THE MEDIATED BODY IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA: *TRON: LEGACY* (2010) AND *THE HUNGER GAMES* (2012)*

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Abstract

It is commonly agreed that we are immersed in the information order where classical dichotomies body/mind, human/machine, natural/artificial, reality/fantasy are dissolving. The science fiction genre particularly offers opportunities for understanding the complex relationship between the human body and the media. This essay intends to explore the implications of the "mediated body" as conveyed in contemporary science fiction cinema, focusing on how visual texts articulate the idea of gender as construction or performance, and how this connects with contemporary anxieties concerning how media affect the materiality of our bodies. In order to carry out this study, two contemporary science fiction films will be analyzed: *Tron: Legacy* (2010) and *The Hunger Games* (2012). From the analysis of cinematic representations of the "mediated body," the idea of performativity is highlighted, focusing on how corporeality becomes key for understanding contemporary (posthuman) subjectivities.

Keywords: science fiction cinema, mediated body, performance, gender, posthuman, subjectivity.

Resumen

Nos encontramos inmersos/as en la era de la información donde los límites entre cuerpo/ mente, orgánico/máquina o natural/artificial dejan de estar claramente diferenciados. El género de ciencia ficción nos brinda oportunidades para entender la compleja relación que existe entre el cuerpo y las tecnologías de la comunicación. En este artículo, se pretende explorar la imagen del «cuerpo mediatizado» en el cine de ciencia ficción contemporáneo, haciendo alusión a cómo ciertos textos visuales articulan la idea de género/sexo como constructo o «performance», y como esto afecta la manera de entender la «materialidad» de nuestros cuerpos. Para tal propósito, se analizarán dos películas, *Tron: Legacy* (2010) y *The Hunger Games* (2012), centrándonos en la idea de artificialidad y en cómo lo corpóreo es clave para comprender nuestras subjetividades posthumanas.

Palabras clave: cine de ciencia ficción, género, cuerpo, subjetividad posthumana.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mainstream Science Fiction (Sci-Fi) cinema has proved to be a useful tool from whence to examine issues of sex, gender and subjectivities. Indeed, the depiction of alternative bodies in the form of human-alien hybrids, monsters, cyborgs or humanoid robots has led to numerous—and sometimes controversial—analyses on gender. It is interesting to note how the genre is becoming more and more preoccupied with the "materialization" of the human body in mediated spaces such as virtual reality, cyberworlds, digital databases, the Internet and the like. As this essay sets up to defend, the material body as represented in recent Sci-Fi cinema becomes key for understanding contemporary subjectivities, while offering fresh instances of sex and gender depictions on screen. At issue here is the integration of the "natural" body into new media developments and how the genre depicts alternative genders. The resulting image has been interrogated by many authors and futurist propositions about the dissolution of the organic body in techno-spaces.[1] This is not to say, however, that the Sci-Fi film excludes the celebration of fluidity. Certainly, a recurrent motif in contemporary films is to show characters whose bodies interfere with technology up to the point that the difference between organic/technological becomes difficult to distinguish.

The "mediated body" is understood in this paper as a fluid and complex foundation that affects and is affected by new media technologies. The idea of the body as a complex relational process that is constantly shifting rather than as a biological state concerns many feminists who have become aligned with the emergence of corporeal feminism. Specifically, the notion of the "mediated body" discussed here entrenches with materialist analyses on the posthuman. Materialist or embodied posthumanism states that bodies are not static figures, but entities mediated by processes and practices. This corporeal branch of posthumanism claims for a polymorphic body, one that is not reduced to sexual difference, but that takes into account the complex set of differences that pass into our beings. In this context, it is essential to stress the importance of understanding the subject in a time when technology is able to alter our bodies and our sense of an interior. While identity can

[1] The literary movement known as "cyberpunk" appeared in the 80s with William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). For most cyberpunk fiction, the body is not a biological essence but, because it has been dangerously invaded by information, it is regarded as pure mind. The so-called cyberpunk mode is deeply entrenched within technology and, Gibson's work has especially exemplified postmodern poetics. These writings have become key analytical tools for understanding postmodernism and the interaction between the human and the mechanical. The relation between a human individual and a non-human system has typically been represented as problematic, being the function of the hero to resist the "invasion" of technology. By privileging the hero's "human" side over the "non-human", films like *The Matrix* (1999) dangerously re-write humanist mind-body dualities, along with the resulting gender binary of masculinity and femininity.

be understood as the product of cultural processes by which we construct ourselves, subjectivity relates to both the body and the mind, situating ourselves in relations to power. Hence, the notion of subjectivity, especially that of posthuman subjectivity, becomes key for the discussion of the "mediated body" in contemporary Sci-Fi.

The "mediated body" becomes represented in many contemporary Sci-Fi films dealing with the media—*Avatar, Inception, Surrogates, Tron: Legacy* and *The Hunger Games,* among many others—especially as they consider fluid and fragmented corporealities as inherent to human subjectivities, avoiding visualizations of powerful and static bodies fused with steel and hard technologies.[2] They present a return to the body, yet a reconfigured and hybrid body, far from being the organic repository of conventional gender traits. In order to explore the implications of the "mediated body" as conveyed in contemporary Sci-Fi cinema, this article will focus on how visual texts articulate the idea of gender, and how this connects with contemporary anxieties concerning the way media affect the materiality of our bodies. To this end, two popular Sci-Fi films are considered: *Tron: Legacy* (Dir: Joseph Kosinski, Per: Jeff Bridges, Garret Hedlund and Olivia Wilde. USA, Walt Disney, 2010) and *The Hunger Games* (Dir: Gary Ross, Per: Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson and Liam Hemsworth. USA, Lionsgate, 2012).

Released fairly recently, these visual texts explore, albeit in very different ways, the consequences of border transgression and the problematic of "natural" bodies when mediated by computer programs and television. What is interesting for the purpose of this essay and makes these films different from others that thematize the same conflict is that, in them, the "mediated body" consciously plays with conventional sex codes and gender performance to offer posthuman characters. More specifically, both films rely on the idea of body transformation for survival, being precisely this conscious mutability of one's own body which leads to a positive image of female subjectivity. Another remarkable commonality that will be discussed here is the films' insistence on the need for violent games as means for social and personal success. Both Quorra (Wilde), the female warrior in *Tron: Legacy,* and Katniss Everdeen (Lawrence), the rebellious female protagonist in *The Hunger Games*, offer their respective "audiences" what they want to see, while, at the same time, proposing alternative views of female corporeality. Quorra is a video game character who decides to leave her mediated world and start a new life outside this realm, whereas Katniss is forced to move to a space where she needs to perform certain roles in order to survive. The ideas of body transformation and gender performance are thereby common ground in both movies, suggesting the need to perform bodies, genders and sex in order to survive in technologically mediated societies.

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[2] Popular Sci-Fi films of the 80s and 90s like Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) or Verhoeven's *Robocop* (1987) offer armoured and violent male cyborg figures. In his hyper-masculinity, the cyborg is both strengthening traditional masculinities while representing the hero as having a "better" masculinity because it is "natural". In a similar way, we get many instances of hyper-feminization of the cyborg figure, as it happens with the replicant Rachael in *Blade Runner* (1982).

2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As suggested above, the articulation of the "mediated body" proposed here resonates with the concept of the posthuman as described by Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles or Rosi Braidotti among others, whereby the "link between the flesh and the machine is symbiotic and therefore can best be described as a bond of mutual dependence" (Braidotti, "Metamorphosis" 223). These theorists on the posthuman put forward a hybrid, fluid and complex body that incorporates media technologies by proposing an embodied subjectivity, against the tendency to erase the materiality of the body in contemporary contexts. Critical posthumanism is also different from transhumanism, a movement that celebrates a technologically enhanced human in his/her quest over nature.[3] The two contemporary Sci-Fi films under discussion—*Tron* and *The Hunger Games*—will be analyzed through the lens of materialist feminist theory. In them, the body operates between two spaces (the real and the simulated) that sometimes merge, affecting the characters' subjectivities. Hence, the rigid categories of femininity and masculinity proposed by Western patriarchal cultures are somehow reconfigured and/or rearticulated in the ambiguous space of virtual reality or hypermedia.

The digital media (which include computer games, virtual reality, television and special effects used in Hollywood films) allows for a re-imagining of the traditional body, since humanist ideas surrounding the materiality of our bodies are altered in these spaces. Moreover, images of the body speak to our contemporary politics and, as Kroker contends in *Body Drift* (2012),

> [w]hile the triumph of mass media, particularly television, may portend a future of pure simulation, the overriding cultural reality is that the image machine is itself haunted by memories of the body: bodies of missing children; crime victims: bodies of those abused, violated, accidented, disappeared. (Kroker 1)

In this sense, Sci-Fi coalesces with forms of feminist criticism (Butler, Hayles, Haraway, Braidotti) that propose a new way of being multiple, hybrid, and bodily (Kroker 4), arguing that it is vital to "reconfigure" rather than negate the materiality of our bodies in technologically-mediated societies. As a matter of fact, and as Kroker contends, we are drifting through many different specular performances of the body and "we no longer inhabit *a* body in any meaningful sense of the term but rather occupy a multiplicity of bodies—imaginary, sexualized, disciplined, gendered, laboring, technologically augmented bodies". Moreover, the codes governing behavior across this multiplicity of bodies have no real stability but are themselves in drift—random, fluctuating, changing (12).

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[3] Nick Bostrom is one of the central figures associated with transhumanism, and recognizes that this project of enhancing the human species derives directly from ideals of human perfectibility and rationality inherited from classical humanism.

This thought on "body drifts" stems from Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity (1993, 1999, 2004), whereby bodies are subjected to normalizing practices by means of performance. Butler seeks to contest binary systems by reconceptualizing gender as unstable and performative. Her argument is that "the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 2). Butler proposes a performative theory of gender that disrupts the categories between bodies, sex, gender and sexuality. Accordingly, femininity and masculinity become bodily styles that are incorporated to construct gendered subjectivities.

In a similar way, but more concerned with information environments, Katherine Hayles (1999, 2002, 2005) employs the category posthuman to refer to an emergent ontology that reshapes and challenges the traditional concept of the human subject. Hayles describes the posthuman as a collection of heterogeneous components. Posthuman subjectivity becomes, then, the ideological reflex of information environments, troubling the information/material separation. In *My Mother was a Computer* (2005), Hayles deals with the ineludible interaction between subjectivity and intelligent machines: "the experience of interacting with them [intelligent machines] changes me incrementally, so the person who emerges from the encounter is not exactly the same person who began it" (Hayles 243). She takes a materialist feminist approach to argue that we are embodied creatures, and "just because information has lost its body does not mean that humans and the world have lost theirs" (244). Equally, Braidotti (2002, 2013) further develops the potential of the posthuman subject and proposes virtual embodiment as a new path for the material/media relationship. Arguing that it has become "historically, scientifically and culturally impossible to distinguish bodies from their technologically mediated extensions" (Braidotti, "Metamorphosis" 228), Braidotti poses the opportunity for different bodily conceptualizations.

Subjectivity is key to these writings on the posthuman predicament. Yet, while Butler develops a queer approach to performativity that relies heavily on psychoanalytic approaches to the subject, Braidotti takes an affirmative and vitalist Deleuzian approach to difference to argue that we exist in a plenitude of possible "becomings" that are continually changing and transforming. When dealing with the idea of "becoming", Braidotti contends that "the intensities this engenders create pleasures and affirmative and joyful affects that open the subject up to a multiplicity of possible differences" (Braidotti, "Metamorphosis" 71). Hence, examining subjectivity not as a universal consciousness but as a process is crucial for any analysis of the posthuman. Indeed, the aim of critical posthumanism is, according to Braidotti, to think beyond traditional humanist limitations and embrace the risks that "becoming-other-than-human" brings (Braidotti, "Posthuman" 15).

Taking these foundations as theoretical framework, the notion of the "mediated body" proposed here refers to the visualization of an intricate body that, although still addressed by power and inflected by questions of gender and sexuality, suggests a re-articulation of the codes that have traditionally governed the corporeal body.

Indeed, corporeality is depicted both in *Tron: Legacy* and in *The Hunger Games* as performance, as will be debated in the following paragraphs. Unlike other popular texts dealing with the media, the two films under analysis here offer transgressive female characters whose "mediated bodies" consciously play with sex and gender conventions in order to get power.

3. THE VIRTUAL BODY: *TRON: LEGACY* (2010)

In *Tron: Legacy*—a sequel to the 1982 film *Tron*—characters enter virtual reality and their bodies interfere with computing media, becoming part of it. This blurring of frontiers offers opportunities for questioning familiar categories of gendered bodies and practices, while allowing us to consider our intricate relationship with computing and information technologies. After the software engineer Kevin Flynn (Bridges) disappears, his son Sam (Hedlund) starts an investigation that pulls him into the Grid, a virtual reality space created by his father who had been trapped there for twenty-five years. With the help of the female warrior Quorra, Sam attempts to release his father and escape from the system, always stopped by the villain Clu (also played by Bridges), a digital double of Kevin that rules the program and that will do anything to stop them. By creating a body/media relationship, the film opens up spaces for the representation of posthuman subjectivities. In a similar way, and as it will be discussed in the next section, *The Hunger Games* proposes instances of the "mediated body" by means of characters who present a disturbing relationship with media.

Human characters (namely Kevin and Sam) find themselves trapped in cyberspace, where they literally fuse with media technologies. They corporeally enter the Grid and become undistinguishable from those characters that, like Quorra, are but bits of information. Yet, mediated bodies are "recognizable" by contemporary audiences. Indeed, Quorra has a female appearance, and, precisely, she will take advantage of her "corporeality" to take the final decision of leaving the Grid, as will be commented below. Also, when Sam is sent to the "Games" at the beginning of his adventure in cyberspace, he is forced to fight computer programs whose bodies, movements and behavior are human-like. Hence, the body appears in these virtual spaces under the guises of graphic representation, bodily movements and standardized language. In the sequence that shows the fight's final round, Sam faces the dangerous assassin program Rinzler (Cheurfa) who accuses him of being a human user after seeing him bleed, technically reinforced by a close-up of a blood drop. The blood becomes, then, the only signifier of Sam's biological/organic nature. Notably, this domain of violent games bears a resemblance to the games arena in *The Hunger Games*. While participants in *Tron: Legacy* are computer programs that simulate human behavior and bodily movements, both movies engage in the portrayal of a brutal spectacle with a deadly outcome to be enjoyed by a privileged audience.

The virtual environment plays with appearances and expectations in the film, simulating the human characters' experience of reality, which results in the confusion between reality and fiction, a main motif in Sci-Fi films, in which characters–and

spectators by extension—are frequently unable to perceive what is "real" or, in this case, what is "human". Specifically, *Tron: Legacy* blurs the distinction materiality/information by simultaneously considering corporeality as information (as suggested by the programs that inhabit the Grid), and by proposing characters that corporeally enter the virtual space. In this context, subjectivities become troubled. This resonates with Hayles' affirmation that the body is vulnerable to be influenced by media, so mediation functions as part of the feedback loop that is both constructing and constructed by the body. Specifically, Hayles's thought relies on the posthuman subject to address the complexity of information environments in the twenty-first century, promoting the elimination of fixed gender and sexual traits in this new concept of the body. By challenging the humanist notion of the body, the movie suggests new ways of understanding the relationship between media and its users, which is in line with materialist feminist analyses.

  Tron: Legacy proposes an embodied subjectivity that erases the border between simulation and materiality. The resulting image is a fluid, hybrid, multiple and complex body that "simulates" or "performs" genders. As Michèle White concludes after analyzing the gendered gaze in MOOs (multi-user object-oriented worlds), the participants' fascination with the spectacle of power and with being visual "perpetuate[s] a series of limiting identity constructs" (124). Hence, and as other media critics have also argued, the digitally-coded bodily attributes become markers for users or participants: "the shape and form of a digital body, coding clothing, skin colour or hairstyle, points to the ways these markers of difference are explicitly constructed and therefore open up performative possibilities" (156). Although multiple subject positions are offered in these sites, they normally follow familiar operations of gendered identities and bodily practices (150). The fact that virtual space is opened for alternative genders, but normative bodily constructions are consistently played out, further highlights the performative aspect of gender.

  The film portrays a group of female programs, called the Sirens, whose function is to outfit other programs for the games, providing them with any needed equipment. All dressed in white, with the same hairstyle and wearing skin-tight body suits, high heels and extreme make-up on their faces and eyelids, the Sirens who re-clothe Sam at the beginning of the movie suggest artificiality and performance. With the help of costume and other aspects of the mise-en-scène, the Sirens perform femininity in this virtual world. Indeed, they adopt—or rather exaggerate—bodily codes traditionally associated with women in an attempt to become visually different from male programs, inevitably following traditional gender norms. They can be said to play the role of "acceptable" women within the heteropatriarchal virtual world. Yet, the overemphasis on a shared external aspect, together with the futuristic and synthetic looks of the Sirens suggests the artificiality of gender. These sequences further remind us of the pre-games in *The Hunger Games,* in which performing gender is but a strategy to survive in the ensuing games. Likewise, the Grid is a fabricated space where gender seems constructed and artificial.

  The rather static and non-natural vision of gender insinuated by this group of female programs is soon altered when the female protagonist appears on screen. As will be discussed below, Quorra can be very much compared to Katniss, espe-

cially if we take into account their bravado courage and protective instinct. Quorra is the last remaining member of "isomorphic algorithms" destroyed by Clu with a complex code and triple stranded DNA. Significantly called "The Miracle", she survives thanks to Kevin, who has shared all his knowledge about the real world with her, a world she is extremely curious about and wants to experience. Her first appearance on screen, clearly opposed to Sam's, exalts the superiority of her body. Neither Sam nor spectators know about her sex/gender at first. Like the rest of the programs, she is wearing a neon suit, which makes her "melt" into the futuristic setting. Moreover, she is using a helmet that covers her face, the part of the body that best works as a sex "differentiator" in the virtual world of the Grid. Costume helps to suggest hybridity in the film, reinforcing the idea of the crossing of gender boundaries.

Quorra's body is represented on screen as strong, resourceful and capable, characteristics often associated with masculinity, but all of this in the very heteronormatively attractive tradition. Given that Quorra/Wilde is exemplary of this physicality (as it is Katniss/Lawerence), expectations are not totally subverted in the film, especially since the "heroics" are done by a "sexy" female body. Her depiction on screen is similar to some female heroes present in contemporary mainstream action and Sci-Fi films, a tradition which began in the late 1980s and beginning of the 1990s with characters like Ripley (Weaver) in the *Alien* saga or Sara Connor (Hamilton) in *Terminator II,* and continued with Trinity (Mosse) in *The Matrix* trilogy, or Lara Croft (Jolie) in the film adaptation of the popular video game *Tomb Raider*, to give some significant examples. While Sam looks astonished when Quorra takes the helmet off and shows her face, contemporary audiences are used to finding strong, resourceful and accomplished attractive female warriors leading the action.

Hence, sequences in the Grid indirectly address the problematic of gender construction in virtual domains. It is in this sense that the film clashes with cyberfeminit perspectives that see cyberspace as a gender-neutral site that enables women to communicate and act outside the constraints of male-dominated physical realms. Sadie Plant (1997), for instance, argues that virtual worlds "undermine both the world-view and the material reality of two thousands years of patriarchal control", probably in reference to the differing representations of a body where sexual differences are not so sharply marked (265). Quorra does not succeed in offering a differing body while in the Grid, but follows bodily and gendered expectations. Moreover, her goal is to escape from virtual reality and move to a "reality" governed by patriarchy. Characters like Quorra and Sam, with the help of costume and other aspects of the mise-en-scène, play with conventional notions of masculinity and femininity in this virtual world.

Hence, and precisely because of the presence of the body, virtual reality films encounter obstacles when representing new body politics and gender roles, which echoes existing socio-material power inequities. In my view, the main obstacle may well derive from the fact that mainstream cinema presents digital worlds that are meant to simulate a gender-biased reality. As in *The Hunger Games,* the illusion of a heterosexual romance between the main leading characters is suggested—albeit in a very subtle way—at the very end of the movie, when Quorra fulfills her dream

and accompanies Sam on his journey back to the real world. The last sequence in the movie shows an apparent flesh-and-blood female body at the back of Sam's motorbike, delighted because she is seeing the first sunrise in her life. *Tron: Legacy* is, after all, a Walt Disney production, which normally offers conventional depictions of gender.

The virtual world offers, then, contradictory images of women, which, according to Springer, makes it "difficult to either condemn or celebrate them, since a single interpretation cannot entirely explain their appeal" (Springer 138). In order to confer meaning on the visual text, screened bodies need a referent and, while the reality in the film may be constructed as very different from our current reality, it is nevertheless still a simulation of it. *Tron: Legacy* does not propose disembodiment in cyberspace but the virtual look and feel of the characters are signs of an embodied experience. The resulting image—epitomized by the character of Quorra—is a virtual body with its memories, desires and wishes. In this sense, the "mediated body" can be aligned with Kroker's definition of body drift, which, in cinema, "is the universal essence of powerful visualization of bodies of the future, with their complex intermediation of code, flesh, and desire" (4).

In short, corporeality can be understood in *Tron: Legacy* as a performance, a melancholic subjection to social codes of power in order to become acceptable, and, eventually, to survive in an unknown world. This same idea, which resonates with Butler's theory of performativity, is clearly articulated in *The Hunger Games*, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Its protagonist—Katniss Everdeen—is but another example of the "mediated body" in pursuit of empowerment through imitation. Very much like Quorra, she also needs to perform her body in order to survive in a mediated world.

4. THE TELEVISED BODY: *THE HUNGER GAMES* (2012)

In the film *The Hunger Games* the material body encounters media in the sense that it is conceived as mere spectacle, and the characters' actions and behavior as a popular (and brutal) form of mass entertainment. The movie is an adaptation of the first novel of Suzanne Collins's trilogy of the same name, written in 2008.[4] It shows a dystopian world governed by an authoritarian government, the Capitol, which organizes the annual event known as the Hunger Games, a popular competition that is televised live across the twelve districts in which the country—Panem—is divided. One young girl and one young boy from each district are chosen at random to participate in the games, and become TV show contestants who are forced to fight each other to death in front of cameras. Their existence becomes eventually

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[4] Susan Collins's trilogy consists of *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010). These three texts have been adapted to the big screen in four movies: *The Hunger Games* (2012), *Catching Fire* (2013), based on her second book, and with the film adaptation of *Mockingjay* split into two parts, the first of which was released in 2014 and the second in 2015. These films continue the adventures of Katniss and Peete after their victory in the 74th Hunger Games.

counterfeit given that they are reduced to mere tributes to be evaluated, and die for a rich, good-looking and fashionable audience.

In line with Butler's notion of performativity, whereby the body acts upon genders, ideologies and compulsory heterosexual normativity to become socially accepted, the "mediated body" works in *The Hunger Games* to suggest the artificiality of gender in contemporary contexts. In creating a visual display of performative bodies and subjectivities, the film resists gendered expectations both by parodic irony and by blurring binarisms. The clearest example of the "mediated body" as defined in this essay is that of the film's protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. She is a transgressive figure in many senses, and her "televised" body turns into a social construct which she consciously employs to challenge power. Remarkably, and as in *Tron: Legacy,* the film "dehumanizes" the body by reducing it to a piece of a popular game to be consumed by mass audiences. In this sense, both Katniss and Quorra are images of the corporeal that become key to understanding posthuman subjectivities in mediated-driven societies.

Katniss embodies qualities of the ideal young girl: she is beautiful, athletic, brave, intelligent, courageous and resourceful. As Lem and Hassel argue in "'Killer' Katniss and 'Lover Boy' Peeta" when referring to Collins' text, "Katniss Everdeen is a female character who balances traditionally masculine qualities such as athletism, independence, self-sufficiency and a penchant for violence with traditionally feminine qualities such as idealized physical female beauty and vulnerability" (pos. 1787). This fact favors her appeal to both young male and female readers:

> One way that *The Hunger Games* bridges the divide between boys and girls' culture is Collins portrayal of a heroine who embodies traditionally masculine characteristics—in her role within her family, in her behavior, and in her adherence to patriarchal expectations regarding masculinities. (Pos. 1834)

Yet, Katniss' beauty before entering the Capitol is a construct of the film, as it is not originally written into the novels. The opening sequences of the movie show Katniss as a physically active young girl capable of feeding and taking care of her family. Katniss crosses the physical boundaries of her district and ventures to the woods for hunting, a moment of freedom that she shares with her friend Gale (Hemsworth), which can be further interpreted as an act of rebellion. She is the protector of her little sister, a role that will continue inside the televised games when she takes care of Rue (Stenberg), the young female tribute from District Eleven. Her courage is explicitly shown when she volunteers to take her sister's place in the Hunger Games, being the first to do so from District 12. From this moment onwards, she is depicted as a rebellious figure.[5]

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[5] Katniss's rebellious attitude will continue throughout the rest of the films that follow *The Hunger Games.* Thus, at the very end of *Catching Fire*, Katniss learns that she is the face of the rebellion in Panem. *Mockingjay* Part 1 and Part 2 see Katniss lead this rebellion against the Capitol.

The Capitol holds the absolute power of judgment, imposing an authoritarian ideology that promotes the visual enjoyment of punishment. Its power is spread through media, proposing a dominant body image linked to spectacle. Hence, and in order to become visually acceptable the tributes taking part in the cruel spectacle of the games must reshape their bodies according to the members of the Capitol's idea of beauty. In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault deals with how the body is involved in the political field, and power relations have an immediate hold upon it: "they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25). The Capitol imposes its societal norms, and participants need to literally train their bodies and perform genders to adjust to the prevailing rules. Their bodies are, then, regulated to correspond to the social ideal and to satisfy the audience's visual demands. All of the tributes—both male and female—become active recipients of a dominant aggressive gaze. Katniss actively rejects the gaze and Peeta (Hutcherson) is also quite aware of it and manipulates it for his own (and Katniss') gain, as it becomes explicit in the interview sequence. In it, Katniss is somehow confused about the power of performing fashion and heterosexual love. To Peeta's sudden holding of her hand, Katniss first reacts abruptly. However, as the film develops, she realizes the influence of acting as a loving couple in front of cameras and the implications of heteronormative desirability. In spite of her initial confusion, Katniss tries to be pleasant in the televised interview just before the games, with the sole purpose of getting the sympathy of the audience and gain sponsors.

Power is not unidirectional but a field of play, exerted in what Foucault calls "observing hierarchy" (184). As the sequences prior to the game show, the participants actively play with power in the process of "beautification", or "reshaping", guided by their mentors and stylists, who teach them how to make people like them. Following the advice of her stylist, Cinna (Kravitz), Katniss and Peeta are dressed in stylish black leather suits with capes made of fire for the tribute parade in the opening ceremony. Bodies are converted into lovely objects of desire, and gender is but a script to be consciously learned and played by the participants for the Capitol's enjoyment. Bodies are conceived, then, both as being acted upon and acting in concert with power. Katniss' beautification process is controlled at all times and placed upon her from outside, but she also takes advantage of it and plays with power for her own benefit. This reaffirms Butler's idea that the body is actively participating in the way in which that inscription is happening. The bodies of the tributes are not just passive receptacles, but they are also complicit with what is happening. Their final aim is to be legible and desirable to the audience as this increases their chance of survival.

The Capitol's emphasis on aesthetics and visual enjoyment is technically supported by a number of strategies. Both characters and spectators can be blessed with an attractive setting which shows an abundance of nice, beautifully displayed food, colorful and stylish dresses and accessories, and luxurious and charming bedrooms. The Capitol's obsession with fashion, style and physical appearance is reinforced by the recurrent use of close-ups of the characters' faces and parts of their bodies so that their hair-style, make up or cosmetics can be fully appreciated, and evaluated

in the case of the tributes. Significantly, the sequence showing the two-week physical preparation/training before the games lasts thirty-five minutes, approximately one third of the film, a fact that evidences the importance of the recreation of the senses for plot development. It also serves for setting up the contrast between the poverty and colourless setting of District 12, the excess of the Capitol, and the lush but lethal Arena. Paradoxically, the Capitol residents, extremely concerned with beauty and style, advocate a visual enjoyment of death.

Fashion, cosmetics and body modifications are, then, the language of power. Looking beautiful and desirable is decisive for survival as it is a mean of securing sponsors. Katniss soon learns that her success or failure in the games depends upon her image and that, in order to survive, she needs to perform the role of a beautiful, engaging and attractive girl, apart from being physically and psychologically strong. The molding of her body is easily observed in the sequences in which her stylists reshape her body into a "visually appealing body", which is deeply ironic for contemporary 2012 audiences who can appreciate Lawrence's fine physicality. Apart from her external image, she needs to construct her behavior. She must smile to charm sponsors and play the idealized traits of female beauty and vulnerability, yet combined with qualities like independence, self-sufficiency and violence. This resonates with Foucault's idea of disciplining one's own body to avoid social punishment.

Katniss's performativity has been interpreted as an act of rebellion. Indeed, as Amy L. Montz argues in reference to Collins's novels, "the spectacle [Katniss] becomes is itself a rebellious demonstration of the power of consuming, fashion, and femininity" (pos. 2077), since "physical presentation and public spectacle are the two most important components of protest, particularly when placed on the bodies of women" (pos. 2082). Montz bases her arguments on the novels' particular attention to the details of dress and the preparations made to present a composite image of Katniss to the public: "Katniss's fashions become visual representations of the Resistance that are, ultimately, more important than her actions" (pos. 2090). After the tribute parade, her stylist comments that she will forever be known as "the girl who was on fire", a sentence that leads Montz to affirm that she is marked by this visual representation throughout her life, and her stylized outfits make her socially and politically "on fire" as well. Katniss's alteration and/or manipulation of the codes governing behavior by ironically displaying conventional gender roles is itself a transgression, but it also speaks to the arbitrariness and randomness of the rules, making audiences aware of the artificiality of gender. Katniss learns the power of a good performance and succeeds in transgressing the rules, which, once again, syncs with Butler's idea that power is in drag.

As it has been suggested so far, both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Tron: Legacy* bodies are on display. The idea of the "mediated body" is clearly articulated in both films, and characters are forced to play their part in deadly games inside a mediated space. Female bodies are active agents that are, nevertheless, reduced to pieces of a deadly game, tributes. Interestingly, in *The Hunger Games* the arena, the events, and the rules are constantly manipulated by the Gamemakers to maximize the spectators' engagement in the games, making it difficult sometimes to differentiate what is real from what is not, except that, as happened in *Tron: Legacy*, the

ramifications for Katniss and the other tributes are very real and material, involving physical pain and death. Gamemakers throw in firestorms, tricks and traps and release carnivorous aggressive wasps to intensify the games and raise the level of action in order to avoid boring the audience. It is at this point when one can best affirm that the characters are "dehumanized", reduced to pure spectacle. Sequences inside the game further suggest the insensitivity of viewers to the brutality of the images, which resonates with Foucault's idea that dominance is projected through violence and observation. The film promotes violence as a media strategy to suggest the power of the Capitol. Similarly, and as pointed out earlier, in *Tron: Legacy* the "posthumanized" character Quorra feels terribly trapped in cyberspace and dreams about escaping it.

Katniss "simulates" a heterosexual romance with Peeta inside the game, which is but another example of the film's heavy reliance on performativity. As Cinna warned her, the Capitol "would love it" and, indeed, while in the middle of the game, participants are told that two players of the same district are permitted to win. Ironically, heterosexual romance is used by the Capitol to reinforce patriarchy in a world where everything—including gender—seems constructed. When at the very end of the game the Gamemakers proclaim that the rule change is revoked and only one survivor is allowed, Katniss plays the role of her life. She pretends to act out of love and announces her intentions: she and Peeta will both commit suicide at the same time. She is aware that this decision will affect the Capitol, especially because the rules of the game will be totally transgressed. To this, the Capitol reacts promptly and allows both of them to live, showing the arbitrariness of a system focused on pleasure and appearances. At this point, one can affirm that Katniss manipulates spectacle by giving the (whimsical) audience exactly what it wants. She plays the Capitol's rules for her own benefit. These sequences specifically suggest Butlerian theories of performativity, whereby gender is an act of imitation, except that Katniss is very consciously performing femininity as the only form of power against the tyranny of the Capitol.

In short, the film rests on the idea of refusing rigid gendered rules through parodic irony, creating a visual display of performative bodies and posthuman subjectivities. Katniss takes advantage of the power of her body, adopts an artificial appearance and simulates a fake personality, and, thanks to this, she survives and becomes the winner of the games, together with her potential lover, Peeta. *The Hunger Games* adds another meaning to Darwin's "survival of the fittest", linked to the performance of beauty, fashion and gender in mediated contexts, which responds in part to the televised gaze of the twenty-first century.

5. CONCLUSION

In spite of the cultural, social and biotechnological forces that work to transform the body in contemporary society, it is difficult to find radical representations of the human body in our visual culture, especially if we are to consider mainstream Hollywood cinema. Still, contemporary Sci-Fi has refocused the relationship between

flesh and machine by proposing a hybrid, composite and fluid body, which has been here termed the "mediated body". With the help of the latest special effects, the human body as represented in contemporary Sci-Fi is symbolic of the attitudes and anxieties of society to technological advances. Breaking with previous visualizations of the traditional body, the "mediated body" works in *The Hunger Games* and *Tron: Legacy* to value the organic self and hybrid identity in technologically mediated spaces. By proposing a performative—sometimes ironic—gender identity, both films rearticulate traditional sex and gender codes in an attempt to show transgressive figures whose bodies are, in one or another way, mediated by media technologies. In this sense, they propose two versions of mediated bodies, the televised and the virtual body, embodied creatures placed in post-apocalyptic scenarios, specters of posthuman subjectivities.

The main characters of the films under analysis, Katniss and Quorra break down the traditional alliance of power and body, which used to privilege male physicality, at least when represented on screen. In this sense, the films propose, within the limitations posed by popular media, new ways of challenging power structures. Indeed, by means of a series of visual and plot strategies, such as parodic irony, androgyny, fluidity, gender role reversal and performance, both movies engage in the portrayal of a hybrid body that, although still constrained and influenced by gender conventionalisms like heterosexual romance, open up new ways of thinking about the fruitful possibilities of body-media interactions. While a white, masculine, heterosexual, Western subject is normally present in these movies, these cultural products also manage to rearticulate human embodiment from different angles. Indeed, both Katniss and Quorra subvert gender expectations in an attempt to convey more flexible bodily figurations.

The analysis of these cinematic representations of the "mediated body" casts light on the idea of corporeality and strives to find new paths from which to analyze gender and body politics in contemporary Sci-Fi cinema. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach towards the study of the gendered body signifies a departure from existing practice, and demonstrates that the Humanities constitute an effective field for the study of contemporary digitalized, mediated or/and fluid identities.

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