radical cloth. This combination of new and familiar, real and fantasy, are central to the aesthetic and plot of Science Fiction hybrid film genre.

**Terminal Genre**

Unique combinations of old and new, familiar and frightening, the very same dynamics that are played out on the body of the replicants, define science fiction film. Vivian Sobchack, in her analysis of the SF film genre *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, argues that hybridity and conflict are the primary visual
characteristics of SF because the genre inherently combines dialectically opposed constituents. The primary task of a SF filmmaker is to construct a novel fantastic world but must simultaneously create a world that is recognizable to the audience:

SF films… strive to remove us from familiar experience and perception into the realm of the unknown, but which at the same time also attempt – for the sake of narrative, meaning, and relevance – to relate their alien images to human and familiar concerns. The result is visual tension produced from two opposing impulses. (Sobchack, 108).

Scott constructs conflict between familiar and novel visuals, first, by conflating the nostalgic genre aesthetic of film noir with the futuristic plot and setting of a science fiction. Conflict between familiar and novel is also created by representing characters that directly model the nostalgic archetypes of 1940’s film noir, but who emerge from a late industrial future setting. Shrouded deeply in nostalgia, *Blade Runner*’s characters and their performed gender roles ground our expectation of the labyrinth future Scott envisioned.

*Blade Runner* is a prime example of what Roland Barthes describes as a ‘writerly’ text. For Roland Barthes, the ideal text privileges the reader as an active participant in the creative process. While readerly texts simply allow for pleasure reading, writerly texts remain open for interpretation by individual readers. Barthes
writes, “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) [which] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (S/Z, 4). Although much of the film is left unresolved, over twenty-five years of popularity attest to *Blade Runner*’s quality as a writerly text where the viewer finds pleasure, not in passively watching, but by actively and creatively interpreting. Not only is this an active participation with the text, a writerly text is personal. Each person inserts their accumulated semiotic associations into the way he or she navigates the text. "The writerly text is . . . *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages” (5). Because the film’s message is left ambiguous, the viewer projects his or her own meaning or interpretation onto the film through the lens of personal experience. Therefore, no viewing experience can ever be replicated. With each repeated return to the text, the reader, or in the case of film, viewer will make new associations and draw different conclusions. The ambiguity allow for new reading, different interpretations, in other words- audience agency and participation.

While Barthes would likely find bliss in the inchoate narrative and mystifying world deliberately cultivated by Ridley Scott, the director’s financial backing could not take the risk and transformed the film to clarify many of the details Scott leaves
opaque. Despite, or perhaps due to, these changes, critics and audiences alike received the film poorly. One seemingly prescient movie fan responded to People Magazine’s negative review: “Blade Runner will no doubt end up as a cult movie. Its one error was to present too much for the average viewer. I’m not the only one in this town who saw the movie six times and noticed new things each time. It was rich in detail and excitement and long on drama and message” (Sammon, 321). Ambiguity does not distract from the film’s quality, rather, it exponentially increases it.

**Terminal Genre and Identity**

Also attempting to describe the unique writerly quality of the film, William Fisher classifies *Blade Runner* as the original text that inspires a new genre: the Terminal Genre. This is the “multinational, commercial avant-garde…This genre takes a reckless plunge into the junk pile of contemporary material life” (187-8). Out of Scott’s pillage of material culture, we discover incongruous, eclectic reflections of our world pieced together in a way that is familiar yet foreign. In this way, the film is a maze of familiar content in an unfamiliar form that the viewer wades through. “*Blade Runner* seeks to abolish those reference points which in E.T. guide us through the labyrinth of generic experience. Terminal genre aims precisely at letting us lose our way in that labyrinth” (192). Terminal genre films, of which *Blade Runner* is the ur-text construct polysemic texts which viewers must unravel. The conservative
performance of gender and nostalgic characters, juxtaposed against the terminal text, create reference point for the viewer to navigate the film.

Fisher bases the Terminal Genre he theorizes on the Terminal Identity posited by Scott Buckatman in his book *Terminal Identity: The virtual subject in Post-Modern Science Fiction*. Bukatman offers the term "Terminal Identity" to describe the new subjectivity created at the crossroads of SF lived-fiction and post-modernity. He posits the definition as: “Terminal identity exists as the metaphorical mode of engagement with this model of imploded culture. 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.” (22) The cyborg is central to Bukatman’s thesis because it is an embodiment of the crisis between technology and culture. (3)

Bukatman argues that SF film and cyber punk prefigure the dominant truths and crisis of the Postmodern era. Conversely, the current postmodern era sees itself as a science fiction. This moment produces epitaphs like: "We live in a science fiction" and the "future is now" (6). Bukatman's analysis identifies how the social transformations of postmodernity are projected on to the very body of SF subjects. This shift affects all subjects in SF literature, but the cyborg is central to this discussion.
as a unique place to re-imagine power dynamics as organic and technological become increasingly intertwined.

Bukatman and Haraway both use the cyborg as a subject position that, through technological integration, opposes identity categories based on what is natural, primarily gender. Bukatman argues that terminal identity, the production of postmodern collapsed genres, semiotic codes, bricolage and pastiche, combines human society and the logic of technology. This leads toward a less repressed subject position where a greater variety of experiences and identities are possible. Due to the complex semiotic labyrinth of postmodern texts, the new subject “speaks with voices of repressed desire and repressed anxiety about terminal culture” (Buckatman, 329). In a similar tone of liberation, Haraway argues that cyborg subjectivity is a way out of conservative and dualistic gender roles. In the previous chapter, as I will also explore in the following chapter on Ghost in the Shell, theorist attribute differing gender roles to the cyborg character. As well, the film’s form frames her in an ambiguous way: at times, she is the active viewer at others she is spectacle, and at times, she can be both. In contrast, Blade Runner, a film that leaves the viewer to interpret more then it explains, consistently and clearly represents the gender of the characters, human and replicant, within traditional gender roles. Women are consistently framed according to cinematic standards privileging the male gaze and pleasure described by Laura
Mulvey. Given Buckatman and Haraway’s polemical aspirations for the cyborg, why are these characters so conservative? Why are the women objectified and subservient while the men are so dominant?

Gender in this film has been given little attention due, in part, to the fact that the gender roles appear traditional and static. Evidence supporting Marleen Barr’s argument can be seen in nearly every frame. She posits that through BR “the male film maker dreams of electric women, women as manufactured sex objects…The female replicants’ bodies become sexist images” (29-30). The film presents conservative gender roles, leaving little room for interpretation. While cyborg theorist would predict liberated or divergent gender performances in this film, that is not how the replicants appear on the surface. Theory and application appear to be dissonant in this case.

By looking at how the conservative gender roles resonate with the radical ambiance, I identify how gender and sexuality in this film are as radical and unstable as the cityscape and definition of human. The replicants represent both the original and the deviant dopplegenager. This is performed by contrasting the radical mise-en-scene and the conservative film noir archetypes. In this way, the characters are like conservative nostalgic garments cut out of the cloth of radical industrialization.

In the contradiction between the old and the new, the conservative and the radical, not only is the old transformed, but our imagination of what is radical bends
also. W. Russel Gray writes, “The addition of science fiction visuals and themes brings new wine to the detective genre’s old bottle, again bootlegging new energy for the detective tale” (72). I arrive at the conclusion that by performing both conservative and radical gender roles, these characters call attention to the instability of gender categories. Here they denaturalize gender into a performance instead of a definition of subjectivity and gender.

Analysis

In this analysis, I will begin by describing the filmic or literary archetype Deckard, Rachel, and Batty are modeled after. I focus on these three characters for two reasons. First, their desires or stories drive the film. Deckard’s search for the fugitive replicants, Rachel’s longing for human identity which she locates through Deckard, and Batty’s quest for ‘more life’ are the central sources of tension in film and absorb the imagination of the viewers. Second, these characters all represent ambiguous ontology: either their ‘humanness’ is called into question or they are replicants who behave and feel so human they cause us to question the definition of natural.

After describing their historical model, I will describe the settings in which they are most often located. I focus on setting and mise-en-scene because Riddly Scott, whose background is in set designer, is known for creating ‘thickly layers’ in every shot to maximize the power of the mise-en-scene. The mise-en-scene then acts to
create the characters emerging out of them. Often in *Blade Runner*, the characters appear to materialize part of the physical setting. After focusing on the mise-en-scene, I discuss the character development of each role while highlighting their performed gender.

**Deckard**

Deckard mirrors the typical hard-boiled detective and the leading man of the film noir. While comparing traditional detective fiction and *Blade Runner*, W. Russel Gray describes Deckard as, “coolly efficient, world-weary eliminator of immigrating androids.” (66) His profession has hardened him to so that he can kill without sadness or agitation. Deckard remains un-empathetic as he coldly recites to Rachel the memories that have been implanted in her mind. Even after developing a romantic relationship with a replicant, Deckard continues to hunt others of her kind. He follows leads, hunts and kills his targets, and remains outwardly unemotional. The detective archetype is apparent in Deckard’s external persona, which the viewer is initially introduced to, yet his identity in internal space is conflicted and often vulnerable.

The initial introduction of Rick Deckard establishes him as the dominant masculine detective character reminiscent of 1940’s film noir. The film introduces Rick Deckard gradually as he stands stoically on a crowded city street. The camera starts in the middle level of the city, high above the ground level but low enough
surrounded the viewer by buildings with twinkling window lights. From this high vantage point, the camera tracks back and then cuts to a high angle shot of the streets below, with neon dragon signs, crammed streets, drizzling rain and busy shops. This foggy shot cranes down and through the crowd as dozens of Asian men and women repeatedly pan across the frame. After pushing past the crowds, who continue to pan across our view, we finally see the first glimpse of Deckard. He leans on a window ledge, reading a newspaper, with a several beaming TV screens and bright pink and green neon illuminating his figure from behind. At every angle, we see screens, lights, neon and people. Although the camera centers on Deckard, passer-bys continue to obstruct our view as the pan left and right across the frame. Deckard stands calm and quiet in contrast to the hectic noisy city.

It is also significant that he is first seen in a public space. This indicates we are seeing his exterior persona who is formed primarily by the world around him. Russell Gray points out “Its disordered cityscape is a back drop for the detective’s divided, unfocused sense of self” (72). The character in the outside world maintains a stoic impenetrable face. By this gradual introduction, the mise-en scene establishes Deckard’s character as a futuristic model of the 1940’s era tough guy detective who is a product of this dystopic urbanism, yet hardened against it.
Deckard’s tough detective personal stands in stark contrast with the deeply introspective and vulnerable person represented in the interior scenes. Deckard’s home is a deeply personal interior space that represents entering the man’s most personal space and thoughts. It is possibly the darkest but location in the film. Occasionally illuminated by beams of light from outside, the apartment is cramped, disorganized and low lit. Despite its darkness, the place appears to be a warm comfortable space. His home is a nostalgic space filled with family memorabilia but no signs of a living family. The low lighting and deep shadow create the sense of entering a deeply personal interior space where much is left hidden or unknowable. This feeling of intimacy is interrupted as searchlights repeatedly intrude upon even this most private space. While the exterior shots are, for the most part, medium shots, once inside Deckard’s apartment the camera closes in tightly. This framing contributes to the sense that we the viewer are entering the very personal and emotional space of a man who appears to have few if any personal or emotional attachments.

These interior spaces, as well as the close framing, give the viewer the sense that they are moving beyond the normally cold austere front and entering the personal, vulnerable and emotional interior of this character. The contrast between Deckard’s cold exterior person while outside and the warm personal interior space creates a multi-dimensional character both tough detective and insecure subject. The mise-en scene I
described above grounds Deckard’s character as superficially a tough unaffected hunter, but who is internally vulnerable man capable of empathy. His actions reflect the contrasting mise-en-scene that frames his contradictory character.

Despite this stereotypical masculine exterior, as the film progresses Deckard’s character proves to be in some ways much less and in others, much more, then the typical film noir detective. Physically, he proved inferior. In every encounter of physical conflict, he fails. Zora escapes by distracting Deckard with her disarming and naked body. With a similarly sexually charged technique, Priss comes close to besting him in physical combat when she smothers him between her thighs. Were it not for his gun, Deckard would have died at the hands of either of these women. The replicant Leon manages to separate Deckard from his gun. Just before crushing Deckard’s eyes, Rachel rescues the ‘hero’. Deckard does not even pose a challenge to Batty, who teases him in a prolonged fight scene. Russel Gray suggests that Deckard’s fallibility adds to his ‘human’ appeal. “Ridley Scott and writers David Peoples and Hampton Fancher ‘bootlegged’ energy from science fiction to revitalize the eye genre. Deckard is not quite Marlowe. In the context of his genre his is an older, more vulnerable, and hence more credible hero” (Gray, 70).

As a character, Deckard reveals a much more introspective and empathetic then the typical one-dimensional detective. Gray asserts, “The traditional private eye
figure, though more isolated then ever before by the zeitgeist of a grimly utilitarian society, is still able to discover a wellspring of empathy and affirm a personal value code” (Gray, 74). Feelings of love and empathy evolve slowly for Deckard. In the conclusion, he performs his first act of real heroism: he flees with the ‘woman’ he loves to protect her from other Blade Runners. He cannot match them in strength, but as the film progresses Deckard’s character develops into an equally interesting and empathetic subject as the emotionally driven replicants.

Rachel

Rachel replicates the femme fatale of 1940’s film noir in her clothing, hairstyle, cool demure, and confident sexual appeal. Her performed gender is submissive at times but identifying her with the femme fatale acknowledges strength and power. I will not deny that in many ways the film objectifies Rachel yet they are also sources of power, even threaten. David Desser acknowledges Rachel’s importance by pointing to her film noir image. “She represents a movement away from his isolated self-sufficiency. This disturbs the hero…In Blade Runner the noir image of female sexuality as a weapon wielded by women is made explicit” (175) Although film noir is a male dominate genre, women are essential to the intrigue and conflict. (161).

We may say, then, that Rachel’s gender performance disarms the male, but it also disrupts the traditional model she is cast into. Deborah Jermyn points to the
writerly quality of the film to interpret Rachel as more than a misogynistic fantasy. Jermyn points to the role of the centrality of the femme fatale in 1940’s detective cinema to argue Rachel’s character is central to the film’s narrative progression.

Most importantly, Rachel is the character whose ‘humanness’ is most ambiguous, through which she represents and directly asks the central question of the film: who and what does it mean to be human. (Jermyn, 159) Scott Buckatman grounds an argument about gender in *Blade Runner* in the belief that in Science Fiction, “by positing a world that behaves differently – whether physically or socially – from this one, our world is denaturalized” (6). By projecting conservative gender roles on unnatural beings, the constructedness, or preprogrammed, source of gender is revealed. Buckatman concludes, “As synthetic humans, replicants inherently challenge essentialist notions of identity. Identity stands revealed as a construction, the result of conscious or unconscious social and physical engineering” (80). Rachel, the archetypal femme fatale and Priss the ‘basic pleasure model’ are programmed into their performed gender, reflect how our own gender performance is likewise socially constructed. Like Deckard, Rachel is framed within two contrasting settings reflecting two different settings.

Dr. Tyrell’s penthouse souring above the smoggy city, like Deckard’s apartment, reveals not only the status, but also they psychology of its inhabitants,
Rachel and Dr. Tyrell. Rachel is introduced to the viewer as she emerges from the far back of Dr. Tyrell’s cavernous penthouse apartment. We see an overly opulent spacious apartment that is angular and sterile. Soft reflected light flirts on the brown walls as a mechanical owl flies from one side of the sparsely yet finely furnished apartment to the other. The entire back of the room is open, flooding the space with evening light and overlooking a breathtaking sun settling over the city. From the lower levels of the city, smog and clouds dropping dirty rain conceal the sun and block natural light. In contrast, Tyrell’s apartment is lifted above the urban decay and chaos. This prominent figure in the hyper-industrialized world is wealthy enough to remove himself from the debris of the under world. From this height, the chaos of the city can not disturb this serene place. This is the residence designed by one of the cities most powerful men: the inventor of Replicants. The camera initially frames Rachel in medium close up, yet even in this relatively close shot, she appears distant cool, collected, and unemotional. In the next extra long shot, we watch her as she walks directly toward the camera in a tight fitting 40’s era pencil skirt, high heals, shoulder pads and bright red lipstick. In the background the same flat brown is everywhere. This dull tone is only broken by the glint shining off the overly polished floors and two gold eagle statues resembling figurines out of the apartment of a 1940’s fascist dignitary. The place appears so empty and vast, the echo of her heals on the hard floor resonates.
As her dialogue with Deckard develops, Rachel remains confident and direct. She is as rigid and unwelcoming as the space suggests, yet she stands out as seductive and alluring.

By moving from her initial home setting in the high rise to Deckard’s apartment, Rachel also transitions gradually from the cool collected femme fatal to the warm lover seeking refuge. The pull between these two very different spaces represents her search for a sense of genuine identity, humanness and love. Unlike Deckard who has a cold exterior persona and a softer emotive person while in his home setting, Rachel’s character is established in the lavish home of Tyrell, but she seeks out Deckard and returns to his home for the majority of the film. In this way, the film situates her within the home of one man or another, under their care and protection. This is also a move from a sterile rigid space to a messy yet warm place.

In the transition from one home to the other, Rachel moves from an attractive but cold and guarded replicant to learn to be a highly sexualized lover. This development occurs gradually. During her first clandestine visit, she wears a full coat with an oversized collar shielding her face, concealing her entire body, and restricting her movements. The camera frames her in extra close shot from below as a tear drops down her perfect cheek. Her second entry to Deckard’s apartment she is visibly agitated after shooting Leon, her fellow replicant. This action indicates Rachel chose
sides between her newfound identity as a replicant and the human she seeks to be. Shaking, with dark makeup bleeding below her eyes, she is clearly insecure. Rachel gradually loosens her clothing, letting her hair fall from the tight up do to curl down her shoulders. She softens and reveals her insecurities. There is an irony in this transition. While under the misconception that she is human, Rachel appears stiff and cold, almost mechanical. After discovering her mechanical ontology, she becomes warm, loving, and desires of the Deckard’s affections.

The lighting of this scene contributes to the sense that identity is unknowable and shifting. The lighting of the scenes in Deckard’s home quotes 1940’s film noir. Sharp contrast between light and dark, silhouette, and deep shadows all represent the un-knowable human character. Rachel stands in near complete darkness with little more then her profile visible, yet three times during this scene light floods in the window bleaching the entire frame white. In contrast to the harsh white spotlight, the darkness feels comforting and safe. These flashes, rather then illuminating Rachel and the apartment, blind our perspective of the drama. The flashes of harsh brilliance remind that someone else is always watching. Ridley Scott’s Los Angeles in 2019 is a world permeated by screens and cameras. At every angle, someone is watching and being watch. Deckard’s apartment represents an attempt to withdrawal from constant surveillance. Rachel comes from Tyrell’s astounding apartment overlooking the city,
but at the same time, potentially always being seen. In contrast, Deckard’s apartment shields her with darkness. While Rachel remains in shadows, back lighting illuminates Deckard’s profile during the dialogue. As this scene develops into a love scene, Rachel remains out of direct lighting while Deckard stands under or in front of bright light sources. She removes her coat and walks into direct lighting, sharing a space with Deckard. These characters are in transformation. Nothing is stable or clear. The mystery of this scene is not the typical murder case of the noir, but the mystery of what or who defines the ‘human.’ The characters themselves are mysteries.

Rachel evolves from a powerful and controlled femme fatale who is irresistibly attractive yet dangerous, to a vulnerable insecure woman seeking love and acceptance to validate her humanity. Much like Deckard who resembles the hard-boiled detective, Rachel resembles the film noir femme fatale, but she is much more than a typical noir. After this extended seduction scene, we do not see Rachel again until the film’s conclusion. She sleeps peacefully, guard down, in complete trust of Deckard. He transforms into a compassionate hero. A caretaker who, after his life has been spared, now displays empathy toward Rachel.

**Roy Batty**

Roy Batty, the antagonist, does not fit into the noir mold; instead, he represents a long tradition of creations gone awry. David Desser in his essay “Blade Runner:
Science fiction and Transcendence” compares the Devil in Paradise lost, the Monster in Frankenstein, and the Roy Batty in *Blade Runner* to conclude that, although the human is the ‘hero’ of the story, it is the replicant Batty who captures our imaginations and whose plight consumes the plot of the film. (176) Just as Lord Byron and Mary Shelley crowned Satan the true hero of Paradise Lost, Desser argues that Roy Batty is the true hero, even more, he is the most ‘human’ of all. Roy Batty is the enemy and the savior. He, like Frankenstein before him, sought out his creator in search of life, or a life worth living.

His quest for meaningful life secures a strong sense of identification between this cyborg and the humanity. Because of this strong connection Francavilla asserts, “The two paradoxical aspects of the double, feared harbinger of death and guardian savior, both are manifest in Batty” (Francavilla, 11). He represents the conflict of identity because he is a perfect physical replicant, yet in human affect, he surpasses his ‘natural’ creators who enslaved him.

In stark contrast to the other character’s introduction, Roy Batty is introduced in extreme close up. With sweat beading on his perfect Arian face, he stands in profile forcing an ironic smile revealing both joy and pain. This initial shot of Deckard’s professed enemy immediately situates us in an imitate and introspective space with the film’s antagonist. The complex psychology of this character is revealed like a man
with his heart on display. His face reveals the pain he has seen and the sweet joys he seeks to prolong. This close up shot precedes a shot down a dark damp empty street, with unsettled debris from a passing dump truck. Neon signs create focal points leading down the street into an endless urban space.

This scene situates Batty as a product of industrialization, the unexpected debris and negative consequence of technological advances. Deckard was also emerges from public space as a product of industrialized and globalized, but Batty’s introduction scene is drastically different due to one important detail: the world Batty emerges from is empty, with only trash crisscrossing the empty streets. Batty is the product of industrialization, but he is strangely abandoned or isolated in an urban space that would typically be crowded and bustling with life. The only sign of life in the scene introducing Batty is a garbage truck: symbolically associating these renegade machines with the waste of life in an industrial world.

Unlike Deckard or Rachel who are associated with specific homes or personal space, Batty is a fugitive. He wonders in search of his ‘father’ Dr. Tyrell to request more life. Batty, more then the other three characters, is unintended consequence of urbanization and industrialization. His life was never intended to be his own, but a slave to human on ‘outer world colonies’. As such, he transverses in and out of various settings, always out of place. Never at home, his perfection prevents him from ever
melding with the settings as the other characters do. As Dr. Tyrell tells him, “the brightest candle burns twice as fast, and you have burned so very brightly”. This doubly bright light attracts the viewer. Hyper masculine with superhuman strength, his appeal for the viewer lays in his acute display of affect. As he tells J.F. Sebastian, “We’re not computers. We’re physical.” The viewer empathizes with Batty as he seeks to cling to life for himself and his lover. We are absorbed with his story, not because he is a perfect human technology, but because he embodies strong human desire for life. He is primarily a human like being clinging to life.

**Conclusion**

Each character performs the gender role of a literary archetype: the noir detective, the femme fatale, and the fallen angel or rejected creation. At the same time, they perform characteristics that betray artifice of their gender role. The film’s rich mise-en-scene reflects the changes in persona. The characters first construct a conservative gender performance, only to betray that persona in the intimate introspective spaces. In this way, gender in *Blade Runner* is symptomatic of identity in flux. The contradictory performance calls into question the naturalness of conservative gender roles. Therefore, gender is programmed and in this film, can be un-programmed.
The cyborgs Maria and Rachel in *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner* appear very similar: seductive, fleshy, irresistible, and dangerous. The significant difference lay in the worlds these cyborgs emerge from and how humans respond to their cyborgian double. In *Metropolis*, once she is discovered to be a cyborg, her former lover must destroy her. In *Blade Runner*, Deckard is equally, if not more, attracted to Rachel after he identifies her as a cyborg.

In *Blade Runner*, the characters’ identity are insecure and in transition and this instability plays out on the replicant’s gender performance. It is impossible to confirm Deckard’s humanity, but it is clear that he is much more vulnerable and insecure than the typical noir detective. The many introspective moments in the film reflect Deckard’s insecure identity. Batty is a hyper masculine cyborg, yet he attracts the empathy of the viewer and significant portions of the film though his strong emotions and relentless desire to preserve life. These desires culminate in the final fight scene where he saves Deckard’s life. Philip K. Dick makes clear in his novel that empathy is the defining quality of humanity. Batty’s saving act embodies empathy, hence the definition of humanity. Rachel initially is hardened and cool, yet a soft seductive persona gradually develops. This is an ironic transition for Rachel because while she believes she is human, she is cold and stoic, almost mechanical. After discovering her
real identity as a cyborg, she becomes warm, empathetic and seeks affection. The
gender performance of these characters is emblematic of Postmodern identity in flux.
Chapter 5. Ghost in the Shell

It found a voice... now it needs a body

After Blade Runner, the last major Science Fiction film edited and shot exclusively in camera, the introduction of digital film and computer editing and effects changed the process and apparatus of filmmaking. Featuring groundbreaking animation, Ghost in the Shell represents a cyborg subject who reflects trends in New Media in a world where the dichotomies discussed so far in this research are no longer contested. Developments in film technology are just a small example of a larger shift across media and society away from traditional analogue media and toward New Media. New Media is digital recording, storage, and distribution media, including the Internet, which appeared in the early 1980s and are gradually making analogue media obsolete. Lev Manovich defines New Media in detail to understand how the change in the media corresponds to changes in content and by extension, the experience of the consumer or user. With the dominance of New Media in film and in our daily communications, David Trend questions, “the extent to which a disembodied presence on the Internet permits an obfuscation of corporeal presence” (184). This is also the central question explored in Mamoru Oshii’s 1995 anime film Ghost in the Shell.
Along with significant shifts in the film technology, *Ghost in the Shell* represents a significant shift in the representation of the cyborg. Kusanagi, like the Maria and Rachel, is a beautiful powerful woman. Unlike her predecessors, she is not overtly seductive or sexual. Another significant difference, unlike the world’s Lang and Scott project, Mamoru Oshii envisions a human society that embraces its cyborgian counterpart. The primary tension of the film is not between the humans and the cyborgs, but between two cyborgian characters. The tag line above posits the central tension of the film and reflects trends toward immaterial new media and identity. “It found a voice… now it needs a body” posits the ‘voice’ or content first, where as the ‘body’ is of secondary importance. The changes in media as well as the changes in the cyborg body are both indicative a similar trend: new media, characterized by digital technology as well as the representation of the cyborg both indicate trends toward immateriality.

After a brief overview of the film’s narrative, I will review the literature on *Ghost in the Shell*, looking specifically at how the cyborg Kusanagi’s gender and sexuality are interpreted. I will then review how Lev Manovich defines New Media in his seminal text *The Language of New Media*. The previous research by both the feminist film theorist and Manovich’s definition of New Media argue that subject and body, medium and message, are inseparable and must be studied in relationship to each
other. On the other hand, Science Fiction, precipitous scientific fantasies all reflect a
trend toward immaterial subjects as well as media. I have established in Chapter one
that feminist have used the cyborg as a heuristic to argue that the body and identity are
inseparable. *Ghost in the Shell* appears to dispute these feminist arguments. I will
focus on Kusanagi’s gender performance throughout the film, but focusing on two
salient montage scenes to argue that, while the human body is gradually becoming
obsolete, the flesh continues to be central part of our identities.

**Film summary**

Previously in this thesis, I use science fiction films to interpret the cultural
work the cyborg does in representing fantasies of sexuality and technology. Now, I
make a jump from SF to Anime. Although much of anime represents similar themes as
SF, these two genres are not synonymous. Anime refers specifically to an aesthetic of
Japanese animation that has gained international popularity. The film *Ghost in the
Shell* is one of the most popular examples of the anime sub-genre *mecha*: animated
science fiction that “revolves around a quest to contain the body… in the form of some
kind of technological fusion” (Napier, 86). Although she agrees that SF and anime
*mecha* visually and thematically, resemble each other, *mecha* is specifically
preoccupied with the collapse of boundaries between the human and the machine.
Susan Napier writes, “many works in the *mecha* genre actually enact this double vision
(technological and humanist perspective) on a more profound and darker level through insistently presenting the fusion of human and technology as one of ambiguous value” (86). Napier attributes anime’s profound representation of human and machine relations to a means of production, which is not constrained by the realist technology of sequential photograph. She writes, “The viewer may play in the liminal world of fantasy. Of course, this is what all cinema and video products do to some extent, but animation allows the play to take place to an even more liberating degree” (238) (emphasis mine). Created outside the confines of material realism, anime represents culture, ideology and fantasy constrained only by what animation technology will allow and by the scope of human imagination. Whereas the live action film Blade Runner created an enhanced reality to represent fantasy, Ghost in the Shell represents a fantasy that is enhanced with bits of reality. While mirroring Blade Runner’s themes and rich mise-en-scene, and representing similar postmodern anxieties, its animation ex nihilo means that Ghost in the Shell has the potential to explore these fantasies and fears more radically without basing the characters and context in the real world with real people.

Based on the manga series with the same name, Mamoru Oshii’s feature film Ghost in the Shell won international critical acclaim and topped Billboard magazine’s video sales chart in 1996. The film touts both a complex and unique story line and
breathtaking visuals using state of the art technology. These components together, continue to mesmerize audiences in the East and West. The animation director, Toshihiko Nisikubo, incorporated traditional cell animation, 2D and 3D animation, computer generated images, and digital photograph. The animation features such rich perspective scenes resemble real three-dimensional space. By combining digital photography and CG imaging, long shots of Hong Kong’s streets and skyline appear richly detailed. Together, all of the elements constituting *Ghost in the Shell* construct a world that appears both artificial and realistic, both fantastic and concrete.

Set in 2029, the initial scene introduces the audience to our heroine; the specialized, crime fighting, cyborg woman Major Motoko Kusanagi eavesdropping on a secret meeting from the soaring height of a Hong Kong skyscraper. Disrobing, Kusanagi leaps from the ledge, glides more then falls, and appears to dissolve into the city air. We learn that this is a feature of her enhanced body that allows her to seem invisible while her skin projects the light from her surroundings. After a surprise attack on the meeting, Kusanagi again disappears into thin air and the film cuts to a lyrically paced montage.

This montage scene, interjected with credits, wordlessly and fluidly follows Kusanagi’s mechanical conception and birth. We watch as her naked inorganic body, starting with metal, and then floating slowly through several layers, until light brown
flesh is added. Finally, Kusanagi curls in the fetal position until she is born through clear blue water from the maternal machine to the outside world. The film immediately ‘cuts’ to Kusanagi while she awakes in her apartment overlooking the sprawling urban space of Hong Kong.

The plot of *Ghost in the Shell*, like *Blade Runner*, follows two tracks, one is an investigation and the other is a metaphysical search for meaning. The action plot follows cyborg Kusanagi, a member of the Section 6 enforcement team, as they investigate the cyber crimes and identity of the Puppet Master. An echo of Kusanagi’s own revelations regarding her person, the Puppet Master is not a flesh-and-bones human being but is actually a sentient cyber subject, a disembodied yet self-conscious program. In her historical analysis of anime including *Ghost in the Shell*, Susan Napier comments that this theme of a search for something non-material is significant to the movie: “The real ‘action’ of the film is not so much the hunt for evil perpetrators or even the Puppet Master but is rather a quest for her (Kusanagi’s) spiritual identity” (107). The film develops, not with the unfolding investigation, but with the character of Kusanagi who attempts to discover her identity as a unique subject beyond her constructed and replicate body. Kusanagi ponders, “Perhaps the real me died a long time ago… and I’m a replicant made with a cyborg body and a computer brain. Or maybe there never was a real ‘me’ to begin with.” Her search takes Kusanagi through
the streets of Hong Kong where the mannequins in store fronts reflect Kusanagi’s face. During the search, she again sees herself reflected in a face of a mutilated cyborg woman. This blonde busty cyborg serves as the temporary body of the Puppet Master while he courts a more permanent home: Kusanagi herself. Puppet Master is looking for a permanent body because he is essentially sentient code. His identity is composed of pure information, independent of medium. He represents a sophisticated program that exists in any form without being altered. After a final fight scene where Kusanagi is dismembered, the Puppet Master and Kusanagi merge into one ‘ghost’ able to transfer bodies at any time and able to enter the web of cyberspace. The union of Kusanagi and Puppet Master suggests that Kusanagi leaps forward toward complete immateriality. It is not clear how much, if any, of the new subject is flesh, but it is clear that merging with Puppet Master leads makes her less dependent on the flesh, which in this narrative equates to empowerment and new experiences.

**Previous Research**

Previous research of *Ghost in the Shell* offers interpretations of the film’s technological and disembodied subjects using categories of race, gender, and sexuality: identity categories intimately tied to the material body. Applying identity categories, gender specifically, to immaterial bodies has lead to contradictory interpretations of the cyborg. Scholars differ primarily over the gender of the Puppet Master and sexuality
performed in the union of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master. No consensus can be reached to define the identity of these cyborg subjects. This confusion is consistent with Haraway’s description of cyborgs who are ‘post gender’ (151). Haraway asserts, “Cyborgs are ether, quintessence” (154). The attempts below to fit the cyborg into traditional binary are inconsistent and inconclusive.

Susan Napier, in her book *Anime: from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, explores the meaning or eroticism in *Ghost in the Shell*. While explicitly erotic content is common in some forms of anime, Susan Napier points out that physical eroticism is displaced by “techno-eroticism” in mecha anima and climax in “lengthy climactic fight between huge and powerful machines engaged in combat involving crushing, dismemberment, and explosions” (88). *Ghost in the Shell* is exemplary in this regard. Although Kusanagi is explicitly eroticized, neither she nor the Puppet Master appears to possess any erotic desire of their own. Without desire yet possessing hyper-sexual appearance, according to Napier, sexual energy is released as techno-eroticism.

Women in film traditionally, according to Mulvey, do not possess desire and the gaze of desire. Instead, women are objects of visual pleasure to satisfy male desire. This is not the case in *Ghost*, Nusanagi and the Puppet Master appears indifferent to sexuality and sexual desire. This fact is significant because, while in the end, the new hybrid subject is liberated from the body, the lack of desire suggests that they were never, even while
embodied, ‘slaves’ to the needs and wants of embodied subjects. Pleasure according to this reading, for the cyborg, is congruent with a struggle for dominance. Napier attributes gender distinctions to the cyborg characters: feminine gender to Kusanagi and male to the Puppet Master. On the other hand, Napier interprets them as asexual, without desire, cyborgs achieve climax and pleasure through conflict. Eroticism is associated here with destruction not affection.

Carl Silvio, in the article “Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii’s “Ghost in the Shell”, offers two contrasting interpretations of Major Kusanagi: first as a radical opposition to traditional patriarchy and second a more complex interpretation that exposes how the film re-inscribes conservative patriarchal gender roles onto the cyborg. He argues,

“Kusanagi is often cinematically positioned in relation to male characters through the employment of various shot-reverse-shot structures that conform perfectly to Hollywood cinema’s familiar inscription of the female body as it has been described by feminist film scholarship (i.e. Mulvey)” (65).

A second level of reinforcing conservative gender roles for women, Silvio argues, is created by relegating Kusanagi with the body and job of maternal reproduction. This reading is interesting because Silvio argues that Ghost re-inscribes conservative gender
roles by connecting Kusanagi, a woman, with the body, while he interprets the Puppet master as a male and freed from the body. Hence, the conclusion reinforces heterosexual norms of masculine dominance. In this reading, the cyborgs are both assigned a gender and possess sexuality. The heterosexual tension, while restrained for most of the film, consummates when the Puppet Master enters Kusanagi’s partially organic brain, eventually merging the two identities into one superior being.

In contrast, Wendy Chun interprets Kusanagi and the Puppet Master as equally feminine symbolically making the conclusion non-threatening lesbian sexual relations. This interpretation assigns a specific gender, like Napier and Silvio, but both cyborgs are feminine. They have sexuality but Chun argues that lesbian relations are not perceived as a threat to patriarchal sexuality. Reading the technology, gender and race together, Chun delineates levels in which, through Ghost, the audience identifies with machines over subjects. Chun first claims both of the cyborgs are feminine and second that the audience is lead to identify with machines, by extension; these two claims together indicate that Ghost is structured to facilitate identification with feminine subjects who are also machines. This process of identifying with the machine and the illusion of disembodiment is germane to anime:

“Anime’s relation to cyberspace is not simply thematic: as Thomas Lamarre has observed, anime’s use of limited animation makes it
analogous to scanning information – the experience of informationization.

As well, both cyberspace and anime offer an escape from indexicality: in both spaces, the impossible can be represented and ‘seen’ ” (Chun, 196). Likewise, *Ghost in the Shell*, facilitates identification with disembodied subjects, machines, who are, to varying degrees, free of the burdens of flesh: including desire. They cannot now but wish to experience the feeling of desire, an experience intimately tied to the flesh and body. There is an ironic move in Chun analysis: humans desire to free themselves from the body through identification with machines and the cyborgs desire to desire, an experience that appears to be limited to subjects with flesh. “This complication of desire…., in this anime and others what feature female protagonists, the viewers and the female protagonists passively desire; they desire to desire. We are all therefore disembodied, and hence identify with computerization” (233). This is similar to Napier’s portrayal of the cyborgs disconnected from desire, but Chun adds that the cyborgs desire to desire.

The conclusions of the three major readings of Ghost all interpret the sexuality and gender of the cyborgs differently. The immaterial subject, in the case of these researchers, creates ambiguity and variation when assigning identity categories that reference a material body. According to Donna Haraway’s concept of the cyborg, this confusion is predictable. The cyborg resists definition according to binaries but instead
blends the both to find ‘pleasure in the confusion’. The confusion is integral to the cyborg’s definition and empowerment according to Haraway. Considering this, I do not attempt to argue for a single gender or sexuality for the cyborg: the cyborg’s hybrid body resists such binary distinctions. Rather, I locate the cultural significance of these cyborgs compared to the humans and the machines in this world as a way of discussing this embodiment of our relationship with technology.

I argue that the relationship between the Puppet Master and Humanity represent two ends of a dialectical tension between human and technology that is collapsing but not irrelevant in the cyborg filled world of Ghost in the Shell. In the center of this deconstructing dialectic, we find Kusanagi. Not clearly one side or the other, she is pulled between the two extremes of the dialectic as she searches to ground her identity. Although the theorists mentioned above seek to define Kusanagi’s gender, she is indifferent – the category has little significance to a postgender, possibly posthuman, cyborg. Kusanagi’s introspection is to locate her place in-between organic and inorganic, the world of humanity and the vast expanse of the net – in the end her choice clearly is for the technology.

In fictional as well as scientific discourse, the body of the cyborg has transitioned from a flesh bound Frankenstein toward a trend of disembodied, immaterial subjects. In the famous novel of 19th century Romanticism, Frankenstein
created a monster that was over determined by his flesh. This text represents a critique of Modernist ceaseless drive toward technological progress. The monster represents that drive gone horribly awry. At a time when railroads and factories were altering the physical landscape and social order, nineteenth century Romanticism called for a return to the natural sublime. Likewise, as much as the monster sought to be humane, his physical appearance was too frightening and his body too threatening to be integrated into human society. In the 1960’s, Manfred Clynes and Kline coined the word ‘cyborg’ and defined it as human, technologically altered in preparation of space travel. For this Cold War era cyborg, the human altered was less interesting then the possibilities made possible through technology. In the early 1980’s, William Gibson bases his dystopic cyber punk Neuromancer on cyber technologies, which were still in their infancy, to describe a world where flesh represents burden to the freedom of the mind. Gibson represents an increasingly abstracted subject. Abstracted from work, communication, and once stable anchors like nationality, the globalized, industrialized, and hyper-capitalistic society is filled with people who seek to escape or enhance their bodies. In Gibson’s literature, cyberspace is a place free of the body, an imaginary place where human consciousness is liberated from the body and survives in the net. Similarly, Hans Moravec, grounded in biological and computational reality, argues that, in the future, super computers will replace human consciousness. Moravec’s
proposition would effectively eliminate the body, and with it the fear of sickness, pain, and death. In contrast to the disembodied cyborgs of Gibson and Moravec, Donna Haraway advocates for a cyborg that embraces technology as an empowering force, while retaining the importance of the human body. Haraway argues that the bodily hybridity of the cyborg requires us to re-think concepts of subjectivity and identity that do not reject technology or the body.

The cyborgs in *Ghost in the Shell* do not maintain Haraway’s claim that the cyborg is a liberating subject position for women. Kusanagi is often represented according to the conservative codes of narrative cinema, or her claim that the identity of the cyborg is bound to its body: the Puppet Master makes it clear that body and flesh are restrictive and the disembodiment leads to a wider range of abilities and experiences. Just as the cyborg has often represented a trend toward immateriality, New Media can also create a sense of content that is increasingly independent from its medium. Lev Manovich’s definition of New Media demonstrates how this perception is possible, yet he concludes by grounding all content in a particular form. Likewise, I will later identify places where the cyborg, by confusing the difference between object and subject, does not fit into the binary of sexual difference.
Technology and New Media

Lev Manovich’s definitional work with New Media illustrates how digital information is abstract but not detached from the form of the media. New media became the predominant mode of communication and representation progressively since the early 1980s. Digital imaging, internet, and computer propelled the ubiquitous application of new media in contemporary society. To clarify and qualify useful criteria to describe media trends, Lev Manovich, in his book *The Language of New Media*, defines five principles of new media. I will outline these looking for parallels between the language of new media, anime specifically and the identity of the cyborg.

The first principle, Numerical representation, indicates that the “new media object can be represented formally (mathematically)… [and] becomes programmable” (27). Put simply, numerical represented media reduces all data and images to sequences of zeros and ones. Second, Modularity in new media allows the whole to be reduced into smaller and then smaller independent components, ‘down to the level of the ‘atoms’ ” (31). Third, Automation allows the media to operate independent from human direction (32). Fourth, Variability allows something to “exist in different, potentially infinite versions” (36). This indicates not only that infinite iteration is possible but also that something can be easily translated into different forms. The first four principles outlined by Manovich frame new media in abstract terms. Film as a new media, is reducible to numbers, can be generated via computers with varying
degrees of human intention, and can exist in an infinite amount of versions instead of being dependent on celluloid reel reproduction.

The first four principles outlined by Manovich frame new media as disembodied and autonomous. These principles suggest that new media is independent of material form and becoming increasingly abstracted. The same trends are represented in Kusanagi and Puppet Master in Ghost in the Shell. Kusanagi is made of almost no organic parts, and questions whether they were ever really there at all. In the end, we discover the powerful Puppet Master is pure disembodied self-conscious information. Although the Puppet Master is initially positioned as the film’s antagonist, when Kusanagi discovers that he is a disembodied subject, she is irresistibly drawn to make contact. He is a mysterious character who is simultaneously threatening and attractive. Puppet Master has no body or medium, it is pure information, medium is irrelevant, and is completely out of the control of its human programmers (creators).

The final principle Manovich grounds new media in a specific material frame. Transcoding in new media structures all information and data to “follow the established conventions of the computer’s organization of data” (45). This principle locates the disembodied principles above within structure of the computer that is never free of material structure. Manevich argues the computer structure influences the cultural aspect of our media as well: “What can be called the computer’s ontology,
epistemology, and pragmatics – influence the cultural layer of new media, its organization, its emerging genres, its contents.” (46). Donna Haraway would likely agree with Manevich’s medium specific principle. Yet, the film Ghost this trend is concealed. The form and body become negligible. Kusanagi and Puppet Master can be translated into any form (body) but their Ghost, like code, remains unchanged. The end of these developments is that “In a computer age, cinema, along with other established cultural forms, indeed becomes precisely a code” (333). Likewise, the ultimate cyborg the Puppet Master who emerges at the film’s conclusion is essentially sentient code, a virus that with enough experience in the web has become self-conscious. He represents embodied code; his identity follows the computer’s conventions. By giving code identity and subjectivity, the film metaphorically reveals the unseen DNA of new media structures. Code, usually made invisible behind our relationship to the screen, is now given a body in the cyborg.

Attempting to understand the impact new media has on discursive practices, Anna Everett describes the interchangeability possible through transcoding with the neologism Digitextuality. Drawing on Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, Everett proposes that new media creates digitextual discourse. She defines this neologism as, “a metasignifying system of discursive absorption whereby different signifying systems and materials are translated and often transformed into zeroes and ones for
infinite recombinant signifiers.” (7). For Everett, the reduction to zeroes and ones facilitates hybridity and bricolage. Just as Intertextuality transverses divergent discourses, digitextual media transfers diverging discourse, form, and medium.

Digatextual media, which reduce all images to computer data, allows filmmakers to combine indexical reality and man-made fantasy. Manevich concludes filmmakers cease striving to represent a realistic image and move toward a ‘painterly’ aesthetic. Using reality as a point of departure, photography and traditional cell animation are transcoded into a graphic, CG, computer animation, and painting are compounded together to create a film in hyper reality, something so realistic it could only be an illusion. (300-301). Anime inverts Manevich’s description of new media film: anime starts with painterly visuals and elaborates the fantasy with portions of indexical images. Animation and CG imaging are the painterly basis of anime but depth and richness of the fantasy world is augmented by incorporating photographic images. Much of the scenery and cityscape is computer generated in rich detail in depth. In contrast, traditional cell animation comprises most of the characters who stand out as two dimensional against the deep 3D environment. Whereas, live action film becomes hyperrealism through painting and computer graphics. Anime is painterly fantasy that blends in realism to enhance the imagined world. This inversion toward heightened imagination and painterly effect is the basis of Napier argument that
anime creates a free mode to represent play and cultural fantasy. She justifies the
genre when she writes, “Even more than live action cinema, animation is a fusion of
technology and art, both suggesting in its content and embodying in its form new
interfaces between the two” (11).

Anime is a rich example of digitextuality. Specifically, in the film *Ghost in the
Shell*, Director Mamoru Oshii and Animation Director Toshihiko Nishikubo layer
computer generated images, digital photography, cell animation and video composites.
The animation features such rich perspective to take on the appearance of real three-
dimensional space. By combining digital photography and CG imaging, long shot of
Hong Kong’s streets and skyline appear richly detailed. Together, all of the digitextual
elements that constitute *Ghost in the Shell* construct a world that appears both artificial
and realistic, both fantastic and concrete. These trends make the distinction between
real and unreal irrelevant. *Ghost in the Shell* also discusses this relation to the cyborg
Kusanagi’s search for identity. She asks what it means to be human and, given the
chance that she may never have been human, would it matter, in her search for unique
sense of identity, if she were composed of inorganic matter. The trend in media to blur
real and unreal, human and Posthuman, reflects on the body and identity of Kusanagi.
At the same time, this subject is denied one thing that is central to human existence and
culture: sexuality and desire. Being pulled between human and machine, Kusanagi, by
extension, is caught in the disintegrating relevance of real and simulation, original and replica. What relationship does Kusanagi, part organic and part inorganic, have with the two extremes of this dichotomy?

**Analysis**

The interpretations of the gender of this film’s cyborgs, thus far, are contradictory and at times very unclear. The body is sometimes the site of Kusanagi’s subjectivity and at other times her bodies is negligible. Kusanagi is a high-ranking specialized crime fighter. She protects the human race only striking fear into the hearts of criminals. Although she protects society, it is apparent that pure organic human life is dwindling, gradually becoming obsolete. *Ghost in the Shell* creates a dichotomy between human and mechanic life. Humans are more prolific but clearly, the technology is more powerful. The film’s two montages visually locate Kusanagi’s creation and then her search for identity.

The first montage illustrates Kusansgi’s conception and birth. She is clearly composed b inorganic means but the product is deceptively human-like. With green lasers and codes projected over the scene, we see the conception of Kusanagi. First, the mechanical scull close and seal over a newly installed brain, still attached to wires. Green sheets of light scan over an image brain from what appears to be a computer screen. Throughout this montage, scenes are interspersed resembling the body being
composed on a computer screen with code projected on her body. Next, the camera pans up the skeleton, with some tendons and muscles, suspended vertically with cables, wires, and cords. A body, covered with an external layer, then floats by the camera through a vat of bluish liquid. As the body continues immersed down a filled tube, we notice that several male scientists are observing this creation. Kusanagi emerges from the thick green liquid into another canal of clear liquid, revealing refined details of her face. Her body then rotates in the liquid, revealing precise details of her enhanced body. After an additional layer of liquid submersion, an external coating flakes off her skin, revealing very human-like flesh. She is then immersed into a third liquid, this time in the fetal position while she spins slowly in the water. Finally, she propels out of the liquid canal, out of the fluid, and the camera closes in on her emotionless perfect face.

Halfway through the film a second montage, also slow and lyrically paced to the same eerie music, explores the city of Hong Kong as Kusanagi wonders repeatedly recognizing reflections of herself in others. In this montage, the camera moves freely, separate from point of view shots. At one moment, the view will be a long high shot, at the next a close low angle. It floats from one angel to another, unconnected to an embodied source. There are also repeated shots of the murky water. Though tainted and littered, it still reflects the city souring above. Hong Kong is show alternately from

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the street level looking up at planes or from above down on trucks people. At both
angles, the city is rich with color, full of activity, yet marred and dingy with overuse
and over crowding.

However, of the films in this research, this is by far, and ironically, the most
realistic. The city appears to be the least futuristic. The montage resembles modern
Hong Kong. Rowboats bob in the littered murky water. Water trolley passes rusted
signs and glass front buildings filled with everyday humans. Kusanagi first sees her
eerily resemblance in the face of one of the women she passes in a café window. This
world is rich with color and layers. Although everything appears damaged or worn out.
Many of the buildings are covered with scaffolding for repair. Kusanagi next sees
herself reflected in a mannequin draping a high fashion garment in a shop window.
Rain begins to fall creating small rings that ripple out on the dark water and distort the
city’s reflection. The back and mid ground of the city are murky, brown and dull, but
this bland darkness is broken up at every angle by richly colorful signs. We see people
shopping, strolling, a group of school children run across the mid ground all carrying
bright yellow umbrellas. Everywhere the camera turns, we see people going about their
lives, streets filled and layered with the ware left behind by generations of inhabitants.
In this scene, Kusanagi wonders the city, at first recognizing herself in the face of a human woman. But throughout Kusanagi stands out as perfect and clean in a world that is messy and worn. In those defects, the city looks exciting and alive. Meanwhile, Kusanagi remains detached. She does not assimilate into the disorganized living city. She belongs to the world high above that is clean, sterile, and perfect like the mannequins she repeatedly recognizes as herself.

The relationship between humans and their machines in *Ghost in the Shell* inverts the previous films analyzed. Technology is dominant but its dialectical opposite, the inventors who move toward obsolescence, retain power over one thing: the body and with it sexuality. Technology is everywhere, information and data move across the screen, the city, and the character’s bodies. The film portrays the evolution of technology is in the direction of complete disembodiment. The most powerful subject, the Puppet Master, has no body.

Augmenting the technological deterministic trend, technology become stronger, the body becomes smaller: Kusanagi’s body looks frail and vulnerable as she stands naked on the roof, her creation is one of innocence and her body appears weak. The Puppet Master is encased in a dismembered cyborg body where the doll like breast, face and blonde hair are the only parts that remain intact. Later, Kusanagi is also dismembered before she and the Puppet Master merge. In their wedded form they are
transposed into a prepubescent girl’s ‘shell’ slumped over in an oversize chair like a rag doll. As the program develops intellect, strength, and eventually sentience, the body assumes a weak, puerile form. The body recedes into irrelevance. As dominant the technology is, the Puppet Master recognizes he cannot be complete without that which dialectically opposes it. He desires to desire. He needs flesh to prevent identical repetition and variety. Human corporality retains this sole significance: in this world, sexuality and desire appear to be the only human traits cyborgs cannot or are not replicated.

While the cyborg gains a type of liberation through technology, humans retain exclusive control over one thing: sex. The film creates cyborgs that are visually and physically perfect but not complete. They lack desire, sexuality. Her reproductive parts appear incomplete and closed off. We are in no way lead to believe she is capable of completing sexual acts, only of attracting sexual desire that she cannot fulfill. In a perverse way, this is invocative of the maxim, “prohibition is the root of desire”. Her appeal enhances due to her inability to follow through, not despite. Restricting her sexuality serves a cultural purpose.

The viewers identify with the cyborgs but restrict how closely the cyborg resembles and functions as a human. Chun suggests that, although the human as a marginal role, it is still significant. The human, not programmed like the cyborgs, is
capable of unique and spontaneous thought, as well, presumably, able to produce unique children. She also describes the cyborgs as ‘desiring to desire’. By framing the cyborg as lacking, especially something so tied to the flesh and humanness – desire—the film positions the cyborgs looking back, with an amount of envy, toward humanity.

The film frames the difference between organic and inorganic within the mise-en-scene. Kusanagi’s apartment, the lab, even the ‘womb’ she is created in appears methodological, sterile, and clean. Her world is empty and isolating. The contrast to the world of organic life is visualized as Kusanagi travels through the colorful vibrant streets of Hong Kong. She walks like a stranger through the messy, disorganized, and cluttered world of humans on the Hong Kong streets. While searching for a sense of her own identity, in this colorful rich world of humans, the only parts she ‘sees herself in’ are the inert mannequins.

Kusanagi’s quest for self reaches a conclusion, but the closure is ambivalent. The marriage of Puppet Master and Kusanagi is not a joyous one but coerced and consummated through destruction and dismemberment. In the final shot, Kusanagi in her new child body appears abstracted and isolated. The audience’s perception alters in tandem. The long shot tracking in toward Kusanagi lying doll like and helpless in an oversized armchair has an eerie appearance. In these last few shots, the camera remains objective as POV shots cease.
Conclusion

The film promotes a post-gender cyborg, as Haraway advocates for women’s empowerment. Kusanagi, of the cyborgs discussed in this research, most resembles the utopic empowered, post-gender cyborg of Haraway’s Manifesto. The film makes clear, her new empowerment through technology does not lead her closer to a happiness or satisfaction.

Her new subject position leaves Kusanagi lost. After the defining binaries of the humanist subject have dissolved, the post-gender cyborg is left empowered but lost, unhappy, and searching for something to ground her identity. Humanism has been deconstructed. The alternative she chooses is to cling to the purely technological. At the same time, the cyborgs of Ghost in the Shell are able to be post-gender because they no longer are bound to a body. The physical no longer defines these cyborgs. Their power is derived, not from confusion between object and subject, but by choosing disembodied technology.

While the other films equate natural humans with the autonomous humanist subject, this film defines natural humans as bodies bound imperfect flesh. At the same time, the Puppet Master is a radically autonomous ‘cogito’ who has never been bound to the body. As technology develops, abandoning the body for the efficiency offered through technology also holds out the hope of immortality. In exchange for the flesh, Kusanagi chooses immortality, but the price is high: sexuality. Sexuality and desire
remain unique to human life. Variety, richness, and originality, as displayed in the contrast between Kusanagi’s apartment and the streets of Hong Kong, are also part of the price paid when purchasing immortality.

As in the chapters before, this analysis acknowledges the cyborg character is framed in many of the ‘objectifying’ ways that Mulvey describes and victimizing women. Never the less, for the cyborg, object is never a negative term. In the previous chapters, combining object and subject lead toward a unique type of power. In this chapter, abandoning the human subject for pure object, or technology, leads toward the greatest amount of power.

The significance of this argument involves both components of the cyborg body: culture and technology. On a cultural level, the cyborg represents a fantasy that we, also subjects looking for solid identity categories, may eventually leave the state of flux. On a technological level, the cyborg is indicative of a media age marked by hybridity, remix, and illusion. Claudia Springer concludes these narratives represent a society where “postmodern instability is taken to its extreme; nothing is necessarily what it seems, and illusion is the new reality” (11). For the cyborg character as well as the postmodern body, illusion is also the new reality. The cyborg does not nostalgically idealize the ‘natural’ or search for “An orchid in the land of technology” (Benjamin, 234). Similarly, illusion and simulation have become the new standard while reality
has given sway to enhanced hyper-reality. In this hyper-reality, eroticism is ubiquitous yet sexuality is regulated and exclusive to human reproduction.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

The cyborg, a figure of rich cultural significance, can be used as a heuristic to research representations of gender from a perspective that accounts for cultural and material contexts. Cyborg bodies deconstruct binaries such as subject/object and real/fantasy, to expose the falsely opposite distinctions used to define subjectivity. Scholars specializing in feminism, anthropology and cultural studies continue to theorize how the rich cultural significance of the deconstruct(ed)(ing) cyborg body. This research contributes to this on going discussion by focusing on the cyborg’s significance in film discourse and feminist discourse. I argue that the cyborg, as a subject of film, conflates the false opposition between empowerment and victimization. My research method uses the cyborg character to illustrate that these two terms are not opposites, but connected in an intricate weave. This weave between power and powerless materializes in the cyborg’s gender performance, the representation of her body, and context of the mise-en-scene. In addition, I argue that with social and technological shifts, the dynamic between empowered gender performance and victimized performance changes. Gender, then, is as nuanced performance dependent on the tools, materials, and culture.
This analysis suggests that the cyborg, as a heuristic for analysis, accounts for the co-constituting relationship between materials and identity. This perspective enhances feminist analysis, but it also critiques feminist discourses that maintains the opposition between empowered and victimized. Instead, both positive and negative trends come into focus through the cyborg as a lens thereby creating a two dimensional perspective of gender performance.

Specifically, this research complicates the notion of objectification. Mulvey’s argument presupposes that ‘object’ indicates passive and repressed while ‘subject’ indicates active and powerful. Women are passive because they are framed as spectacles or objects. The foundation of Mulvey’s theory of the gaze presupposes that objectivity must be a passive position. The cyborg does not totally disrupt this filmic code, but it does present an active spectacle. The cyborg reveals that object and subject are false distinctions. Object or body is the basis of the subject; embracing that leads toward new experiences and ontology.

I began the project by demonstrating that the cyborg does not always lead directly to empowerment. In the final chapter, I have shown that when identity deconstructs to achieve Haraway’s empowering ideal, its arrival is ambivalent, not utopic. The cyborg I have described in the final chapter appears to reflect the post human post-gender cyborg Haraway advocates for, but this new subject position is
ambivalent and abstracted. *Ghost in the Shell* represents a world after postmodernity’s work of deconstruction and preoccupation with blurring boundaries has set in. The distinguishing between real and fantasy no longer is a meaningful question. Postmodernity is now established. The world is post- postmodern. The subject inhabiting the post-postmodern world must discover her own meaningful source of identity. In the end, posthuman postgender identity is unstable and unknowable. Haraway’s call for empowerment through the cyborg subject, once realized, is not a utopia. It is ambivalent. While the postgender posthuman gains power and freedom, it comes at a price.

While I remain more reserved then Haraway’s utopia, I do take up Haraway’s challenge to reject the describing all women as victims by closely analyzing these cyborgs’ performed and programmed gender. This study is significant because, while its aims are decidedly feminist; it challenges feminist presuppositions. I challenge feminist discourse that place strict opposites between empowerment and victimization. In doing, I call for feminists to move beyond false opposites of empowerment and victimization, instead, notice the complex and context dependent flow of both of these terms. What this analysis suggests that feminist arguments should not place empowerment and victimization but opposites, but interpret how they weave together like the organic and in-organic components of the cyborg’s body.
What is new in these films, is the not cyborg, but the world around them. Gradually the cyborg supplants the human. In each film, technology spreads to further dominate the mise-en-scene, the cyborg becomes commonplace. This is in the context of a globalized, postindustrial world where formerly static Cyborgs are now the dominant, considered most efficient character. However, in the end, trends in New Media as well as the cyborg in *Ghost in the Shell*, demonstrate that the fantasy of disembodied autonomous cogito is implicitly re-inscribed on the body of the cyborg.

All three of these films represent historical moments of social unrest. In *Metropolis*, Lang recreates the Bolshevik Revolution with an anti-communist conclusion. Lang’s film posits a form of critique of unbridled technological advances. At the same time, the film fetishizes technological progress and features the fantasy of creating life through mechanical reproduction. Scott layers decades of industrial decay on Los Angeles in 2019. Globalization, industrialization, and capitalism create a world that is over crowded yet lonely. The characters are a product of their environments, yet they remain abstracted and isolated. This represents a relationship of acquiescence of human agency to technological progress. In an ironic move, this allows Scott to imbue the cyborgs, technological progress at its best, with human affect and empathy. Oshii imagine the near future, and augment real trends toward globalization, information economy, and digital identity. Reflecting trends in New
Media, Oshii represents a relationship with technology that, like *Blade Runner*, is ambivalent. Kusanagi searches for a stable sense of identity in a post-postmodern world where identity has been deconstructed, leaving the subjects abstracted and searching for stability.

The cyborg performs a rich variety of cultural work, but I offer one perspective to illuminate the significance of this figure within film and feminist discourse. Scholars have identified cyborg figures in literature, science and even engineering since the Enlightenment. This figure has been recycled though the centuries, in part, because the figure embodies our relationship with technology. My argument helps to answer this question. Rather then distracting from their appeal, I argued that the ambiguity contributes to their imaginative value. They are not victims or utopic, rather, they conflate both our fears and our fetishes, anxieties and our hopes. Representing both at once, we find pleasure in the tense coupling of fear and fetish. Like Barthes writerly texts, the cyborg text does not mean one static thing, rather, the viewer takes pleasure in the act of interpreting. They are not victims or utopic, rather, they represent both our fears and our fetishes for the future. Representing both at once, they spark our imaginations in new ways and captivate our attention.
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