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The (d)evolution of the cyberwoman?

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Organizing in Action Nets

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Abstract

In this text, we examine Donna Haraway's idea of a liberating potential of cyborgization first in the subsequent versions of *Stepford Wives* (the novel, the 1975 movie, and the 2004 movie), and second in the evolution of the character of a cyberwoman, from the book, *Do androids dream electric sheep?* (1977), through its film version, *Blade Runner* (1983), to William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Idoru* (1996), ending with Trinity from *Matrix* trilogy. We show that cyborgization does not automatically denote liberalization; and suggest that the much greater popularity of *Matrix* films compared to the intellectual projects of William Gibson show that stereotypes and strong plots survive, finding ever new forms of expression. We end the paper pointing out the relevance of popular culture models for work in contemporary homes and other workplaces.

Keywords: popular culture, cyborgization, cyberfiction, gender

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Introduction

> A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. . . . The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs – creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted (Haraway, 1991, 150).

Following Haraway's reasoning, we turn to science fiction novels and films in our search for female cyborgs, knowing, however, that their presence and presentation is complex and changes over time. These developments are important to understand as, in our opinion, popular culture re-presents and shapes the actual behavior of people, not the least in organizations (Czarniawska and Rhodes, 2006). Cyborgs, we claim, can be figures of liberation; vehicles of tradition and stereotyping; or, in Haraway's words, "a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource" (p.151). Whereas Haraway fully perceives the horrific aspect of cyborgs (after all, they are "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" p.152), she does not predict their role as stabilizers of the old world order.

In our analysis, we use examples widely known and popular in Europe. We begin in the late 1960s, because, as it has been pointed out by the Mexican literary critic Naief Yehya (2001/2004), until the late 1950s, science fiction proffered defence against the threatening Other not only through recourse to arms, but also through a confirmation of the value of heterosexual romance and matrimony. It was not enough to eliminate the monstrous spiders, stop the deadly rays, or kill the horrible aliens. The chaos was conquered only when the hero could embrace the woman he loved and promise her that everything will be alright from now on.

That model, continues Yehya, became obsolete in the 1960s, when women took the pill and went to work. The sexual revolution changed life and fiction, creating many more options for women. Whereas there is no doubt about the multiplication of the options, we have doubts that these options were as many and as revolutionary as it might have seemed in the late 1960s, where we begin our explorations.

Women as (household) technology[1]

> The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polls based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household (Haraway, 1991, p. 151).

Machine dreams

In 1988 the independent German film director Peter Krieg made a film essay called *Machine Dreams*. Krieg's films are cinematic dissertations; he has also made one on money, and one on chaos theory. *Machine Dreams* contained a thesis on the genesis and development of technology – a rich field material – and quotes from scientific literature delivered by the authors. By the end, it constructed a proper theory about machines – as dreams and nightmares of men.

Peter Krieg's theory of technology unfolds as follows: men constructed machines to escape their biological nature (of which women play a large part). This technical "second nature" brought them more disappointment than relief as, says Krieg, projected dreams and nightmares are only apt to return. Not all is lost, however. The disappointment with second nature brought to the fore an unexpected gain: a better understanding of human condition – including the role of women in the fate of humanity – something that could be called a third, or "reflexive" nature.

Within this general thesis or plot are several subplots, situated historically. One of the main drives behind the construction of machines was to relieve humans of heavy menial work; once successful, they moved to mechanizing of lighter menial work, like household work. Another drive was to protect humans from threat; and as men feel threaten by women, replacing women as sex objects with sex machines was the next step. If one develops this logic to its absurd consequence, housewives can be seen as a combination of household machines and sex object. Ergo, *Stepford Wives*.

Stepford Wives, *the book*

The topic of Ira Levin's book from 1972 is, in our reading, the rising feminism, or women's liberation, as it was then called. It begins with a quote from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*:

> Today the combat takes a different shape; instead of wishing to put man in a prison, woman endeavors to escape from one; she no longer seeks to drag

[1] This section is based on Czarniawska and Gustavsson, 2005.

> him into the realms of immanence but to emerge, herself, into the light of transcendence. Now the attitude of the males creates a new conflict: it is with a bad grace that the man lets her go.

There are two main points to the book, and Ira Levin proved to be right about both of them. One is that men will not lightly accept women's liberation – especially their liberation from household duties, including sexual services. They will fight back. The other point is that this liberation is inevitable. They would have to kill women – and/or turn them into robots – to stop it. Technology does not play an important part in the book; it is merely a prop necessary for the plot. The novel is almost luddite in its suggestion that high-tech companies (among others) might be polluting the water with poisonous waste.

The Allen & Unwin homepage offers a following synopsis:

> Photographer Joanne Eberhart has just moved home to Stepford with her family, but for some reason she is having a lot of difficulty making new friends. As far as Joanne is concerned, there's something peculiar about the women of Stepford. They don't have time for a cup of coffee and certainly not for a chat: there's too much cleaning and housework to be done. And even though it's the swinging sixties, feminism seems to have passed every one of them by. As Joanne's isolation grows, she begins to think she and her friend Bobbie might be the only liberated women left in Stepford. But when Bobbie very suddenly turns into one of the Stepford Wives too, Joanne begins to fear that something sinister is at work – and that her own days of freedom might be numbered too. (ww.allenandunwin.com, 050326).

In the process of investigating the strange events at Stepford, Bobbie and Joanne discover that the docile housewives used to belong to a very powerful women's association, and that the strange events leading to the formation of the Men's Association began after Betty Friedan gave a talk at women's association meeting.

Levin's book actually reverts to the plot of Karel Capek's play, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots),* from 1920 – the one that introduced the word *robot i*nto modern English. Capek's robots had two interesting traits. The first was that they were synthetic, i.e. chemically produced, being basically a simplification introduced by an engineer by the name of Rossum (in Czech, Reasson) Jr. to his father's discovery of an alternative (to God's) way of producing life. The second is that they came in two sexes – a necessity for the plot's resolution, in which robots discover love, and thereby procreation.[2]

[2] "Although the term today conjures up images of clanking metal contraptions, Capek's Robots (always capitalized) are more accurately the product of what we would now call genetic engineering." (Site by Dennis G. Jerz, accessed February, 18, 2005).

Levin follows young Rossum's reasoning: too much complication is a problem that must be resolved. His innovation lies, however, in relocating the conflict: it is not between robots and people or between industrialists and workers – it is between men and women. In Capek's play, the robots win; in Levin's book, the women lose, but both endings are absurd and are intended as such. The purpose is to force the spectators or the readers to reflect over issues that might prove disturbing.

The novel is very short, which probably prompted the subsequent filmmakers to extend it, at the same time giving them enough space to do it the way they preferred.

Stepford Wives, *the movie, 1975*

Here is Amazon's synopsis of the 1975 movie:

> Ira Levin's scary novel about forced conformity in a small Connecticut town made the *Stepford Wives* a compelling 1975 thriller. Katharine Ross stars as a city woman who moves with her husband to Stepford and is startled by how perpetually happy many of the local women seem to be. Her search for an answer reveals a plot to replace troublesome real wives with more accommodating fake ones (not unlike the alien takeover in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*). The closer she gets to the truth, the more danger she faces – not to mention the likelihood that the men in town intend to replace her as well. Screenwriter William Goldman (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*) and director Bryan Forbes (*King Rat*) made this a taut, tense semi-classic with a healthy dose of satiric wit (*Tom Keogh, www.amazon.com, 050326).*

There is no doubt about the satirical intent in portraying the USA obsessed by commercials, expressed by commercials, and modeled by commercials. It is the two other themes – technology and women – which are treated in a way that provokes doubts. The movie has a clear luiddite tone to it: anything of importance is made manually, including the murder of the "real" women. Men dealing with technology (unlike other men who are merely using it) are extremely sinister; the second the viewers meet the ex-Disney man, it is obvious that he is up to no good, but this exaggeration is not grotesque (as it will become in the next version of the movie). Computer and various lab companies have sinister, black-and-white signboards, unlike everything else in the movie, which is colorful.

And then the film's women! By the end of the movie, it is difficult to combat a feeling that they get what they deserve. The women in the movie, including the three resisting liberals, seem to be intellectually handicapped, or at least made so by their love of their spouses or/and children. Why should Charmaine, the tennis star, fully aware that her husband does not love her, decide all of a sudden to go for a love weekend with him? Why should Bobby,

fully aware that those love weekends do not bode well, agree to go on one with her husband?

These are perhaps not questions that should be asked at a movie belonging to the science fiction genre. But within this genre, it is the main character – Joanna – who acts most surprisingly. First, the two Helper figures – her ex-boyfriend and the psychologist – are introduced into the plot for no apparent reason; they seem either unaware or unwilling to understand the plea for help. In Levin's book, there is no boyfriend, and the therapist is convinced that Joanna is a neurotic with no need for immediate help. Perhaps this is the director's twist – a breach of narrative rules to torment the viewer as the movie changes from science fiction into a gothic horror: long corridors, high vaults, heavy storms at night, and all that. As a result, the main character changes from a resourceful woman to a moron, walking in the pouring rain with her hair loose (given that it reaches her waist, wouldn't it be more practical to tuck it in or at least braid it?). She has guts enough to hit her husband over the head with a golf club (and he has brains enough to lie to her, even as he lies in a puddle of blood), but then she walks onto the grounds of the mysterious Men's Association (her children could have told her to get help first) with her mouth permanently open, and at the sight of the Disney man, the golf club simply slips out of her hands. Considering that the woman is clearly out of her wits, perhaps the ending is more benevolent than it might be at the first glance.

Once this skeptical thought seeps into the mind of the viewer, the perception of the character of Joanne undergoes critical scrutiny. She is, supposedly, a photographer: that is, she has a heavy camera with a zoom lens with her, and a developing room at home. Alas, the galleries do not want her work, until one day she starts photographing children at play – what a nice feminine topic! – and there she succeeds, or seems to be on the verge of succeeding. Again, this development is not faithful to Levin's book.

Is the moronization of the main character an unintended slip resulting from succumbing to the horror genre (the open mouth and the long hair!), or is it the film's warning to women who might be robotizing themselves without realizing it? Hard to say. The movie has dated much more quickly than has Levin's book, but perhaps pictures date quicker than words. At any rate, Levin's point concerning women's liberation seems to be lost, or perhaps is overdramatized to the point of the grotesque, and is therefore unconvincing.

Stepford Wives, *the movie, 2004*

The next generation of *Stepford Wives* (DVD 2004) is a movie made in a time when Levin's predictions have been fulfilled. Women's liberation has happened and technology came to the fore in society, for both men and women. The points that Levin has made cannot be made again, and the reviewers point it out:

> An all-star cast remakes the 1975 socio-political horror flick, *The Stepford Wives*. After being fired as president of a television network, Joanna (Nicole Kidman) has a nervous breakdown, prompting her husband Walter (Matthew Broderick) to take her to a simple Connecticut town called Stepford to recuperate. But Stepford is a little strange: The husbands congregate at a closed-doors men's club, while the wives – all in bright summer frocks and air-brushed smiles – exercise to keep their hourglass figures and cook endless pastries. Joanna, along with new arrivals Bobbie (Bette Midler) and Roger (the very funny Roger Bart), soon discover that the mastermind of Stepford (Christopher Walken) has used cybernetics to "perfect" womankind. *The Stepford Wives* has some satirical zingers (from sneaky screenwriter Paul Rudnick), but the basic idea has lost a lot of gas since 1975 (Bret Fetzer, www.amazon.com, *050326).*

The new point the movie makes is more philosophical and time-universal: perfection is not attractive. The time difference from the original is honored by making the main perpetrator fascinated – nay, obsessed – with an old-fashioned image of perfection.

Stepford Wives 2004 has become much sharper, more distinct, and more politically correct than the movie from 1975. First of all, the satirical edge is clear and well achieved through the level of acting. The opening sequences consist of many quotes from actual commercials of the 1960s, rather than merely alluding to them like the 1975 movie did. Also, there is a very funny, almost too-close-for-comfort scene concerning the "real life" TV, of the Temptation Island kind. Second, the motivation of Stepford men becomes more convincing – in the 1975 they were a bunch of weird technos with mean ideas, but in 2004 they are all less successful husbands of successful wives. Third, the technology is complex and important and, at the genius end of it, there stands a woman. (There are some small lapses like the fact that although the women are not killed but brain-engineered, they seem to be able to put their hands in fire with no damage – or perhaps this only applies to Bette Midler because she is Bette Midlerr!) Fourth, the idea of a house-machine is made equal because a gay partner is also remade into such model. Fifth, and most important, the 2004 version is close in its main thesis to Peter Krieg's. Technology is used to rid human life of imperfection ("biological nature"); but the key to happiness lies in accepting imperfections, not in getting rid of them. All together, it makes possible a happy ending that agrees well with Hollywood – as do all gothic endings.

But the topic of "women-as-technology" is an interesting one, although it does not attract much attention from the reviewers. This is an ancient topic, after all. If Eve was made of the Adam's rib, women are like Dolly sheep, cloned from a bit of man, to serve him in life. It is a matter of accessible technology whether they are made of metal and springs, like a long series of antique docks shown in Peter Krieg's film; of plastic and computers, like

Japanese robots in the same film; or are brain-engineered, like in *Stepford Wives* 2004. One topic that neither of the two *Stepford Wives* versions dared to raise was that of female children: were they worth raising with care if they were to turn into kitchen-and-bedroom robots sooner or later? Levin, however, did ask this question in his book.

The 2004 version of *Stepford Wives*, with all its Hollywood simplifications, might still be aspiring to revive Karol Capek's own conclusion: there are no easy solutions, as everybody is right in their own way:

> Be these people either Conservatives or Socialists, Yellows or Reds, the most important thing is – and that is the point I want to stress – that all of them are right in the plain and moral sense of the word. . . . I ask whether it is not possible to see in the present social conflict of the world an analogous struggle between two, three, five equally serious verities and equally generous idealisms? I think it is possible, and that is the most dramatic element in modern civilization, that a human truth is opposed to another human truth no less human, ideal against ideal, positive worth against worth no less positive, instead of the struggle being as we are so often told, one between noble truth and vile selfish error." (R.U.R._ supplement, p.11; http://www.u.arizona.edu/~gmcmilla/talk.html, 050218).

Thus whereas the picture of frightening women of success in 2004 *Stepford Wives* can be seen as a postfeminist message (Modleski, 1991), in Capek's perspective it could merely be giving everyone a voice – women who "can do it better" and men who feel henpecked – and showing that those who want perfection are dangerous, even they "want only everybody's good". Capek's vision is truly of the postmodern world, with its clash of idealisms rather than disenchantment.

Actual household technology and robotics

The dominant impression is that the novelist and the filmmakers did not know much about the actual household (however, Levin may be absolved because the book does not show it – only speaks about it). Thus it is perhaps not surprising that they reproduce various kind of stereotypical thinking about the organization of a household.

The 2004 movie opens with a commercia, 1950s' style, in which the new machines are playing the main role. In this way, the movie establishes a historical background alluding to the rationalization of house work in a truly Tayloristic spirit. In Stepford, however, there is no need for the new machines because women are machines. At the same time, the traditional role of a housewife who can do anything is preserved.

The machinization of the household held the same double message at the time of its introduction. As Boel Berner (1996) points out, housewives in the rationalized society were supposed to acquire new technical competence, setting them a par with their technically minded husbands. But were the machines intended to keep women at home, or were they supposed to free women to assume jobs in the public sphere?

Stepford husbands were clearly not afraid that their robotic wives would turn against them, like robots in *Terminator, Blade Runner,* and *RoboCop*. The traditional assumption that people control the robots and not the other way around is not challenged. The robotic wives are fully directed towards productivity: their cleaning, baking, and cooking excel all Stakhanovite standards.[3] They are forever busy with their duties and have no time for anything else. A talk group initiated by Joanna in the 1975 movie provokes anxiety, as women are torn away from their kitchens. This idea is a clear allusion to the 18th century woman's ideal, where the woman "was the organizer of the household, but not its master" (Berner, 1996: 122). This anachronism is absent from the Levin's novel.

In the 2004 version, the "real" women left the housework to men to be able to pursue their careers without a thought of family and home. The modern Joanna takes for granted the existence of a hi-tech "smart home". She takes also for granted that her husband knows how to use the controls. However, the woman of the 1950s and the 1960s has had an important position in the household: she might not have been a master, but she was irreplaceable. When Joanna loses her job, she has no power platform whatsoever, and unable to answer her husband's accusation that it may be she who is defective. This is why Joanna decides to give the "Stepford strategy" a try, but her unfamiliarity with the household technology turns it to her foe. The talking fridge reminds her of her shortcomings and the security system refuses to let her in.

In the 2004 version, it is a woman (Claire Wellington, played by Glenn Close) who is responsible for the robotization of the women. She thinks that everything was better before women left the household and their traditional roles. She used to be a talented researcher in the field of brain surgery and cybertechnology, and she applies her expertise to turn back the clock. Intentionally or not, this is yet another way in which the movie shows that women's familiarity with technology is a serious threat to the patriarchs.

Are the "household machine dreams" a thing of the past, a historical curiosity? Probably not. Still, there is another part of machine dreams: cyborgs and androids as wives, lovers, and work colleagues.

[3] On September 1, 1935, the newspaper *Pravda*, organ of the Communist party in USSR, reported that a Donbas miner named Stakhanov had extracted 102 tons of coal in a six-hour shift, exceeding the norm more than fivefold. Thus began the Stakhanovite "movement" -- a campaign urging workers to emulate this and other alleged feats of super-productivity. Yehya (2001/2004) claims that a cyborg – indefatigable and politically incorruptible – was always the ideal of a Soviet worker.

Technology as women

> By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. Thus cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics... The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. (Haraway, 1991, p.150)

In this part of the paper, we focus more on the development of cyborg-type of *characters* in science fiction novels and films; the plot, with one exception, is less relevant for our analysis, and will be relegated to footnotes. Also, we follow Haraway's idea of a cyborg: a hybrid of machine and organism, with a symbolic meaning. This definition may not be the one preferred by the authors or directors. Philip K. Dick (1995: 211) went to great lengths to explain that his androids or replicants were not cyborgs, because they are made with the specific purpose of imitating humans. His point was that although the border between a machinized human and humanized machine might be almost non-existent, its crossing carries an enormous symbolic meaning. For him, it was filled with fear; for Haraway, it could be filled with hope. We try to accomodate both views, without wishing to promote any strict definition of a cyborg.

Rachael in Blade Runner (1968/1992)[4]

Almost at the same time that Levin mused about the possible consequences of the emerging feminist movement, Philip Dick wrote a novel that later became a cult movie. It seems to us that Dick does not take any position on feminism – rather, his book is an expression of misanthropy – or at least disappointment with the human race – presented from a male perspective, but without much sympathy for males, either. The only true human feeling that his characters preserved is love for animals, but it is hard to say whether it is a symbol for the nostalgia for the past life or a status symbol – living animals are extremely rare.

Androids are so close to humans that, indeed, the main problem is to how to tell them apart. Rachael, the android who lures and ensnares Rick

[4] "Do androids dream of electric sheep?", the original title of Philip Dick's novel (1968) on which the movie was based, depicts a gloomy postwar landscape, where most of the people left Earth to live in colonies on other planets. The authorities try to entice the remaining "normal" people (those damaged by the radioactive dust are not wanted) to emigrate, offering them androids as personal servants. But some androids rebel and return to Earth, looking for the means to prolong their four-year life span. A special police hunts and eliminates them. The answer to the question in the title is negative: androids do not dream of electric sheep, but humans dream of real animals, of which there are almost none left, and of the Earth as it used to be.

Deckard, the bounty hunter, under the pretext of helping him hunt androids like herself (she is the property of the corporation producing them) can be best presented in contrast to Iran, Rick's human wife. Rachael is smart, energetic ("great intellect, ability to accomplish much", p.86) and extremely attractive; Iran wallows in self-inflicted depressions in-between the TV shows. It is Rachael who has the sympathy of the reader for most of the novel.[5] This sympathy lasts until Rachael reveals itself to be a stereotypical woman, after all: she has a crammed-full purse, like women do (at least according to Deckard), she boasts about her deceits, second-hand Mata Hari as she is, and she is jealous. She kills Rick's goat because she realizes that it is his greatest love (next comes his wife, then her) – the concept that was used again in *Fatal attraction* (1987), when Glen Close (Alex Forest) cooks Michael Douglas' (Dan Gallagher) pet rabbit. As Deckard himself says, "The idea is old-fashioned" (p.170).

Perhaps there is a hint of a warning against women who are too active and independent, android-cold, like there was in *Stepford wives*, but the sorry persona of Iran is hardly an attractive counterpart. The concept of android, however, permits Dick to start exploring themes similar to those suggested by Haraway. Will the human race go forever in circles of self-perpetuated stereotypes? Does one need a final catastrophe and the shock of androids to start questioning the platitudes of our common sense?

Ridley Scott's movie from 1983, cinematically accomplished as it is, changes all this. Dick's novel has the atmosphere evoking Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979); in *Blade Runner, Star Wars* meets *Metropolis* (the action is moved from San Francisco to Los Angeles). There are plenty of living animals (a dove to symbol the last android's soul); Deckard is not married, and does not own either a goat or an electric sheep. Android women (call replicants in the movie) are portrayed as sex objects even though they are primarily designed for political homicide and military service. Rachael is their improved version – an upper class candidate for a "trophy wife"; she is a pretty doll (played by Sean Young), always dressed to the hilt, in stark contrast to Rachael from the novel, always dressed for action. Accused that he made Rachael too beautiful, Ridley Scott replied: "If this patriarchal technology could create artificial women, then they'd surely design them to be young and sexually attractive... I don't agree with it... But that would be the reality of this civilization" (Sammon, 1996:383).

In the end, the point seems to be that love is as rare as a unicorn, although the interaction between Deckard (Harrison Ford) and Rachael is more evocative of rape.[6] Indeed, Haraway is not unaware of a possibility that

[5] Like her android friends, the opera singer Luba Luft and Ingrid Baty, and somewhat less, like her double Pris – but then they are in a kind of a competition.

[6] We are not alone in this interpretation: The producer, Michael Deeley, always thought of that "so-called love scene as 'the rape in the corridor'" (Sammon, 1996:164).

the cyborg world might be about ”the final appropriation of women’s bodies in a masculinist orgy of war” (p. 154). In contrast, the novel’s main point concerned the big issue of human empathy and solidarity: is it an illusion produced by a collective mind? is it uniquely human? can it be extended to machines?

Molly in Neuromancer (1984)[7]

Molly is a character in *Neuromancer*, William Gibson’s first novel, which gave birth to many ideas, including the Matrix (later explored and exploited by the Wachowski brothers), cyberspace, and a long line of non-stereotypical female characters. Here is Molly introducing herself to the ”software cowboy”, Case:

> She shook her head. He realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag. The fingers curled around the fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy. The nails looked artificial. (...)
> ‘Molly, Case, My name’s Molly. I’m collecting you for the man I work for. Just wants to talk, is all. Nobody wants to hurt you. (...) ‘Cept I do hurt people sometimes, Case. I guess it’s just the way I am wired.’ She wore tight black gloveleather jeans and a bulky black jacket cut from some matte fabric that seemed to absorb light. (...) She held out her hands, palms up, the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four-centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails (Gibson, 1984: 36-37).

Molly can see in the dark, and can read the time from the a readout chipped into her optic nerve. She uses her blades to hurt, but also to cut a bit of herring when hungry. She has microchannel amplifiers behind her lower front teeth.

Molly was the first female cyberpunk character,[8] and she touched both the heads and the hearts of many a female reader, the present authors included. Extremely clever, a perfect employee (most positive characters in Gibson have to work for money for lesser human beings), she nevertheless has her own judgment. She is a ”working girl” with ”professional pride”. She performs the most ambitious and dangerous tasks, of which Case (the main character, ”a software cowboy”), sitting at his console, learns vicariously, and sometimes

[7] In the story, the twin Artificial Intelligences, Wintermute and Neuromancer, fight for autonomy, each with a different program for its future independence. They compete in enrolling various characters, among them the software cowboy who must exchange his crucial body parts that have been poisoned and a cyborg woman who needs to earn her living.

[8] Molly appeared first in ”Johnny Mnemonic”, but Gibson, who wrote the script for the movie under the same title, changed her name in the film to Jane, signaling a difference in the characters.

painfully. A Turkish/Armenian man is suspicious of her (”In Turkey, women are still women...” p.111), but he fails and she puts him in his place. Although she earned her own place in a costly way and has a terrible secret and a tragic love story in her past, she is now above all the men who want to hurt or exploit her.

Molly dictates the conditions in her relationships with people and takes sex when she wants it; she is devoid of sentimentality but not of sentiments. She might be falling in love with Case, but Case may still be in love with Linda, the girl-next-door in white sneakers, although Linda is dead. So Molly leaves him with a note saying ”HEY ITS OKAY BUT ITS TAKING THE EDGE OF MY GAME (...) ITS THE WAY IM WIRED I GUESS”.

In short, Molly seems to be a very good example of a Haraway’s cyborg. The only criticism we have against her creator is that, considering that her leg is broken at the hip for the most part of the action, she could not continue kicking things around her, no matter how powerful the drugs she is using. We do understand the symbolism of kicking, however (see Trinity below).

The egalitarian toughness and rudeness of Molly, like that of other cyberpunks, made her politically attractive for the feminists (Joan Gordon, 1991). Cyberpunks represent an extension of the radical thought of the 1980s, also in the sense of the distance they take from the nostalgic Utopias of feminist science fiction, like that of Marge Piercy. As a genre, ”cyberpunk is covert feminist science fiction” (Gordon, 1991:196) and Molly is ”simply a human being in women’s clothing” (p 198) and her toughness ”represents no female principle, just a human coping hechanism” (p 199).

As an employee, Molly is an interesting topic, but it is not connected to her gender or her cyborgness, but the way in which Gibson continues to depict the economy in his not-so-fictitious world: a few transnationals; some anachronistic family clans, like Tessier-Ashpol in this novel, who ”survive” due to cryonics; and crowds of highly talented individuals, some evil, other straight, like Case and Molly, streetwise, cynical towards their employers, but loyal to one another, and hopelessly addicted to their professions. Cyberpunk, says Veronica Hollinger is about the breakdown of the divide between the artificial and the natural, the human and the machine (1991:204). At its best, as in *Neuromancer*, that breakdown also includes a breakdown between the ”natural” opposition between men and women.

Idoru

Rei Toei (*Idoru*, *All tomorrow’s parties)* is not a cyborg, but neither is she a robot. She is an idoru – the reverse of cyborg, one could say. Not a human with machine parts, but a machine producing an effect of humanness: an idol-singer, ”a personality-construct, a congeries of software agents, the creation of information-designers, ... a ‘synthespian’” (Gibson, 1996: 92). She is going to marry Rez, a

human half-Irish singer, which worries both Rez's fans and Rez's managers. The latter employ Laney, a person who is able to do pattern recognition, to check out the situation. He expects an idoru to look like a synthesis of Japanese female media stars, but his expectations fail:

> Her black hair, rough-cut and shining, brushed pale bare shoulders as she turned her head. She had no eyebrows, and both her lids and lashes seemed to have been dusted with something white, leaving her dark pupils in stark contrast (Gibson, 1996: 175).

But, if one happens to have infrared video unit glasses, as a blind man in her company had, one would see a big aluminum thermos bottle: idoru was a hologram produced by that thermos when plugged in. She is also, her constructor explains, a desiring machine, put together out of aggregates of subjective desire, an architecture of articulated longing. And her experience of the world, processed into her dreams, produces videos that attract the fans. The videos are becoming a central part of the popular culture, and "popular culture ... is the testbed of our futurity", says the constructor, or perhaps Gibson himself.

Rei Toei is not at all like Molly – she is a dream, everybody's dream, men and women alike. She is not an employee – she employs. Being a thing, she escapes being anybody's property. And what characterizes her, apart from her beauty and sensitivity, is her forever growing complexity. Thus, as we learn in *All tomorrow's parties* (1999),[9] which is straight continuation of *Idoru,* she develops beyond Rez and his narcissistic ideas of a celebrity marriage.

We also learn in the second novel that she who was "a Japanese girl" in the first novel, is now one of the examples of "hybrid vigor, but saying which races had been mixed was beyond him", thinks Rydell, the ex-cop, after having activated the "thermos" (1999: 153). What one can see is a hologram; but she is real, she claims. And for all her beauty and glamour, she is acutely sensitive to the world's poverty, without making it a political manifesto. As we said, she is everybody's dream: "she had been designed for (...) the world to fall in love with. As the amplified reflection of desire, she was a waking dream, a love object sprung from an approximation of the global mass consciousness" (p.164).

What can be a fate of such global love object? Gibson saved her from the strong plot of marrying the country singer and living with him ever after

[9] The plot evolve around Laney and his talent for pattern recognition which is caused by experiments conducted on him when in orphanage. It turns out that another person submitted himself to the same treatment willingly, to be able to control the world (via mass media and chain stores), and he becomes Laney's main opponent, while idoru becomes Laney's ally. Two minor characters known from earlier books, Rydell (the cop) and Chevette (the bike messenger, raised on the Bridge) assist the developments (on the side of the good guys), and fall in love, out of it and in again. A Max-von-Sydow-type is a perfect killer, driven by the pain of the loss of his first love, and under the influence of idoru he switches from the bad to the good side, etc.

(even if the "ever after" was meant as an ironic necromancy, but the machine dreams are about immortality, after all). She must be universally accessible. The book ends when the global chain, Lucky Dragon, installs in its store the Lucky Dragon Nanofax,[10] which can reproduce the matter at any branch of their chain throughout the world. While the manager is planning to reproduce a gold statue of the Lucky Dragon, Rei Toei sneaks in and reproduces herself – naked – to every Lucky Dragon in the world. (She always materializes naked and then takes on clothes that fit her environment. Travels light, so to say). In this way, she thwarts the plan of a global capitalist to take over the world through control of nanotechnology.

Readers (at least these readers) might sometimes feel that Gibson does not know what to do with his creation. As he says himself, she was "an emergent system, a self continuously being iterated from experiential input" (1999: 163) – like all of us, actually. And this is exactly what is attractive about Rei Toei – that she is not readymade, finished, and following a determined and recognizable path. She is not Molly's replacement, but a complement. Molly is like us, only better equipped; Rei Toei is the symbol of our desires, the cyborgs' dream.

Trinity in Matrix[11]

The appearance of Trinity in *Matrix* was hailed with admiration by many female viewers, the present authors included. When she is removing the scorpion-bug from Neo's belly, and her colleague tells her "You are losing it", she says "I'm not", and we hear an expert confident in her skills. When Neo protests that he will go alone to free Morpheus, she says "I am a high ranking officer on this ship". Yet soon (or at least by the second movie, *Matrix Reloaded*) doubts began to creep in. How is it possible that Trinity, using the same fight techniques as Neo and Morpheus, needs to be constantly rescued when fighting alone? Then one remembers the early signs: Trinity bringing Neo his dinner on a tray (which the spectator takes as a joke, cued by another person in the movie who jokes about it), and the helicopter mishap, when Neo for the first time calls her "Trini"(! soon abbreviated even worse, to "Trin") in *The Matrix*.

[10] Nanofaxes exist, though, and were in use for at least a few years before being described in the novel. The technology is called stereolithography, and it is used to create a three-dimensional plastic model from a three-dimensional computer-aided design (CAD) drawing. The machines cost about $250,000 and the polymer is about $800 per gallon. The providers of this information (http://www.technovelgy.com/ct/content.asp?Bnum=112) remind the readers that computers no more powerful than a $5 calculator once cost millions of dollars.

[11] The machines conquered the world and enslaved the humans, who live their lives in the illusion of a free world. Some machines, however, were of an opinion that a peaceful cooperation of humans and machines was a better idea, and liberated some of the humans, who started to organize resistance. In what seems like a perpetual war between the machines and free people, comes a prophecy that The One will come and liberate them all.

In *Matrix Reloaded*, she fares better in driving a bike (after a crash course, like with the helicopter), and she saves the plan; but Neo saves her life, which is only fair because she saved his in the first movie. However, Trinity saved Neo's life by the sheer power of her love, whereas he saves her by removing a bullet and giving her a heart massage, with his bare hands. (The best cue she gets in this film is "Excuse me?!" when Persephone demands that Neo kisses her as he kisses Trinity, in exchange for the Keymaker that is imprisoned by Persephone's evil husband, Merovignan.)

The third movie, *Matrix Revolutions*, begins hopefully again. Trinity wins Neo from Merovignan through deadly blackmail, and engages in some skillful driving, although driving in this part is dedicated to Niobe, the ship commander. But by the end there is no doubt left: Trinity dies the death of a proper woman, sacrificing herself for her man (who, as men tend to do, is on a mission to save the world), her (almost) last words being "I've done all I could do". In this light, even the interpretation of the saving act in the first movie changes: rather than alluding to the resurrection of Christ by the trinity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Bassham, 2002: 113), the resurrection of Neo can be seen as salvation "by the love of the good woman", whereas the resurrection of Trinity was advanced surgery.

Nor is our reading idiosyncratic. As Carolyn Korsmeyer put it,

> ... [Trinity's] actions embody the intimate side of trust. It is no accident that this role is given to a woman, for the tender aspect of touch is associated with both eroticism and maternal care, and since Trinity is the only female sexual presence in the script, these roles fall to her. (Evidently in their efforts to inspire doubt about the certainty of sense experience, the film makers forgot to doubt gender stereotypes) (2002: 52).

And finally the pitiless analysis by Cynthia Freeland, with which we completely agree:

> ... after [the) opening gambits, Trinity assumes the role of a sidekick female. She has a few scenes of skill, but we never see this famous hacker to do anything meaningful at a computer board (she never examines the code of the Matrix, for example). She is there to be the love interest for Neo and to support his important enterprise of salvation. She provides stereotypical female nurturance and "connectedness" for the inexpressive, intact Neo. (...)
>
> Trinity is also a "babe" who is here to provide sex appeals. She is celebrated by fans for "kicking butt", and she does accompany Neo in rescuing Morpheus, where she kills her share of men, but obviously her main job is decorative. Carrie-Anne [Moss] looks damn sexy in skin-tight black latex and leather. Sure, she flies a helicopter, but even that gets messed up and she must be rescued by Neo (2002: 209-210).

It could be that critiques of that kind made Wachowskis introduce into *Matrix Reloaded* and *Revolutions* the character of Niobe, who is better and braver than the boys – apart from being beautiful. But Trinity is not alone in the cast of stereotypical characters. We get brave old soldiers, and even braver young boys willing to die for their country, sexy Caribbeans, clever Indians, wise black American women, older male councilors and architects, etc., etc. After all, popular culture plays on and with stereotypes, and the Wachowski brothers deliver a good entertainment, embellished with philosophical allusions. Why disappointment? After all, Trinity is a cyborg, but not advanced enough to match Neo and become his (VR) equal. In *Matrix*, the cyberpunk breakdown between the artificial and the natural is not complete. Was it Haraway's' fault that we expected more?

Did the cyborgs do their work?

> Cyborg imagery can help [us to see that]... taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess (Haraway, 1991, p. 181).

How relevant is Stepford Wives in 2005?

It is possible to ask if there is any clear trend in the development of the science fiction characters in the 30 years covered in this paper. Actually, we do not claim that there is one trend – rather, that there are parallel trends, or two that fight each other. The feminist writings use the term "backlash", and, indeed, we know that it is quite possible that in the 21st century women can be imprisoned at home, their political and educational rights taken away. But changes do take place. In 1983, Cynthia Cockburn and her collaborators interviewed an advertisement worker who said "It would be quite unthinkable to present a publicity (...) where the woman, if she was visible in the picture, was not the one who did the kitchen

work. (...) This wouldn't simply be credible, as this is supposedly women's domain" (Cockburn, 19o96: 24-25). If this advertising man is not yet retired, he would not have said the same thing. We are all used to publicity showing women in front of computers (with eyeglasses signaling intellectual aptitude) and men in aprons in front of induction kitchens (of course). Why, then, re-make *Stepford Wives* after 30 years?

"Stepfordwives" has become a label in the USA. Stepford is a marker for small, conservative suburbs that grow around big cities. In the film, somebody says condescendingly: "Something like that can only happen in Connecticut!" The series, *Family Guy,* alludes to a "Stepford wife" to denote a reactionary and simplistic housewife. The film was made, among other things, to show how things changed.

But there are rather unpleasant analogies between the world of today and the original *Stepford Wives*, and not only in the USA. According to Rappe and Strannegård (2004), more and more people in Sweden want to have a clean house or an even "cleaner house", and fewer and fewer will do the cleaning themselves. Electrolux's robotic vacuum cleaner still does not do a very good of cleaning the corners. The solution is, as Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002) pointed out, the immigrant women. They clean and iron, take care of children and the old, and provide sexual services. Like robots, they are not on the same emotional and intellectual level as their masters/employers (one can't talk with them), and they raise the same anxieties: what happens if they hurt themselves/break? (alas, they are no cyborgs). Will it be possible to get a new model quickly? And what if they stage a revolution? If one could only impose Asimov's "robotics' 3 laws" on them!

Rei Toei or Trinity?

Trinity is a cyborg, but she is also a goddess – a goddess in a hierarchically ordered world of gods, just like Olympus or Valhalla. The female goddesses are there, but are expected to obey and submit when the male gods of first rank order them to do so. In that sense, Trinity is nothing new, and her technological additions are on a par with magic qualities of traditional goddesses – nothing for us, as it were.

Idoru is more than a cyborg, but not at all a goddess; she is our collective projection. But is she? Do William Gibson's books classify as "popular culture", or are they merely food for intellectuals? The appeal of Trinity is much wider and, according to the circuit model of culture (Johnson, 1986-87), she is a collective projection, too, and projected by a bigger collective. So perhaps, in the real world, Lucky Dragon managed to fax its golden statuette, after all. Molly and Rei Toei spell hope; Trinity takes it away. But as long as they all exist, the conversation can go on – the heteroglossia continues.

Twice in our analysis we noted that the film version simplifies the complex message of a novel (we could do it thrice if we included the filmatic version of Molly). This was not to say that the directors were not close enough to the writer's intentions: Philip Dick was very active in creating the *Blade Runner*. It is rather the difference between various media on the dimension of radicality and conservatism: the novel is the most radical, the TV most conservative, with cinema in between (Yehya, 2001/2004). The three media occupy the same places on the dimension of popularity. The filmatization simplifies the message of a novel, but also makes it popular.

Cyborg as a metaphor

Haraway uses the notion of cyborg as a metaphor for the discursive codes that program our biological existence (R.R. Wilson, 2002: 148). But as it usually happens with metaphors, they drag in the connotations that were not intended in the metaphorical use. Maybe cyborg is a perfect metaphor, but not for the liberation from such discursive codes, but for their hybrid character. The cyborg combines the traditional stereotypes with the visions of the new world, and the fears of women with the fears of robots. Like avatars, they might represent an ideal employee (Gustavsson and Czarniawska, 2004), in that they are capable of inhuman efforts and concentration. But unlike avatars, they may stage a revolt and do unpredictable things, like the idoru did. The combination of organic and mechanic parts does not frighten 21st century people anymore; but gender stereotypes prove to be more resilient that Frankenstein's fears. And what about the professional cyborgs of todaya – the people like us who need computers, Internet access, and mobile phones in order to fit into their workplaces? In the best versions of cyberpunk, the opposition between natural and artificial is broken down and gender stereotypes concern clothes, not competences. Will the increased use of information technology at workplaces open the corporate doors to cyberpunks, or will it (again) help to preserve and strengthen traditional ideas about what men and women are best equipped to do?

There is one interesting feature that unites all the novels and films mentioned above, one feature that does not change no matter how outlandish (or rather outtimish) the setup: the massive presence of large corporations. Perhaps the novelists and the directors tell us, intentionally or not, that until the institutional core of our world is unchanged, it is unreasonable to expect that a sheer increase of technical artifacts will change reality.

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