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The Scientific Imaginary in Visual Culture

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Anneke Smelik

Chapter 5: Cinematic Fantasies of Becoming-Cyborg

Introduction

In the last few years several TV-commercials have featured an appealing image of a man-machine. In 2005, a one minute commercial was edited in such a way that a young boy becomes a man while he is running through a modern city jumping from heights, crossing huge gaps, climbing buildings, and hanging from cables. At the end he changes into a car, a Renault Clio 3. The suggestion is that the natural growth and evolution of a male subject culminates in a man-machine. The same year another one minute commercial of the man-car theme was issued, but this time the other way around: Citroën C4 showed a car becoming man. Citroën C4 commercials started in 2005 and continue the theme until now, with the car-man-machine skating on ice, dancing in the streets, or doing a warming up for fitness. The huge robot consisting of car parts is quite endearing in its human-ness. Those commercials are just one example of the popularity of the man-machine in contemporary visual culture, which can be found in commercials, music videos, fashion photography, television series, cinema, computer games and web 2.0 applications like Second Life.

Figure 5.1: Car becoming man; image grab from Citroën C4 TV-commercial 2005.

The man-machine is clearly one of the prevailing figurations in a culture dominated by science and technology. Almost from its beginning cinema has seen science and technology as potentially threatening, for example in the figure

of the mad scientist producing an evil cyborg, like Rotwang creating the robot Maria in *Metropolis* (1927) (see also Merzagora's essay in this volume). In the popular imagination, machines were enslavers rather than liberators, for instance the human masses enslaved by the colossal machines in *Metropolis*, or, more comically, Charlie Chaplin caught in the wheels and cogs of a giant machine in *Modern Times* (1936). The car commercials that I introduced above show that a major shift has occurred in the popular imagination: visual culture of today is not scared by science and technology but embraces it full-heartedly. The machine no longer enslaves man but happily fuses with man – or with woman, like in Björks innovative music video 'All is Full of Love' (1998).

The Posthuman Cyborg

I take the man-machine in its contemporary manifestation as a cyborg, a cybernetic organism, which indicates a feedback system between man and machine and is thus an updated version of earlier figurations such as the robot or android. The term was introduced by Donna Haraway as a utopian concept for posthuman identity in her famous 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1991). In popular culture, the figure of the cyborg projects a fantasy of the human who fuses with technology and becomes a superior being in the process. Especially the genre of science fiction, both literary and cinematic, explores the cyborg as a hybrid of human, science and technology in a posthuman world (Sobchack 1997). As scientific developments in genetics, information technology and cybernetics open up new possibilities of intervention in human lives, cultural theorists have explored the notion of the 'posthuman' (Zylinska 2002; Bell & Kennedy 2000). The term posthuman indicates a historical period in which the technological factor is primary over a naturalistic assumption about the human subject. The notion thus helps to overcome the nature/culture distinction (Haraway 1991; Hayles 1999; see also Rosi Braidotti's essay in this volume). The posthuman cyborg points to deep-seated desires of fusing man with science and technologies as well as to equally deep-rooted anxieties about the dominance of science and technology over the fragile human body and mind. Popular images of the cyborg often reinforce the mind/body split in western culture, raising questions about artificial intelligence, mediated memory and fractured identity (Gray 1995). Those figures also have different, and often complex, relations to gender.

In this essay I will explore images of the human-machine cyborg in contemporary visual culture, mostly in science fiction movies, a genre with both its utopian and dystopian aspects. The cyborg is one of the ways in which popular culture has answered to the 'call' of science and technology. It is a figure probing

what it means to be a human being in a time when science and technology can heal and enhance or on the contrary hurt and destroy the human species. The blurring of boundaries between human/machine, nature/culture, technology/organism, sex/gender, heralded by the figuration of the cyborg, has proved to be a fruitful framework for studies of the posthuman and constitutes a point of departure for this essay. At the same time, I will use methods of analysis from film studies to investigate the particularly visual aspects of the cyborg figuration. I will finish the essay by pointing to cultural practices in contemporary society that are inspired by the figure of the cyborg.

The Genre of Cyborg Movies

The cyborg film is a hybrid genre with its roots in science fiction, horror and action movies (Roberts 2000; Perkowitz 2007). Some consider it therefore to be a postmodern genre (Kuhn 1990; 1999). The cyborg certainly is a postmodern configuration in its hybridity between human flesh and metal or digital material, its wavering between mind and matter, and its volatility between masculinity and femininity (Bukatman 1993; Dery 1996). The cyborg is thus a typical postmodern figuration of the 'in-between'.

Digital technology has recently provoked some significant transformations in the image of the cyborg, moving away from the hardware cyborg of the 1980s to the software and wetware cyborgs of the 1990s. This is not a neat evolution because the hardware cyborg still dominates the popular imaginary, as we have seen in the car commercials. The hardware cyborg combines a human body with technology in the form of implantations or prostheses: for example, the metallic figures of the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and RoboCop (Peter Weller). In contrast, the software cyborg is a human who can hook up to a computer. For example, Johnny Mnemonic (Keanu Reeves) in the eponymous film can upload data into his brain by plugging in, while the mercurial T-1000 (Robert Patrick) in *Terminator 2* (1991) can take on any form whatsoever because he consists of a computer programme and thus his substance is malleable. Finally, the wetware cyborg is a mixture of digital technology and a 'wet' humanoid inside, like Cash (Wynona Ryder) in *Alien Resurrection* (1997). The wetware cyborg often acquires generic traits of the horror genre, as the body can splatter into bloody or slimy fragmentation. I will first discuss the ways in which cinema shows that the cyborg is both human and machine at the same time, before going into issues of identity, memory and gender that are prominent in science fiction movies.

Point of View

While commercials show us smooth transitions from man to car or vice versa, a Sci-Fi movie has to convince the spectator that the human figure she sees on the screen is in fact a cyborg. Apart from obvious narrative clues in dialogue and plot, cinema uses two visual strategies to make this clear to the audience: the subjective camera shot and the reparation scene. The cyborg is often introduced with a subjective point-of-view (POV) or over-the-shoulder shot. Bordwell and Thompson describe the POV-shot as "A shot taken with the camera placed approximately where the character's eyes would be, showing what that character would see; usually cut in before or after a shot of the character looking" (2008, 480). In the case of the cyborg, such a subjective POV-shot contains computerised elements within the frame, representing the cyborg's eye like a video camera that can zoom in and out, process data, check a target, and rewind or repeat the image. For example, when the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) lands nude on Earth from outer space in *Terminator 2* (1991), he surveys his new surroundings with a piercing gaze. The film shows what he sees in a red, digitalised image through a sustained POV-shot. In *RoboCop* (1987) there are several scenes of long POV-shots in which the camera films as if it were the eye of RoboCop (Peter Weller) while it is being fabricated in the laboratory, giving the idea of a robot being imprisoned in a human body. In *Eve of Destruction* (1990) a female cyborg, Eve 8 (Renée Soutendijk), checks out the men in a café through a POV-shot with red lights and bleeping sounds, before beating them up when they harass her.

The function of the POV-shot in the Sci-Fi movies is clear: it has to prove to the spectator that the character is not a mere human being but a cyborg. The computerised elements within the frame emphasise the machine-like aspect of the cyborg, as its eye functions like a camera with superior vision enhanced by technology. Being embodied by a live actor or actress, the cyborgs at first sight look like 'normal' humans. Significantly, after having been introduced by the POV-shot to the spectator as a cyborg, the other characters in the film still have to be convinced. The cyborg therefore usually proceeds to fight in the next scene and show its crushing strength over humans.

While the POV-shot with its technological cues within the frame thus ascertains the 'cyborg-ness' of the character, typical techniques of the POV shot, such as mobile framing, close-ups and camera movement, are at the same time powerful cinematic cues for subjectivity. In film studies the impact of a POV-shot is taken to produce character subjectivity. Thus, another effect of the POV-shots is to simultaneously ascertain the subjectivity of the cyborg, which makes it – partly – human. This allows for empathy and perhaps even identification of the audience with the 'human-ness' of the cyborg.

Reparation of Wounds

Another visual *topos* in cyborg films is to systematically destroy the cyborg so as to repair it. Superhuman invincibility may be one characteristic of the cyborg proving the superiority of technology over the human body, but the cyborg is surprisingly vulnerable to assault and injury. After the cyborg is reduced to just a heap of shrapnel, it can be put together again either by itself or in the lab.

Such reparation scenes excel in ambiguity, because the once-unbeatable machine has become defenceless flesh. To give a few examples: in *The Terminator* (1984) the cyborg repairs his wounded eye in a typical horror scene that shows the wet inside of the body. When he takes out his eye and drops it in the washbasin, the socket not only shows a bloody wound, but also a camera that still functions by zooming in and out. In *RoboCop*, the cyborg drills into his head with a machine, taking off the metal prosthesis that reveals his human flesh. In *Eve of Destruction* Eve 8 undresses and exposes a gaping wound in her chest, which she enters with her own hand apparently restoring it and then gluing it over with red tape. While the scenes disclose wounded flesh, making the spectator shudder in her seat with horror, they show once again the superiority of the cyborg who can penetrate and repair its own body and continue as if nothing happened. Reparation scenes are thus a cinematic way of visualising the hybrid character of the cyborg.

Interestingly, the reparation scenes typically involve mirrors: the Terminator, RoBoCop and Eve 8 look into a mirror while they are tending their wounds. The mirror is a well-known visual theme in cinema where it functions as a moment of self-reflection for the character. In film studies, Mulvey (1975) and Metz (1977) have connected the look into the mirror to the psychoanalytic concept of ego formation in the mirror stage conceptualised by Lacan. Mulvey and Metz argue that the way in which the child derives pleasure from the identification with a perfect mirror image and forms its ego ideal on the basis of this idealised image, is analogous to the way in which the film spectator derives narcissistic pleasure from identifying with the perfected image of the hero on the screen. In the case of a literal mirror in visual culture, whether in paintings, cinema, music videos or fashion photography, there is then a double 'look': the primary one of the character looking into the mirror, and the secondary one of the spectator identifying with the character, mediated by the camera (or painter).

Self-reflection presupposes a degree of subjective consciousness. Thus, by putting the cyborg in front of a mirror, the films suggest that the cyborg is actually thinking about itself. A clear example is *RoboCop*, where the cyborg becomes emotional as he checks out the mirror for signs of his former, human, self. Landsberg (2004) has shown that the cyborg is often surrounded not only by mirrors but by reflective surfaces like a video monitor or computer screen. She

argues that the mirroring surface allows for a moment of uncanny self-recognition and even self-reflection, in scenes that are reminiscent of the Lacanian mirror phase. On the one hand, the cyborg characters see a perfected image of the human figure reflected in the mirror, because as man/machines they are literally enhanced and thus perfected human beings. On the other hand, they see a distorted image in the mirror because they are wounded and disfigured. Quite significantly, the mirror scenes suggest that the cyborgs are quite confused about their hybrid identity: Who are they? Man or machine? Why do they experience pain or feelings? Do they have memories?

Identity and Memory

Now that I have explained two cinematic ways of ascertaining the character as a cyborg in Sci-Fi movies, the POV-shot and the wounding/repairing scene, it is actually surprising to find out that the cyborg is rather uncertain about its own status. In fact, the postmodern cyborg finds itself in quite the same predicament as 'real' people. Perhaps we could say that its postmodern hybridity, its in-betweenness, produces an identity crisis: is it a mere machine, or is it also a man, or both? The crossing and blurring of binary oppositions creates confusion. Sometimes such confusion leads to some comic relief: when Douglas Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *Total Recall* (1990) finds out that he is not Mr. Quaid, but that his memory is implanted and that his whole life, including his marriage and his own wife, is fake, he calls out in desperation: "But if I am not me, who the bloody hell am I?" In a sadder example from the cult classic *Blade Runner* (1982) the cyborg Rachel (Joanna Cassidy) bursts into tears when she finds out she is a 'replica' (the term for the cyborgs in this film), because she was really convinced that she was a human being with her own personal memories and feelings. The ambivalent point here is that she cries while replicas are not supposed to have emotions.

Whether comic or tragic, the identity crisis is a stock theme in the science fiction films of the last twenty years of the previous century. The hybrid figures are confused about their own status, not unlike the Taoist question 'Am I a human dreaming that I am a butterfly, or am I a butterfly dreaming that I am human?' Moreover, the identity crisis is often not brought to closure, which is a rare ending for Hollywood cinema. *Blade Runner* suggests at the very end that Deckard, the main character, is actually a replica; and when Quaid has created a new earth and a new heaven on Mars in *Total Recall* his last words are: "And what if I have dreamt it all?" The films thus refuse to anchor human identity in the cyborg, maintaining its hybridity until the very end.

Early cyborg movies, such as *Blade Runner*, *RoboCop*, *Total Recall* and the

Terminator-films (Penley 1991), tell stories about the crisis of identity often induced or increased by prosthetic memory. The identity crisis is mostly focused around issues of memory, because personal memories function as an index for subjectivity. Prosthetic memory is thus typical of the cyborg movies of the 1980s and 1990s, where implantations complicate the relation between memory, experience and identity (Landsberg, 2004). The visual clues for subjective memories are photographs, which are supposed to 'prove' the personal past of the cyborgs. But where photos usually function as documents of truth, in cyborg films they acquire an ambiguous and much darker status as they are wilful manipulations of the past and suggest that personal memories have been implanted. Such films focus on anxieties aroused by the paradoxical experience of remembering events that the character has not lived through (Radstone 2000). Silverman (1991) has argued that photography is thus used to expose the fragility of postmodern identity.

There is a significant shift in the treatment of the identity crisis in contemporary science fiction cinema, because the – now digital – technologies of memory shift to other grounds, away from implanted or prosthetic memory. In Sci-Fi films of the twenty-first century, the story centres more on the relation between the superior memory of the computer and the failing memory of the human being. Hence, the issues transfer from a superior body to manipulations of the mind.[1] Digital media have created new ways of saving, retrieving, and archiving personal and collective memories (Van Dijck 2007). Science fiction writer William Gibson has claimed that for him, computers are no more than a metaphor for human memory (Cavallaro 2000). In contemporary science fiction, the fantasy has undoubtedly become one of control. Therefore, with digital technology the concern is no longer with the implantation of false memories, since the characters remember lived experiences. Rather, the *utopian* fantasy now centres on total recall that is enabled by the continuous enhancement of computer memory, while the *dystopian* fantasy focuses on the deletion and distortion of digitalised memories.

I will give the example here of one of the first films in its genre, *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), based on a few short stories by cyberpunk writer Gibson. [2]

1 There are two other new themes in contemporary Sci-Fi movies: simulated reality as in *The Matrix* trilogy and genetic manipulations; for reasons of space I cannot pay attention to these kinds of films.

2 More examples of recent Sci-Fi films on digital technology as registering or deleting individual memories, are: *Minority Report* (2002), *Final Cut* (2004), *The Butterfly Effect* (2004 and its sequel in 2006), and the manga film *The Ghost in the Shell* (1995). Films on memory that skirt the borders of the science fiction genre include *The Bourne Trilogy* (2002, 2004, 2007), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and the Chinese film *2046* (2004). An interesting mix of time travel and memory confusion can be found in the British television series *Life on Mars* (2006 – 2007) and its sequel *Ashes To Ashes* (2008 – 2009).

The hero uploads certified data into his brain in order to bring them to people on the other side of the world. To make space for the data, Johnny (Keanu Reeves) has to temporarily download (and thus be deprived of) his personal memories of his deceased mother (as in *Blade Runner* the mother functions as the oedipal sign of human identity and memory; see Silverman 1991). If he is unable to download the computer data within 24 hours, he will die of 'information overload'. Only when he can discharge the data, is he able to reload the personal memories. Of course, Johnny is saved just in time to retrieve his early memories of his mother.

Contemporary Sci-Fi movies convey the futuristic fantasy that private memory can be captive of technology in such a way that it becomes transparent and visible, for example by projecting it as images on a screen.[3] Identity gets fully shot through with technology, as individual memory can digitally be retrieved, represented, remediated, transformed or deleted. The films suggest that private memory is a prison that keeps the subject chained to the past and that technology can offer the character liberation from his or her memories, and thus from the past, opening up new vistas for the future. This Sci-Fi fantasy responds to cultural anxieties around digital technologies as pervading contemporary culture and transforming our relation to personal and archival memory.

Women: Strong & Sexy

As feminist studies have shown, an important aspect of human identity is gender; the social and cultural role, construction and performance of one's biological sex. The question here is: do cyborgs have a sex or a gender? In her 'Cyborg Manifesto' Haraway (1991) introduced the cyborg as a new and enabling figuration for women. The manifesto's principle message to women was to take responsibility for the social relations of science and technology. The cyborg was attractive to Haraway, because it blows up dualities by melding the borders between the human and animal, between the organic and the mechanical/machine, and between the physical and the non-physical. The cyborg could figure as a fresh image for a hybridised, fragmented, postmodern, subjectivity.

As we have seen above, the cyborg is indeed a postmodern figure of the 'in-between', who is in a quandary about its own hybrid identity. Does this also mean that the Hollywood cyborg represents a hybridized, flexible, postmodern

3 Elsewhere, I have shown how the technological digitalisation of memory and identity in contemporary science fiction films results in two different trajectories: on the one hand the spectacular visualisation of memories; and on the other hand a fragmented narrative in which past, present and future become confused (Smelik 2009).

subjectivity of men and women? Hardly so, I am afraid; in fact, gender stereotypes are much repeated in the imagery of the cyborg. Firstly, there are many more male than female cyborgs; secondly, male cyborgs are characterised by their hard, strong and infallible body; and thirdly, the (few) female cyborgs are highly sexualised. To give a recent example: in 2008 the multinational Philips launched a campaign for a new shaver for men, Robotskin. In the one minute commercial a female, Asian looking cyborg, helps a nude man to shave under the shower. She is shy, subservient and attractive. The end of the commercial suggests that the man and the cyborg will have sex. The lighting is blue, the pace slow and languid, and the music is a mix of ambient techno that sounds vaguely Asian. While it is probably inspired by the popular videoclip 'All is Full of Love' (1998), the commercial could not be further removed from Björks radical message of (lesbian) love between human and machine. The erotic tone and setting of the Robotskin commercial could also not be more different from the two car commercials that I introduced at the beginning, which gave us the figure of an exclusively macho fusion between man and car/machine.

Figure 5.2: Eroticised female cyborg; image grab from Philips Robotskin TV-commercial 2008.

While there are few female cyborgs in the genre, it is interesting to note how often they are explicitly linked to female sexuality (Balsamo 1996). One of the most sexist examples is the film *Cyborg II* (1993) that opens with a scene of male scientists watching their new weapon in action: a female cyborg who seduces the enemy into sex and explodes at the moment of her orgasm. Another dire stereotype is the sex cyborg played by Melanie Griffith in *Cherry 2000* (1987), a predecessor of Robotskin's female cyborg in the Philips commercial. The earlier mentioned cyborg Eve 8 in *Eve of Destruction* (1991) is a more complex image of a sexualised cyborg. Sexy in her red leather jacket, she is quite literally a castrating monster who bites off the penis of a man that tries to rape her and killing any man that bothers her. In a striking visual scene, the film exposes the physical position of her lethal weapon. After a car accident, the camera enters the cyborg's body through the mouth (in an anatomically incorrect camera move-

ment), ending up in her womb where a nuclear bomb gets activated. Again, the female reproductive organs are represented as the site for lethal explosions.

Many Sci-Fi movies have intricate representations of the inside of the cyborg body or of cyberspace as a tunnel, a surging vortex of turning and twisting imagery. Elsewhere, I have explored this kind of tunnel imagery in both cyberpunk movies and medical documentaries (Smelik 2008); here it suffices to draw attention to the double meaning of the matrix as a metaphor that is frequently used for cyberspace while its literal denotation derived from Latin is 'womb' or 'breeding female'. By situating the nuclear bomb or the lethal weapon in the matrix, films like *Cyborg II* and *Eve of Destruction* repeat the cultural fears of the – literally – explosive powers of female reproduction and sexuality (Springer 1996; see Ferreira's essay in this volume for feminist reworkings of the matrix in bio-art).

The shift from the hardware to the software cyborg in the 1990s allowed not only for a different image of masculinity, as I will argue below, but also opened up to a greater diversity of female cyborgs, like Ripley 8 (Sigourney Weaver) as a woman of steel or the humane cyborg Cash (Wynona Ryder) in *Alien Resurrection* (1997). *A.I.* (*Artificial Intelligence*, 2001) is peopled with male and female cyborgs who look quite similarly plastic in their present form, and who become completely gender-less in their futuristic forms. In films like *Gattaca* (1997), *Existenz* (1999) or *The Matrix* trilogy (1999–2003) the actors and actresses are made up to look alike in their androgynous appearance.

I want to argue that the image of the female cyborg of today has retained the erotic appeal of female beauty, but without the concomitant fears and anxieties concerning female sexuality or reproduction. In contemporary cyber culture, computer games have taken over much of the gendered imagery from Sci-Fi movies. In the *Tomb Raider* films, for example, Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie) is stunningly beautiful, but also invincibly strong. Although Lara Croft is technically speaking not a cyborg, she is unrealistically strong as a man/machine and can conquer every man and every machine in her personal quest for justice (Kennedy 2002). Her fitness and her phallic weapons make her an insuperable warrior. It is noteworthy that as erotic object, she is not available for the male characters in the film (Mikula 2004). She is even markedly independent and does not maintain any sexual relations. The combination of beauty, strength and independence has been the characteristic of film heroines and cyborgs since the 1990s (Tasker 1993; Walden 2004). Lara Croft is thus exemplary of the ambivalent woman's image in recent Sci-Fi movies: eroticised as a woman and masculinised as a cyborg.

Gender (m): Virile Looks

The hardware cyborgs of the 1980s like the Terminator and RoboCop were, of course, exaggeratedly masculine: hard, made of steel, and muscled. In short, they were phallic in a way that Tarzan could only approximate. Feminist critics have suggested that the hyper-masculinity of the cyborg points precisely to the fear and anxiety of the loss of manhood and thus reflects the anxieties of white men (Tasker 1993; Holland 1995). Jeffords (1994) described the development in American cinema of the 1990s where the white hero combines the superman icon with the image of the 'New Man', whose major role is to be the father and protector of his family. RoboCop, for example, is haunted by memories of his wife and child and quite overwhelmed by feelings when he finds out who he was before he became a cyborg. This leads to the comical complaint of the technicians in the lab that "the robot has emotional problems". Even the cyborg played by Schwarzenegger in *Terminator II* is seen by the main female character Sarah (Linda Hamilton) as an ideal father for her child who is more perfect than any male companion could be. The cyborg, then, becomes the unexpected image of the new family man[4].

The steel armour of masculinity also showed other signs of wear and rust. From the 1980s onwards there has been a distinct change in the visual representation of men in popular culture, in that the body became the object of the voyeuristic gaze. The male body has gradually become fetishised in visual culture in much the same way as women traditionally were in Hollywood cinema. While most critics have commented on the changing image of men in commercials or music videos (Simpson 1993; Hall 1997), I maintain that the same trend happened in the cyborg movie. The voyeuristic gaze does not only pertain to male models or singers, but also to the hyper-masculine cyborg whose body gets fragmented, objectified and eroticised.

Take for example the following scene from *Universal Soldier* (1992), in which a cyborg and a woman are fleeing from the enemy. She has to look for a computer chip in his body so that they cannot be traced. The cyborg, played by Jean-Claude van Damme, strips naked and asks her to check his body for "something hard". She is quite embarrassed and comments on his good physique, while the camera languishes on his impressive torso, glides across his biceps, revels in his hard nipples and zooms in on his leg. Looking down he asks her whether "that hard thing" belongs there and she coyly tells him that it is rather normal. Then she finds the chip in his leg, cuts it out, and faints at the gush of blood. The joke on the hard and erect penis recalls a scene in one of the few cyborg films made by a

4 This took a rather funny twist with Schwarzenegger as a nanny in *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) and a decidedly absurd turn with him as a pregnant woman in *Junior* (1994).

woman (Susan Seidelman), *Making Mr. Right* (1987), where the cyborg (John Malkovich) asks what his big penis is for. The scientists who constructed him answer not to worry because it is there to give him confidence.

Such – admittedly feeble – jokes point to the fragility of the cyborg's manhood that is simultaneously celebrated by the camera, eroticised for the spectator's gaze, and undermined by the narrative. As a rather physical genre of battle and action, Sci-Fi movies illustrate how the male body is equally the object of relentless visualization as the female body. Odd narrative motivations help to display the masculine, constructed, body-built, body in al its naked triumph, for example the Terminator landing nude on Earth from outer space in *Terminator 2* (1991), or the terrorist attack on Bruce Willis who happens to be in the bathroom, causing him to fight in his underpants throughout the first *Die Hard* movie (1988). While the trend was ambivalent at first, because it puts the male character in the position of the spectacle, a structurally feminine position, in the course of the last two decades the audience has grown more familiar with the scopophilic gaze at the male body as 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 1989), especially in the videoclips from music television.[5] Moreover, the development of the objectification and eroticisation of the male body fits perfectly with the wound-and-reparation scenes that I discussed above. As many a cyborg movie shows, the male cyborg can be eroticized by the camera and tortured in the very core of his masculinity, while retaining his virility. Contemporary images of men, even of male cyborgs, combine feminine attributes of beauty and vulnerability with macho characteristics of hard muscles and invincibility.[6]

The image of the male cyborg, then, has undergone some transformations. The shift from the hardware to the software cyborg, and from issues of the body to the mind, also contributed to a different image of masculinity. Hardware cyborgs of the 1980s were typically played by heavy bodybuilders like Schwarzenegger, Lundgren, Van Damme or Stallone, while software cyborgs of the 1990s are performed by less macho actors, like Keanu Reeves in *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) and in *The Matrix* trilogy (1999 – 2003), or Jude Law in *Gattaca* (1997), *Existenz* (1999) and *A.I.* (*Artificial Intelligence*, 2001).

Recently, visual culture seems to advance a renewed celebration of the man/machine. We already saw the happy man/car cyborgs of the Renault and Citroën commercials. In 2008, several blockbusters were launched that show men perfectly in synch with the machines that they build for themselves, and eventually incorporate into themselves: the Sci-Fi films *Iron Man* and *Speed Racer* and the fantasy film *Batman*; *The Dark Knight. Speed Racer* even imitates the car commercials in that the main character becomes one with the T180 that he drives. The movies continue the by now well-established tradition of men fusing with their machines, and they are remarkably upbeat about that symbiosis.[7] While *The Dark Knight* may be as dark as its title in its treatment of the morals of contemporary politics, it is certainly not dwelling in the vaults of anti-scientific dystopia. It seems to me that contemporary visual culture full-heartedly embraces the figure of the cyborg.

5 As Mark Simpson (1994) has argued, the eroticised look was initially taken from homosexual culture. He introduced the term 'metrosexual' to indicate that heterosexual men can no longer permit to be careless about their looks and are allowed and required to be as narcissistic as women. As Simpson argues, the metrosexual mediates his masculinity. See 'Here come the mirror men', in: *The Independent*, November 15, 1994: www.marksimpson.com

6 Examples of such 'metrosexuals' in popular culture abound, from Daniel Craig as James Bond in *Casino Royale* (2006) to the Armani ads of David Beckam.

Becoming-cyborg

In this article I have traced reconfigurations and remediations of the human body through the figure of the cyborg in Sci-Fi movies. I want to conclude by speculating how images of the cyborg in visual culture spill over into social practices of 'real' human beings. In my view, there are at least four, overlapping and interlocking, practices that are inspired by the cyborg figuration: the military, sports, fitness and cosmetic surgery.

Firstly, cyborg imagery has recently become familiar with a global TV-audience through the gear of soldiers in the wars of Irak and Afghanistan. The western troops look uncannily like cyborgs from Sci-Fi movies or computer games. Secondly, while the bodies of soldiers are enhanced through gear and technology, sports is a terrain where the actual physiques of men and women have become enhanced beyond the standard boundaries of the human body. The recurring stories of doping suggest that the bodies of sportsmen and women are indeed artificially improved. Commercials for sportswear play into the cyborg imagery, as for example in the ad 'Puma Football Until Then' where the football players look like animals with cyborg legs that turn into Puma sneakers. This image is in turn taken from the handicapped runner Aimee Mullins, often dubbed 'cyborg', who has become famous for her prosthetic legs, both as a sportswoman and as a model and actress.

The third example of cyborg imagery leaping over into real life is related to sports: the practice of fitness. From school kids to presidents, from housewives to managers, from celebrities to princes/ses, affluent people across the globe jog, do sports, or go to the gym, to keep fit and slim. A fit, strong and muscled body, then, is no longer the prerogative of a bodybuilder who plays a cyborg. Especially in visual culture, the body shape of actors and actresses, singers and performers,

7 See Richard Corliss' review of *Iron Speed* and *Speed Racer* in *Time*, May 19, 2008: 57 – 58.

has changed considerable in the last few decades. Bodies have become much more fit and muscled over the last few decades, as can be easily traced through the range of actors that played James Bond or the Batman from the 1960s till now. The positive image of the cyborg (m/f) as strong and sexy is in keeping with popular culture of today celebrating fitness and sexiness. The new standard of beauty fits in with the fourth cultural practice that makes contemporary men and women more posthuman: cosmetic surgery. No longer an exclusive privilege for the rich and famous, cosmetic surgery is by now established as a huge industry to keep up an image of fitness, beauty and youth for men and women alike. TV-shows like *Extreme Makeover* play into the desire of people to alter and transform their face and body and eradicate any signs of wear and tear (Sobchack 2004).

What links these four social practices together, is the contemporary belief that the human body can be controlled, altered and perfected. In that belief, and in the process of incorporating technologies of warfare, sports, fitness or cosmetic surgery, humans are becoming cyborgs.

Conclusion

Having explored the cyborg in Sci-Fi movies and having traced some cultural practices of enhancing and altering the human body, I conclude that the cyborg is no longer a figure that instils fear or anxiety. Rather, the figure of the cyborg points to deep-seated desires of the post-human to fuse with science and technologies. This is not only apparent in the popularity of the cyborg in visual culture, but also in the practices of everyday life. Human beings of the twenty-first century take control of their own destinies by entering intimate relationships with the machines that they build and construct. Thus, they are posthuman in the sense that the body is no longer a category of nature that can be kept separated from culture, i. e. from science and technology. The social and cultural practices of the military, sports, fitness and cosmetic surgery show the extent to which the scientific imaginary has penetrated the self-fashioning of human beings as cyborgs, male and female alike. The shiny couture of the cyborg becomes us all too well.

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