



Modular Bodies of Animated Characters and Posthumanist Connotations

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Abstract

This article discusses the molecularization of the body and the meanings pointed out via cyborg bodies in the context of animated characters. We analyze films of *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995), *Ghost in the Shell: SAC_2045- Sustainable War* (Shinji Aramaki Michihito and Fujii Kenji Kamiyama, 2021), *Gunnm* (Hiroshi Fukutomi, 1993), and *Alita: Battle Angel* (Robert Rodriguez, 2019) in the context of related philosophical discussions. We carry out the discussion about the body on two axes. First, we examine forms of presenting the modular bodies and discuss their socio-cultural connections. In these narratives, the evolution of the body beyond organic boundaries transforms it into a space where the character reflects the subjectivity and a tool that offers a narcissistic experience of omnipotence regarding bodily strength and competence. However, it sometimes causes the characters to become alienated from their bodies and engage in existential inquiries. Thus, secondly, we examine the existential inquiries/crises of the characters arising from the modularization of their bodies and the philosophical connotations that these emphases indicate. If on this axis, posthumanist arguments that stand out with objections to Cartesian distinctions such as machine-human, mind-body, woman-man, and anthropocentric approaches, constitute the focus of the discussions.

Keywords

Animation Film; Cyborg Body; Desire; Modularity; Cartesian Distinctions; Posthumanism



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Модульные тела анимированных персонажей и постгуманистические коннотации

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Аннотация

В данной статье обсуждается молекуляризация тела и значения, указанные через киборговые тела в контексте анимированных персонажей. Мы анализируем фильмы «Призрак в доспехах» (Мамору Осии, 1995), «Призрак в доспехах: SAC_2045 - Устойчивая война» (Синдзи Арамаки, Мичихито Фудзии и Кэндзи Камияма, 2021), «Ганнм» (Хироси Фукутоми, 1993) и «Алита: Боевой ангел» (Роберт Родригес, 2019) в контексте связанных философских дискуссий. Мы ведем дискуссию о теле в двух координатных осях. Во-первых, мы рассматриваем формы представления модульных тел и обсуждаем их социокультурные связи. В этих нарративах эволюция тела за пределами органических границ превращает его в пространство, где персонаж размышляет над тем, что такое субъективность и тот инструмент, который предлагает нарциссический опыт всевластия в отношении физической силы и компетентности. Однако иногда это заставляет персонажей чуждаться своих тел и задаваться экзистенциальными вопросами. Таким образом, во-вторых, мы рассматриваем экзистенциальные вопросы/кризисы персонажей, возникающие из-за модуляризации их тел, и философские коннотации, на которые указывают эти акценты. На этой оси фокус обсуждений составляют постгуманистические аргументы, которые подкрепляют возражения к картезианским различиям, таким как машина-человек, разум-тело, женщина-мужчина, а также антропоцентрические подходы.

Ключевые слова

анимационный фильм; тело киборга; желание; модульность; картезианские различия; постгуманизм



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Introduction

The cultural transformation, which increasingly determines daily life with factors such as scientific and technological developments, neoliberal policies, and the spread of digital technologies, also transforms the perceptions of today's individuals about themselves and life. A new cultural environment established on the axis of digitalization, consumption, and speed forces individuals to constantly change and transform. Consistent with the modern notion of the subject, being in a state of change is interpreted as a requirement for the individual to establish herself/himself as an independent self and maintain her/his freedom. The analogy of “chameleon man” used by Stevie Davies for the Renaissance period human (qtd. in Bauman, 2011, p.35; 2005, p.176) is also valid for the modern individual, who strives to create herself/himself in a modular structure, under the necessity of adapting to all conditions. One of the primary targets of this effort is the “body.” With the developments in technology, medicine, and aesthetic surgery, it is usual for the body to turn into a device that can be redesigned. Redesigning the body, which is also related to the human’s subconscious desires for immortality by equipping it with detachable technological parts, makes it fluid and modular.

In popular culture products, especially in science fiction, fantasy, and animation films, characters with partially or entirely redesigned bodies are increasingly featured. In these narratives, the evolution of the body beyond organic boundaries, transforms it into a space where the character reflects the subjectivity and a tool that offers a narcissistic experience of omnipotence regarding bodily strength and competence the other hand causes the characters to become alienated from their bodies and engage in existential inquiries. As Despina Kakoudaki emphasizes, artificial humans’ questioning of their reality and studies to understand these questionings also significantly contribute to the political and existential debates on the meaning of being human (2014, p. 4).

In this study, we conduct the discussions about the body in the context of animated characters. We chose, through purposeful sampling, and analyzed animation films in which characters (cyborgs) with redesigned bodies and technologically produced organs are at the center of the narratives. These films, *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995) and the last part of its narrative universe, *Ghost in the Shell: SAC_2045 - Sustainable War* (Shinji Aramaki, Michihito Fujii and Kenji Kamiyama, 2021); *Gunnm* (Battle Angel Alita - Hiroshi Fukutomi, 1993) and the remake of the same story, *Alita: Battle Angel* (Robert Rodriguez, 2019) are notable examples in animation cinema in terms of the number of viewers they reach and provide rich data in body discussion. We chose the first and last examples of the relevant narrative universes to examine the changes in the forms of visualization of the body and the discussions on modularization in different periods. We conducted a qualitative analysis in line with the related sociological and philosophical arguments focusing on the body problem and actualized the discussion in two axes. First, we problema-



tize how the modular bodies are presented in the films mentioned above and examine these forms of imagery based on their relationship with consumption discourses that approach the body as a commodity. So much so that the modularization of the body is related to the consumption culture's presenting the body as a commodity and a surface on which subjectivity is exhibited. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate modularization with our desires to overcome the body's limitations and the discourses built by the consumption culture on having a healthy, aesthetic, and durable body. In this context, concepts such as fluid self, image, and desire gain importance.

Secondly, we focus on the existential inquiries/crisis experienced by the characters with modular bodies and explore the philosophical connotations these emphases point to. We question whether the discussions on the modular body in the selected films allow for new forms of subjectivity. In the philosophical discussions on the modularization of the body, especially in posthumanism, the technologically developed body's evolution beyond organic boundaries into a new formation may enable new subjectivity possibilities beyond established subjectivity forms. For example, Authors such as Donna Haraway (2016) and Rosi Braidotti (2014) affirm this modularity because of its potential to displace the understanding of the subject established by the Western philosophical tradition through oppositions, blurs the dualist boundaries such as machine-human, woman-man, natural-artificial. In this context, posthumanist arguments, which stand out with objections to these Cartesian distinctions and anthropocentric approaches, constitute the primary references of the study.

Discussions About Body in the Context of Its Existential Meanings

The meaning of the body in terms of human existential integrity has been questioned from different standpoints throughout history. For Ancient Greek thinkers such as Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates and Platon, the body express the soul's being stuck on earth (Le Breton, 2019, p. 9). The soul imprisoned in the body is far from the reality of the world of ideas due to the body's limitations. The body can only experience the shadows of the ideas in the present world. Socrates claim that the soul is imprisoned in the body and thinks that the soul can grasp reality as much as it can see from behind the body's prison. Plato also states that the soul is immortal but needs to unite with the body to gain a material existence. (Synnott, 2002, p. 9). Subsequently, neo-platonism describes the body as unreal and, therefore, unimportant (Battaglia, 2006, p.144). The body is a flawed, incomplete part of existence in all these views.

In forms of Gnostic belief, however, the body pays for an undeserved life because it is inherently evil. The soul falls into the body, falters, and suffers there. Being with soul and body, humans partake in light and darkness between the sensible and divine worlds. So, humans must endure the ordeal of being thrown



into the world as incomplete and flawed beings. A part of this ordeal manifests itself in the form of old age, sickness, and helplessness. The body exists as a limit imposed on desire in its increasingly depleted materiality (Le Breton, 2019, p. 9-10). From such a point of view, the body is inferior to the soul.

The body and soul hierarchy leaves its place to the body and mind hierarchy with the Enlightenment. Descartes' assumption based on the statement "I think therefore I am" is considered one of the primary sources of this hierarchy. In this understanding, where thought precedes existence, the body is condemned to invisibility that ceases to be essential for existence. In the philosophical context, some approaches oppose this view. For example, Thinkers like Gilbert Ryle (2009), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2006), and C. T. Nagoshi and J. L. Nagoshi (2012) challenge the assumption that the mind is separate from the body. For them, the idea that the mind reflects the essence of a human is not accurate; human comes into existence as a whole with the experiences of the body. Human is both thinking and bodily beings; thought is never disconnected from the body.

Some objections to the differentiation of human existence into mind and body are made on the axis of the concept of "embodiment". Embodiment is essential for it emphasizes the materiality of the body. Reflecting an understanding that it is impossible to separate experiences from concepts, emotions from the mind, and mind from body, this concept problematizes the contrast between having a body and being a body, embodying. Cartesian philosophy indicates the body as an extension of the person. However, this image is phenomenologically inadequate. As Nietzsche states, the feeling that a human is a body indicates the existence of an indivisible unity with his body (Stauth & Turner, 2005, p.143).

While the body has an "invisible" quality in the classical perspective based on the superiority given to the mind over the body, the body now becomes "visible" with the cultural, economic, scientific, and technological developments in modern societies (Nazlı, 2005). Michel Foucault describes this visibility as a discourse proliferation concerning the body and associates the visibility of the body with practices of power. According to Foucault (2007, p.102-103), in this process that highlights aspects such as the discipline of the body, the enhancement of its abilities, and the emergence of its powers, the body has been domesticated through regulatory control, made obedient, and integrated into economic systems of surveillance.

Although the visibility of the body does not mean that the mind-body dichotomy has disappeared, it is closely related to the curiosity about the body's materiality as part of the interest in discovering the material world and its functions in social life. According to Courtine (2013), the body has turned into a material body in the twentieth century. The body, made of flesh and bone, has become an effective tool for social practices in its organic integrity. This subjective position of the body has made it the material target of conscious and unconscious impulses. The fact that the body is the most determining factor in identity design based on appearance in modernity (Giddens, 2014, p. 132) is related to this situation. With modernity, individuals have to reconstruct their tastes, which determine their subjective identities



and lifestyles, over their appearances; in other words, they must perform self-control. Foucault associates this self-control with practices and discourses such as gymnastics, exercises, bodybuilding, nudity, and glorifying the beautiful body. According to Foucault (2003, p. 39), these regulatory control mechanisms seek to dominate the body and emphasize bodily consciousness and lead individuals to desire their own bodies.

As the consumption culture becomes a dominant phenomenon that determines the social sphere, the relationship that Foucault establishes between the body and the order of desire becomes even more meaningful. As a matter of fact, within the discussions on postmodernity, the relationship between the body and consumption is emphasized more prominently. For example, Featherstone states, "Postmodern everyday culture is, therefore, a culture of stylistic diversity and heterogeneity, of an overload of imagery and simulations which lead to a loss of the referent or sense of reality." (2007, p. 122). Within the said simulation excess, it can be said that the body-spirit hierarchy seen in belief-based understandings has been dissolved, and the body has been sanctified, making it familiar to the soul's position in existence and even replacing the soul with the body. In Baudrillard's words, "The cult of the body no longer stands in contradiction to the cult of the soul: it is the successor to that cult and heir to its ideological function." (Baudrillard, 1998, p.136).

The Modularization of the Body as a Space of Self

When we look at how it has been handled historically, it is understood that the body is most visible in the consumption culture. The main reason for this visibility is that the body is a vital consumption object, a unique capital. With the contribution of the developments in fashion and aesthetics, the focus of discourses in popular culture has been the visibility of the body, and these discourses, which contribute to the spread of consumer culture, have made the body the crucial consumption object (Baudrillard, 1998). As Baudrillard puts it, "the hygienic, dietetic, therapeutic cult which surrounds it, the obsession with youth, elegance, virility/femininity, treatments and regimes, and the sacrificial practices attaching to it all bear witness to the fact that the body has today become an object of salvation." (1998, p. 129).

The body is no longer an entity whose existence is proven only by its materiality but is a cultural object organized by consumption culture. The relationship with the body is not different from the relationship with other consumption objects; the organizational style of the relationship established with things and the organization style of the relationship established with the body are mainly similar (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 129). Like things, the body is in an investment/capital position guided by the pleasure principle. The body has become an instrumental form of the myth of desire, wrapped in promises of liberation and self-fulfillment. Foucault emphasizes that within this discourse of liberation, the body, adorned with



gender icons and cosmetic products, and eroticized, is no longer in the form of “control-repression”, but in a new economic and ideological siege that emerges in the form of “control-promotion”. The slogan of these new conditions is: “Get undressed... but be slim, good-looking, tanned!” (Foucault, 2003, p. 40).

Context of the discourse of desire, bodies are positioned as objects that can be constantly reshaped and designed. Applications that diversify in the axis of fashion, aesthetics, and health can be seen as the main areas where the body is subject to constant change and transformation with the construction of the discourse of desire. In addition, with the development of biotechnologies, cloning, organ transplantation, the development of plastic surgery, etc., these issues have the potential to reinforce the discourse of desire about the body. These developments expand the limits of desires that can be demanded through the body and artificial identity modifications. With the help of technology, the body takes on a modular structure consisting of more modifiable parts. In postmodern culture, identities, and belongings are constantly changing, such as mixing and fitting almost everything in different categories (Bocock, 1993, p. 81); the body is also adapted to an order in which technological parts can be brought together in different combinations.

The modification of the body in different ways, on the one hand, makes it an object instrumentalized by the desired production mechanisms of the consumption culture; on the other hand, it can also mean an objection to the body design organized according to the requirements of social life. Elizabeth Grosz traces the social context of the various markings on the body and states that the body is open to a two-way evaluation when looking at the modifications made. According to Grosz (1997), although such bodily modifications turn the body into a text that encourages social harmony and reflects social laws, it can also be thought of as a tool to question the discursive order of the body, to transform and update it. Technological modification of the body can also be considered in a context similar to marking with text or symbols.

The modification of the body, as Kaderli states, confines it to superficial and symbolic visibility. Behind this symbolic appearance, the body has become an object of consumption, ignored by the mind, exceeded by the use of technology, modified with a projected sense of personality, and actually disembodied¹ (2018, p. 9). With this aspect, the body is the target of capitalist policies, equipped with adjectives such as beautiful-ugly, healthy-unhealthy, and strong-weak.

Besides being a part of a social body construction by revealing the acceptance of the consumption culture, the modularized body also points to the search for new and original subjectivity that destroys the existing self-perception. Discussions on this search for subjectivity are frequently included in the axis of the concept of cyberpunk. Cyberpunk can be seen as an extension of the punk movement, which

1 However, the thought of embodiment includes an experiential body thought beyond the traditional anthropological approach's understanding of the body as a symbolic surface (Kaderli, 2018, p.164-165). As Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1999) stated, the body is a direct dimension of human experience. The embodiment experience is not something that becomes invisible when we ignore it.



has an essential place in body modification in challenge strategies. “Cyberpunk, based on a futuristic posthuman discourse, carries the deviant attitude and modification practices of the punk movement to cyberspace, biomedicine, and high technology” (Kaderli, 2018, p.170). Thus, it is aimed to get rid of the physical as well as discursive limitations of the body through technological remodeling.

The cyberpunk movement and the reflections of body modifications in popular culture products are discussed, especially concerning cyborg characters. As Murphy and Schmenik emphasize, cyberpunk not only explores the hybridization of humans with machines and thus a break from human limitations but also embraces the cyborg not as a radical metaphor but by naturalizing it and exploring its consequences on humanity (2018, p. xxvi). By blurring the machine-human distinction, cyborg characters whose bodies have been modified with various technologies also blur the traces of social norms on the body and become a symbolic expression of the search for an alternative political subject. Haraway says the cyborg is “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism” (2016, p. 9). This means that the cyborg has an aspect that is not within the scope of the body politics of the capitalist economy and is in a struggle with the various myths built on the body¹.

The construction of the cyborg body after or with physical pain also strengthens the aforementioned symbolic expression. Because, in the context of body politics under the control of power relations, pain can be a means of engraving norms and values on the body, as it is a reminder factor. As Nietzsche puts it, “Civilization instills its basic necessities only by imprinting the law on bodies through a reminder of pain” (Grosz, 1997, p. 240). Pain is one of the means by which the subject is included in the collective memory and history. The cyborg body is gradually making traces of collective memory on the body invisible, with pain-defying technological equipment. However, when the said technological equipment is considered as a trace of the aforementioned painful experience, it should not be forgotten that the cyborg body will also become a carrier of a collective memory shaped by pain.

From another point of view, the feeling of pain reminds of the inseparable unity of body with mind, as an element that recalls the past of cyborg characters or their selves hidden in the depths of their subconscious. In addition to the feeling of pain, different sensory experiences contribute to the cyborg characters’ remembering the experiences they have forgotten with various power policies being involved in the self-reflexive processes necessary for self-construction.

1 The foundations of this metaphorical perception regarding the cyborg can be traced back to the ideas of Julien Offray de La Mettrie, who lived in the 18th century and offered a critique of the understanding that declared the “body” as a machine based on Descartes’ mind-body dualism. La Mettrie considered man as a machine and opposed the soul/mind-body distinction with a holistic and materialist body idea (Uslu, 2022, p. 130). According to this thinker who developed a conception of a materialist body and an embodied cognition based on “vitality”, the body exists in harmonious interaction with the environment (Uslu, 2022, p. 130). Therefore, although the cyborg imagery is relatively new, the association between human/body and the machine, as well as the symbolic context of the cyborg have roots that extend far back in history.



Cybernetic Body on the Axis of Posthumanist Approach

With the developments in technology and medicine, implants, lenses, prosthetic limbs, and artificial organs placed on the body have become increasingly commonplace, and the body has gained a modular structure. As Elizabeth FS Roberts and Nancy Scheper-Hughes highlighted, medical migrations are transforming the biological realm, and new biomedical technologies intervene in vital processes of the human body, such as reproduction, aging, and death. Associated with the control over medical and biological destinies, bodies and embodied subjectivities are altered, and contemporary bodies, new norms, specific definitions of happiness, and new and potential futures are created (Roberts and Scheper-Hughes, 2011, p. 22). Considering these aspects, it becomes evident that the phenomenon of redesigning the body through technical apparatuses offers new perspectives to the discussions surrounding the subject. Technology makes it possible to view the body as a redesignable device, making our most primitive notions about “immortality” more rational and acceptable. Thus, the invaluable functionality of modernity’s strategy of removing death from social life is guaranteed for consumer culture.

According to some writers, the idea of overcoming the body’s limitations through technological equipment or the utopian demands for a disembodied existence is similar to the desire to “get rid of the body, which is the source of evil” in gnostic belief forms. For example, Le Breton (2019, p.10-11) claims that in contemporary scientific discourses, the body is seen as an extra limb to be rid of. According to Le Breton, in Modernity, the body perceived as a mechanism, as a collection of replaceable organs, was privileged through biotechnology and modern medicine. Reducing the human body to a mechanism was a value attributed by modernity to the body, which had been perceived as an original flaw. The admiration felt for the body, whose secrets were tried to be discovered, was equated with the admiration for the attractive technical equipment of the machine. However, in today’s technical and scientific discourse, the concept of a “wonderful machine” has moved to an understanding in which the emphasis on “impermanence” is at the forefront. This understanding implies that the body does not fully deserve the discourse of being equated with the machine, – because the body is not like a machine; it gets injured, gets sick, grows old, and dies (2019, p. 15-16). From a scientific-technical point of view, the body’s fragility condemns the body to a hierarchical weakness versus the mind, if not the spirit, similar to the gnostic teachings.

This discriminatory approach to the body, immanence in the humanist view that places the human with free will and reason at the center of life, appears as a substantial limitation in understanding the body. In this understanding, the body cannot go beyond materiality equipped with the necessities of biological nature. The human body is embodied by some adjectives such as healthy-unhealthy, strong-weak, beautiful-ugly, and male-female, which find their expression in refer-



ence to biological nature. One of the expressions of the humanist view in art, the “Vitruvian man” (Leonardo Da Vinci), can be seen as a symbol of this body perception.

The transhumanism approach which puts forward a similar perspective about the body, is a system of thought that aims to overcome the bodily limitations of human beings through technology and affirms to use of the opportunities offered by technology to the fullest for this (Akyol Oktan, 2019, p. 288). In this system of thought, the emphasis on the “impermanence” of the body, as Le Breton talks about, is at the forefront. The body is in the position of an imperfect object that needs to be healed or even replaced with a technology that will not get sick or injured. Therefore, it can be said that the ideals of the Enlightenment were revived with a transhumanist perspective, and the mind-body distinction was carried forward.

At the other side, the interaction of the body with the machine is also a source of thoughts that contradict transhumanism. The posthumanist perspective is based on the idea that the body should be freed from anthropocentric stereotypes and affirms the machine-human integration as a critique of the anthropocentric subject design of the Western philosophical tradition, contrary to the anthropocentric emphases of humanism and transhumanism. From a posthumanist perspective, machine-human integration, by blurring the boundaries such as human-machine, mind-body, natural-artificial, and woman-man, turns the traditional, hardened understanding of the subject upside down (Braidotti, 2014). In this context, embodiment in posthumanism breaks the hierarchy between body and mind within the idea of an ambiguous subject that makes the body independent from its physical form and necessitates physicality.

Posthumanist arguments have attempted to integrate the human subjectivity position in existence with a transhuman understanding, with a body conception beyond Cartesian distinctions. Thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway contribute to this effort by putting forward their views within this framework. All three authors think it is necessary to perceive the body not as a pure biological form but as a necessity of embodied experience. They see embodiment as part of a process of subjectivity that involves the material elements of the body and transcends it, including non-humans. Deleuze’s “becoming”, Braidotti’s “nomadic subjectivity” and Haraway’s “companion species” concepts are based on this kind of embodiment.

In Deleuze’s philosophy (2007), “becoming” means to have a body but to exist in a necessary relationality with other becomings by transcending the traditional form of this body. Becoming is a process in which a person continues to be oneself and proliferates by turning towards something other than oneself. Emphasis on becoming relationality with others and being hybrid destroys the values and presuppositions fixed on the body, because becoming is about transcending the selves built by society and engraved on the body and revealing different meaning potentials for our existential integrity.



According to Braidotti (2017), the body has a complex structure as the conductor of flows, energies, desires, and emotions. The author states that the body should be seen as “the intersection point of the physical, sociological, and symbolic” (2017, p. 38). From this point of view, the body is positioned beyond its materiality as a social construction and in a flux/variable, nomadic process.¹ Nomadism is also based on an ethic of zoe-geo-techno-linked egalitarianism based on interspecies relationality (Braidotti, 2017, p. 39).

Similar to Braidotti, Haraway thinks that the stabilities should be blurred by reversing the oppositions such as self/other, mind/body, woman/man, and machine/human that affect the way of perceiving the body. According to the author, such an originary deconstruction means “to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial” (2016, p. 60).

A reckoning with the humanist perspective engraved on the body draws attention to the approaches of all three authors. The authors object to humanism’s representation of the body, which is based on constancy and norms and considers man superior to other beings. Of course, this does not mean that people should be lowered in terms of status. An understanding based on interspecies relationality can also be evaluated as “human’s excessive exposure and disappearance at the same time” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 62-63).

Today, the body has been reconstructed as fluid, multiple, fragmented, and dispersed depending on technological developments, and the question of what the body can turn into has gained more importance than what it is (Bell, 2001, p. 150). The cyborg, which expresses the integration of machine and organism, can be seen as a figure embodying those wonderings about this question. Although the cyborg body is frequently discussed in terms of its potential to be an ordinary object of desire production policies with its aesthetic, powerful, and gendered features, it is also the subject of discussions to question the possibilities of the alternative subject and body design mentioned in the discussions above. In particular, Haraway’s book *The Cyborg Manifesto* (2016) has been one of the sources that increased interest in the subject. According to Haraway, the cyborg challenges the Cartesian tradition of thought by blurring the boundaries between machine and human. The cyborg “has no origin story in the Western sense” (Haraway, 2016, p. 7). Therefore, it was not affected by the cultural codes engraved on the body. In this context, the author uses the cyborg figure to suggest a relational, hybrid subject idea against the essentialist understanding of humanism’s definition of the masculine subject. This understanding of the subject requires seeing the body as a fluid process based on anti-humanism.

While developments in biotechnology are revealing concerns about the essential nature of who we are and where we are going (Fukuyama, 2003, p. 126), the cyborg character standing on one side of these concerns also reminds the question of whether there is such a thing as “essence”, which is the subject of these

1 The idea that the origin of our understanding of the body is not ontological but cultural is also known from the views of Judith Butler (2008).



concerns. The question of “what is the human essence that we are feared to lose” is the most essential message that the cyborg body reflects. This kind of “anti-essentialism” is at the center of posthumanist discussions, and this approach is too often discussed through cyborg images.

Cinematic Images of Modular Bodies

The body, suspected in the Western philosophical tradition since ancient Greek philosophers as the symbol of human incompleteness and being thrown into an imperfect world, is often objectified in cultural fiction through cyborg characters produced in comics and cinema. Mechanically equipped human representations are prevalent in these narratives, which offer fantasies about compensation for the said feeling of incompleteness through the promises of technology. It can be said that the fragmented, eclectic, and variable body presentations offer clues about the social unconscious and contribute to the cultural meaning through the images they present to the cultural field. So, the meanings established regarding the body in cinema narratives are an important field of study in terms of body discussions.

Body Designs in Sample Movies

The films in which the Gally/Alita characters examined in the study are in the center were adapted from Yukito Kishiro's manga, *Gunnm*. The story, which was transferred to the cinema as an anime by Hiroshi Fukutomi with the same name, transferred to English as *Battle Angel Alita*- in 1993, was re-shot in 2019 under the direction of Robert Rodriguez the name *Alita: Battle Angel*. The story of *Gunnm* and *Alita: Battle Angel* is substantially the same. In both movies, the story of the quest of the cyborg about who she is, whose body was found in the junkyard by Dr. Ido, and brought back to life after new parts and fluids were added to it, is told. The animation method and technology used determined the difference between the two films. *Gunnm* is a two-dimensional animation. For this reason, the differences between the appearance of the bodies of cyborgs and humans are less distinct or not distinct. However, *Alita: Battle Angel* was made when animation techniques were more developed. Live-action and three-dimensional animation methods were used together in the movie, and cyborgs, robots, humans with biological bodies, etc., the type and body diversity of the characters are visualized more concretely.

In these films, the story takes place in a dystopian universe where the possibilities of science and technology develop considerably in the 26th century. As in many other cyberpunk films, living spaces are divided by insurmountable boundaries in this film. There is a definite hierarchy between the sky city of Zalem, a kind of utopia built with advanced technology, and the lower world (Iron City). Iron City was built with waste from Zalem and owed its existence to the garbage from there. While the characters of the lower world are fascinated by Zalem's largely discour-



sively constructed magnificence and charm, they also unwittingly play a role in meeting its needs. The state has completely lost its function in this dystopian world, and the Factory has replaced the state organization. The police who provide security and try to prioritize crime, have been replaced by hunter-warriors, who are also a part of the crime. In Iron City, mixed animal-human-robot hunter-warrior cyborgs, fully machined robots, humans, animals mixed with living organisms and machines, and animals consisting entirely of living organisms live under the city's strict rules known to everyone.

In the cyberpunk universe in which the narrative takes place, bodies that were utterly human before do not die due to the accidents they have had- unless their spines are not damaged in *Gunnm* and their brains in *Alita: Battle Angel*- but are transformed into cyborgs. A repairable, modifiable, decomposable body is first seen in the movie when Doctor Ido takes Alita, who has no body or limbs. However, for original core in her organic brain is still working, he assembles it into the mechanical body he made for his dead daughter to walk. The Berserker, the 300-year-old body Alita will later find, is a nanotechnology that can adapt to the brain and reshape itself according to the self. Berserker, which integrates automatically with Alita, is defined as the most advanced weapon in the world beyond being a technological system. Transformed into a device that can be redesigned repeatedly, the body thus acts as a weapon that can be worn and a human-machine hybrid cyborg.

Cyborgs have become the entertainment tools of the consumer culture of capitalism. For example, in motorball tournaments, they fight so hard that their parts or existence will be completely destroyed, cyborgs turn into objects of spectacle, and people watch this race enthusiastically. It is not a coincidence that the name of the unit that manages the city organizes these tournaments and uses the cyborgs as the killing team (hunter-warriors) is Factory. Moreover, the Factory buys organs such as arms, legs, and eyes, which it stolen from cyborgs by using organ gangs, and it sells them again or sends them to the sky city of Zalem to be used in new bodies.

It is understood that more advanced cyborgs live in Zalem, which has much more advanced technologies for transforming the body. Nova is an immortal cyborg, ruler of Zalem and, thus, of the Iron City. It has an organic body, and its body is, in a way, technology itself. Nova, who can enter the body it wants through a digital network, control them, and communicate with those in the Iron City through this method, is fully integrated with cyberspace. Nova is a machine-human-digital hybrid entity. Thus, in the film, the body ultimately moves away from being an indivisible structure with definite boundaries. The body's limitations are overcome, and the body is exhibited in a completely fluid, variable, and modular structure that almost reaches immortality.

Ghost in the Shell is adapted from the manga by Shirow Masamune, and the last part of the narrative universe, *Ghost in the Shell: SAC_2045 - Sustainable*



War, based on the same story, describes a technologically advanced world in the future where the digital network is used unlimitedly. Oshii's film is about Major Kusanagi, an advanced cyborg tasked with Episode 9 of the cybercrime and counter-terrorism unit, battling a computer program nicknamed the Puppet Master that hacks into cyborgs' brains and the bodies it controls. In the film, in which concepts such as human, cyborg, and digital networks are questioned ontologically, the main character will unite with her rival software to create a new way of life. In *Ghost in the Shell: SAC_2045 - Sustainable War*, a narrative is established in which Kusanagi is at the center, but the 9th branch has been disbanded, and its members continue to operate in different countries as a mercenary group called Ghost.

Ghost in the Shell movie focuses on a dystopian universe in 2029 with cyborgs created by companies, experiencing identity confusion, unlimited data, and information networks, and hacked minds in these networks. The bodies of some characters are completely connected to the digital network. Through the technology they call mind speech, cyborgs can speak through their minds, no matter how far they are, without moving their lips. There is complete fluidity, modularity, and hybridity in terms of the body. Like Alita, Kusanagi maintains her existence in complete fluidity in various bodies and environments, such as her body, the cyber network, and the body she joins with the Puppet Master. Differently; The Puppet Master, is a coded computer program full of neurotechnological mechanisms that developed itself without being tied to anybody's form. This hacker hacks into cyborgs' brains and enters their bodies, even fictionalizes their pasts and convinces them of their fake lives.

In the movie *Ghost in the Shell: SAC_2045 - Sustainable War*, which tells the year 2045, mechanical bodies are made from three-dimensional printers and dead bodies are replaced with artificial ones and renewed with ideal designs. Functionally perfected bodies with limbs such as the cyber brain, cybernetic body parts, and mechanical eyes appear as a heterotopic space between various layers. This hybridization between organic and cybernetic makes a hybridization possible regarding function. Body parts that can be connected to virtual reality environments and enable movement in digital networks have turned into mechanisms that can be turned on and off when desired. In this film, layered digital worlds are also designed in parallel with the physical worlds; the characters can act through different parts of their bodies or act as a different existence. Human, robot, or cyborg bodies are fully integrated with the network. The film universe can be passed from the physical to the virtual environment, and the flow of time and events can continue in a new environment without each other's past or future. From this point of view, virtual images can turn into actual images instantly, and actual images can turn into virtual images instantly. Unlike *Ghost in The Shell*, this universe has no virtual-reality distinction. All physical and virtual environments are real and open to experience from most aspects' angles. Characters, objects, etc., can exist simultaneously in multiple spaces. This space is also often open to manipulation by others.



Therefore, threats to the body also present layered and multiple appearances. As emphasized by Swale (2020), Akşit (2017), and Tembo (2017), it is clear that not only bodies but also many elements such as space and time in the film have a fluid, interactive, modular, and fragmented structure connected to cyber, nano, and neurotechnologies.

Desire Games and the Cyborg Body

The decomposable, fixable, changeable appearances of cyborg bodies are in parallel with the fluid body presentations of the consumption policies operating in the social sphere. It can be said that the fashion and aesthetic discourses transforming the body as an object of desire into a constantly changing commodity are represented by technological reproduction in cyborg characters. The fragmented, eclectic structures of the cyborg characters in the examined films, in a way, reflect the body's position that turns into a capital in the consumer culture. For example, in the movie *Alita: Battle Angel*, Alita examines her body as soon as she wakes up, right after the scene where she is embodied for the first time. However, her attention is focused on the aesthetic appearance of her body, not its mechanicalness. She rediscovers her body as a beautiful design, as a kind of object of desire. In Baudrillard's words, in order for the power of desire to be transformed into a rationally manageable object/sign demand, the individual has to rediscover his body and invest it narcissistically – the formal principle of pleasure–” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.135). In the moments when Alita discovers herself, the “principle of pleasure” draws attention beyond the curiosity of finding herself.

When the tattoo-like patterns, which are the product of a masterful handwork on Alita's body, playing an essential role in the relationship of pleasure she establishes with her body, are evaluated in the axis of Grosz's views (1997) on body modifications; it is possible to evaluate the body of the character as a kind of text in which the codes of the social order are engraved and which is the sign of harmony with this order. As Nietzsche emphasizes (qtd. Grosz, 1997, p.240), traces in the body are remnants of collective and bodily memory. Therefore, these traces make the body a part of social life. As soon as Alita woke up while examining the marks on her body, she interacted with parts of social memory, although she was not aware of it yet. The body's position in social memory is primarily related to consumption or capital value.

The bodies of Alita and the other cyborg characters in the movie are objects consumed in the current order. Alita's face, especially her big eyes, resembles mass-produced dolls, which is among the factors that reinforce this situation. In Alita's eyes, both the over-meaning and absence of desire, which Baudrillard expresses with the phrase “objectless gaze” and the metaphor of “medusa eyes”, draw attention. In this approach, which Baudrillard associates with the female model body, he particularly states that the medusa eyes are confused and pure indicators. According to him, these indicators show that attempts to exalt the body actually



result in the loss of the meaning and reality of the body through a hypnotic process (Baudrillard, 1998, p.134). It is possible to see a similar state of being lost and meaningless in Alita's enchanting eyes.

The Kusanagi character of the *Ghost in the Shell* universe has similar features to Alita's commodification of the body. While Kusanagi's flawless appearance is an ordinary indicator of fashion and beauty values, the character's body which is expressed as a "shell" of the ability of invisibility, can be considered a more abstract style of expression on the subject. The appearance and disappearance of the body can be associated with the feature of the body which is the object of desire, as a visible and disappearing place of pleasure that can never be fully satisfied. On the contrary, this invisibility reflects the views of the modern age, in which the visibility of the body gains importance, rendering the body meaningless at this level of visibility.

Apart from *Gunnm*, the bodies of the cyborg woman, the main character in all the films, are made an object of desire and exposed. The design of the female body as a symbolic means of exchange reveals a form of domination (Köse, 2011, p. 81). This domination is based on excessive sexualization. The characters' emphasis on sexuality combined with masculine stamina emerges in the form of exposing the body rather than a potential or quality attributed to these women. Combining power and beauty, fetishized by various cinematographic preferences, cyborg female bodies are surfaces that invoke the desire of the masculine eye. Counter light that emphasizes the body lines and separates the characters from their environment is widely used in low-angle shots and close-ups that present the body in parts.

Although these characters often do not engage in romantic love affairs with the male characters in the narrative, they invoke the male gaze with their unruly energies, athletic performances, and radiant charms that highlight their rounded lines. The attraction, which combines performance and appearance, is also associated with the bodies' sterile and glittering external view. Their bodies are flawless, clean, and well-groomed, even after their deadly struggles in various venues and sometimes in quite filthy environments. The sparkle and stunning sterility of the mechanical body are always preserved.

In *Ghost in the Shell*, Kusanagi's undressing from time to time to activate the transparent outfit that covers her skin which makes her invisible in battles with her opponents, is also an act that appeals to the masculine eye. As Oktan (2019) emphasizes, these not-so-short moments of the character make her, from time to time, the intersection of the other characters, the camera, and the viewer's gaze. Conversely, none of the male characters are shown naked. In the words of Kakoudaki, the artificial female body is sexy, seductive, and conducive to sexuality not despite its mechanicalness, but precisely because it is mechanical (2014, p. 83). On this surface, designed as an aesthetic and cybernetic shell, it is often depicted that a fragile and needy soul is struggling with various existential problems.



One dimension of the interventions towards the body is the individual's desire to perfect her/his body as a kind of self-building. Practices such as fitness, body-building, plastic surgery, and tattoos to better reflect the individual's existence and achieve a more desirable and ideal body image emerge as unlimited options within the strategies of visualizing the individual's existence, albeit temporarily. The radical redesign of the body through such interventions, being reflections of the body politics specific to the consumer society, which Foucault emphasizes as functioning in the form of control-promotion (2003, p. 40), also reveals a distance between one's body and perception of it. Alita also sees her body as a kind of self-construction tool. She looks for clues about her past and self that she cannot remember in the performance of her body. She adopts the body found on an old warship as part of this self-construction. It is possible to evaluate Alita's desire for self-perfection as well as search for her past in parallel with the visualization strategies of consumption policies. So much so that in the consumption culture where the production of pleasure precedes the production of meaning, individuals tend not to deepen their personalities but to improve their physical appearance.

Alita's steps towards exploration and improvement of her physical appearance and skills can be associated to the mechanisms of desire production of consumer culture, as well as to the demands of production processes for institutional efficiency at the level of action and appearance. Chris Shilling and Philip A. Mellor (2007, p. 534-535) mention that production policies advise individuals to be willing and always ready to shape their bodies as a productive resource, a physical capital. According to them, this puts individuals under increasing pressure to respond to productive demands to discipline their bodies. Nancys Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987, p. 23) argue that, in addition to this pressure that the body is subjected to concerning production, the Cartesian legacy and the materialism and individualism of biomedical, clinical practice also have an impact on the phenomenon of alienation from the body that emerges with the division and organization of arm and head labor in a hierarchy. It is seen that Alita has to renew and develop her physical performance constantly, that is, discipline it, in order to survive in the social conditions she lives in.

Compared to the older versions of films with the new ones, it is noteworthy that the bodies can be changed more frequently and easily, and the principle of "desirability" is more evident in the design and presentation of bodies in recent films. For example, in *Gunnm*, the main character is placed in the body of a frail teenage girl. This body is quite different from the firm, radiant, sterile, athletic body in the new version of the movie. In Rodriguez' film, the main character, the body that Dr. Ido assembles, has a much more aesthetic appearance. It resembles an outfit decorated with pastel-colored lace prepared for a special night, rather than an artificial body. In *Ghost in the Shell: SAC_2045 - Sustainable War*, cyborg bodies, especially Kusanagi, present a much cleaner and more desirable appearance.



In particular, Kusanagi's smooth skin and the colorful and sparkling charm of her clothes, face, and eyes are often highlighted in close-ups.

Male bodies, which are mostly seen in supporting roles in these films, present a more allegorical representation of masculinity, with their solid and flamboyant muscles that make them invincible, and their corresponding narcissistic appearance. The charm of the artificial man derives from his actualization of a narcissistic ideal that transcends the visually constructed sublime and the fragility and weakness of the body. The mechanical parts of these characters are especially emphasized as fetish elements. The mechanical harmony emphasizing Alita's aesthetic grace becomes a tool of the narcissistic image of the hunter-warrior Zapan. Zapan's metal body, which is not covered with leather or clothes, is displayed in all its details and arouses the admiration of other characters, reflects a flawless rationality made visible by technology. Motorball heroes, some hunter-warriors, and criminals, go beyond the human appearance and turn into grotesque beings through the functional parts added to their bodies.

As the body, which can be changed endlessly in these narratives, becomes fluid, it becomes a mask that anonymizes the true identity of the characters. There is almost no connection between the body and the identity immanent to the soul that is put into it. Moreover, the reality reflected from the body's surface hides the self, its mover. Baudrillard (2009) emphasizes that in the contemporary world, where everything becomes a surface and appearance and changes rapidly, the modern individual, which cannot be truly deepened, becomes anonymous and disappears. The body has ceased to be a prison; it has turned into a hiding place where the soul infiltrates. In this respect, while the body reflects the external world through the games of desire, it also turns into a kind of mirror that hides the mysteries inside.

Embodiment, Subjectivity, and Posthumanist Expansions of the Cyborg Body

Artificial humans or cyborgs, fantasies produced in popular culture and primarily based on scientific and technological developments, correspond to an ontological boundary violation between machine and human. Neither fully human nor machine, but simultaneously, these characters become mediators of discussions about what it means to be human. As mentioned by authors such as Mizukoshi (2018) and Komel (2016), both Kusanagi and Alita, who experience a deep existential gap between the prosthetic body and prosthetic memory in the films that are the subject of the study, are in search of a holistic semantic framework for their self. These are searches which tend towards an origin and a ground of belonging on which the characters can build their identities; likewise, it tends towards existential inquiries in which hybridity, going beyond Cartesian dualities and anthropocentrism, is also problematized. In another respect, the characters carry out these interrogations through the connection or disconnection rela-



tionship they establish with their bodies. The rediscovery of the prosthetic body and its abilities, the search for meaning associated with these abilities, or the depression arising from the artificial nature of the body transforms the body into a tool for the characters to look deeper into themselves. For this reason, it is seen that both Gally/Alita and Kusanagi frequently look at their images reflected from surfaces such as water, glass, and mirrors, and each time, in a sense, confront themselves through their reflections.

When Gally/Alita realizes what Doctor Ido found in the junkyard and reassembled into a new body, she sees her new body's hands and immediately gets up and stands in front of the mirror. She looks at her body and tries to recognize this alien new body. She even touches the mirror with his finger to ensure whether this reflective surface is a kind of passage or not. Alita's interest in her mirrored body is visualized as a magical exploration. The character examines her body in front of the mirror with childlike curiosity and fascination. After the scene where Alita learns that her strong heart from her old life is a highly advanced technology core and that she is a warrior, she also discovers her body in front of the mirror again, and this time to improve her fighting skills.

Kusanagi, the main character of *Ghost in the Shell*, carries her existential pursuits beyond reflected images. She dives into the ocean's depths, hoping to feel something that might make sense of her existence, even though it could be detrimental to her mechanical parts and circuits. As she rises to the water's surface, she encounters her image reflected. And sometimes, she watches lifeless mannequins in the shop windows with a few parts of their bodies missing. The camera which frequently frames the character's face in close-up, is almost used to emphasize his pensive eyes, which never blink. The character's gaze is not directed to the physical world but to a search for a reality deep within herself.

Anneke Smelik points out in her *Cinematic Fantasies of Becoming-Cyborg* article that Landsberg emphasizes that in scenes reminiscent of the Lacanian mirror phase, reflective surfaces allow for an enigmatic moment of self-recognition and even self-reflection. Pointing out that such plans are preferred in injury/repair scenes, Smelik says that the main exciting thing here is the indecision of even the cyborg about her/his situation: "Who are they? Man or machine? Why do they experience pain or feelings? Do they have memories" (Smelik, 2010, p.94).

Kusanagi's phrase "I am on my period" at the beginning of the movie as the cause of the parasites in his brain; Alita's shedding tears while she has a completely machine body except for her face; the scenes in which she experiences the tastes of foods are the moments when precisely those questions which pointed out by Smelik, are asked by both the characters and the audiences: Are they machines or human? If they are human, why are their bodies machines? If they are machines, why do they have feelings? Who are they really, or where do they belong?

Kusanagi's existential quest is more about whether she is human enough. This is not an ontological questioning, but is a quest, designed in the way that



the subject defines and makes sense of its own existence through experience, is closer to a Sartrean approach. Kusanagi tries to refresh her experiences by observing the ordinary in the city's streets and diving into the ocean's depths. She experiences both the mundane and the extreme to re-remember her biological body's memories and rediscover her humanity.

As for Alita, every scene where she rediscovers her existence in front of the mirror takes place in the moments when she enters a new phase of her life, takes on a new identity, and is on the way of constructing herself. In the first, the affectionate and childlike self that she acquired with Ido's daughter's body; in the second, her discovery of her past by regaining her original body; and in the third, determination in her struggle against the big brother, Nova with her firm body and determination is reflected in the mirror. The movements and confident stance of the character while looking at herself in the mirror, in a way, reflect the self-approval of the body image she presents.

At this point, the existential inquiries of the characters reveal an anthropocentric approach from time to time. The fact that cyborg characters mirror an anthropocentric view is primarily related to the fact that they are a tool for humanity to think about itself. Questioning of how human we are, whether we owe our human status to the mind, the spirit, or the senses, corresponds to a narcissistic attitude in a way, and the artificial body becomes the mediator of this attitude. The mentioned mirror metaphor is also significant in this respect. The images of Alita and Kusanagi in the mirror or in the water reflect the modern human's alter egos. As Le Breton puts it, "Every day, thousands of men and women are always in front of the mirror – because there are mirrors in the halls and the exercises require the presence of the mirror – destroying their bodies, which they reveal as their alter ego (weightlifting ego). The point is to manufacture himself/herself, to transform his/her body into an object that will gain value" (2019, p.40).

Another feature of cyborg-themed narratives is that they reflect the uneasiness caused by the technological bodies being equipped to replace humans. This uneasiness is related to the fact that the hardware potentials of the cyborg far exceed human qualities, as well as contextual content similar to that expressed by the disruption of body integrity in contemporary horror films with the theme of "body horror". The concept of "body horror" was used as a label, in the 1970s and early 1980s, for a series of horror films made by David Cronenberg, a variety of zombie, monster, and creature-themed films, as well as slasher films characterized by the violation of the human body in the 1970s and early 1980s. While the concept has been subject to evaluation from feminist, socio-cultural, and psychoanalytic perspectives, the discussions within this framework converge on the question of what truly makes the spectacle of bodily horror terrifying from a biological standpoint. One of the answers to this question is undoubtedly the fear of power loss in humans (Cruz, 2012, p. 161-162, 164). Both *Alita: Battle Angel* and *Ghost in the Shell* feature cyborg types that can be associated with the concept of "body horror".



The disturbing nature of the disruptions in the bodily integrity of these cyborgs reinforces the fear of power loss.

These concerns that humans are reducible to a mechanism can be seen as signs of a humanist mentality because the fear of humans merging with machines is related to the assumption that humans have an essence and can lose this essence through technology. The fact that all bodies are human-shaped in all of the films examined and their faces are made of flesh and skin, no matter how mechanical their bodies are, can be evaluated as an extension of the fear of losing face, which is the carrier of that essence and identity.

One of the focal points of the discussions on the cyborg body is about dualist boundaries such as mind-body, machine-human, and natural-artificial. The emphasis that a healthy mind is sufficient for continuing existence reproduces the mind-body dualism in all the films reviewed. In this respect, it can be said that both Gally/Alita and Kusanagi characters are the protagonists of a narrative parallel to the humanist approach, which implies the vital superiority of the mind.

However, although these characters are figures in which the mind and body are handled in a distinctive structure, there are also indicators in different parts of the narrative that this dualism is questioned. For example, in the movie *Gunnm*, the part that distinguishes a person is the spine, which is also a part of the physical body. Damage to the spine also means the end of human originality. The body, which preserves its originality through the spine, also has its memory, which preserves its existence at the subconscious level. The abilities of the original body are automatically remembered at the time of crisis. The body's movements and experiences enable it to remember who it was, where it was, and its past existence. The fact that the body has its memory gives it an autonomous subjectivity. In the movie *Alita: Battle Angel*, the thing that keeps life alive and makes it possible to remain human is that the brain is not damaged. Therefore, the measure of being human is that the brain is biological, as in *Ghost in the Shell*. Changing or modifying other organs is insignificant in terms of asset categorization.

The fact that the body has a memory, a kind of subjectivity is attributed to it, and the relationship established between mind and body reminds approaches that argue that the mind and body are closely interconnected. It can be said that such cinematic images have parallels with the views of thinkers such as Ryle (2009), Merleau-Ponty (2006), and Nagoshi & Nagoshi (2012) against the mind-body duality. Furthermore, Schepers-Hughes and Lock's views on the perception of the body in medical anthropology are essential in the sense that they contribute to evaluating these images together with the prejudices rooted in Cartesian oppositions in clinical medicine. According to the authors, Western science and clinical medicine, due to their commitment to dualities such as mind-body, matter-spirit, and real-unreal, have disregarded a holistic understanding of the body by fragmenting it into its organic and psychological aspects or individual and societal dimensions. However, Schepers-Hughes and Lock argue that the body should be perceived not



as a fragmented, expansive, and complex machine but as a microcosm of the universe (1987, p. 8-10, 21). The portrayal of doctors and medical interventions in the films *Gunnm* and *Alita: Battle Angel* provides clues regarding the role of clinical medicine in the loss of this perception of bodily integrity.

Another indication of the loss of the body's perception of wholeness is related to the separation of affect from the mind. Contrary to psychoanalytic and psychobiological perspectives that reduce emotions and passions to a discourse focused on innate drives or instincts, emotions constitute a part of the integrity of the body (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987, p. 29). In *Gunnm* and *Alita: Battle Angel* movies, Gally/Alita finds answers to her questions about her existence thanks to her affections that include the unity of mind and body. Affective memory, invoked through the bodily agency, activates the conatus of being. As Spinoza (2010) argues, the experiences of the body generate ideas, leave a trace in the mind, or the feeling takes place in the body, and this is again settled in the memory. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the unity between mind and body also through the concept of "embodied experience". Shilling, drawing on Dewey's views, emphasizes the significant role of physical experience in thinking processes. The fact that cultural exchange is largely mediated through the senses is a fundamental indicator of the relationship between thought and experience. Although the source of thoughts at the level of consciousness is education and knowledge, the act of thinking gains maturity at the sensory, experiential, that is, bodily level. Thus, thought cannot be reduced to environmental influences or mental processes. Existing, thinking, knowing, and acting necessitate an organism-environment interaction that involves experience (Shilling, 2017, p. 1209-1210). In the film *Alita: Battle Angel*, Alita's renewal of her memories through her bodily performances indicates the connection of experience with consciousness.

Ghost in the Shell's director Oshii, with a similar approach, believes that omoi, which includes "thought" or "feeling", is still a valid thing. He writes, "to explore what happens when memory and body are unreliable as foundations of the self and affect are the only remaining mark of the self" (Orbaugh, 2008, p.161). Kusanagi thinks that things like a face, an unnoticed voice, the hand seen on waking, childhood memories, thoughts about the future, and the massive data network accessible by the cyber-brain, are the things that make up the consciousness called self and also distinguish herself from others. It can be said that "ghost", an essential concept of the cyber world in the film, is an inner whisper that fully meets the concept of affect, including emotion and thought.

In this framework, the lack of a clear hierarchy between rational reason and intuition is a remarkable discussion in all the films examined. For example, Alita unquestioningly clings to the fragmentary remnants of her memory, which she does not fully control over. She accepts out-of-context instructions that appear in vague memories, of which she does not know the before and after, as a part of herself. What pushes her to embrace a fragmented self so much is an intellectual



intuition that is not disconnected from the mind but highlights sensory content. Similarly, Kusanagi is also in an intuitive search in diving moments. These scenes, in which reason and intuition do not contain a hierarchical opposition, can also be evaluated as an objection to the rationality emphasis of the humanist subject.

Blurring the boundaries between mind and body is an essential indicator of anti-humanism, because in the alternative subject definitions mentioned in the posthumanist discourse, the body is not a phenomenon whose materiality can be given up. In this conception of the subject, the body corresponds to an area where the performative possibilities of the material form and the process of becoming coexist, and where no opposition is established between the concrete and the abstract.

In these narratives, due to the hybrid nature of the cyborg body, the blurring of boundaries, such as machine-human and natural-artificial, also opens the door to debates beyond anthropocentrism. As can be remembered from the approaches of thinkers such as Deleuze, Haraway, and Braidotti, deconstructing these dualities is essential in breaking down the humanist tradition's stereotypes. Thus, human can turn to a new understanding of embodiment through an ethical understanding based on the principle of interspecies equality beyond their natural form. The cyborg body can be seen as a symbolic expression of such thinking.

Hybridization, which results from organic and technological merging, also reflects a notion of subjectivity that experiences differences. In *Ghost in the Shell*, the Puppet Master encourages reflection on the idea of a nomadic subjectivity while expressing the potential of bodies to transform into more easily manipulated objects that are more open to external threats. The Puppet Master is pursuing a new life form by exceeding the limits the authority sets. While programmers try disconnecting him from the network, he defends himself, saying, "I am a life form born in a sea of information". This becoming brings up an understanding of subjectivity that includes non-humans.

Haraway (2010) argues that ignoring, controlling, or preventing the encounters between bodies will also eliminate the potentials and freedoms that may arise due to these encounters. She says, "There is an abundant network of mutual formation, co-evolution, communication, cooperation that will help us rethink the issues of communication and control that lie at the heart of the cyborg figure" (2010, p. 254). It is possible to see a similar experience of encounter, state of being, and cooperation in the Puppet Master's expression of himself in the female body with a male voice. This indicates that being a woman and being a man felt simultaneously coincides with the anti-humanist ideas of subjectivity, which is also evident in Haraway's thoughts and is based on the importance of feeling the other. It can be said that Kusanagi's words, "I feel as if I can transform into something else", when she rises from the sea to the surface and her desire to dive into the mind of the Puppet Master draw attention to the potential of encountering and sensing the other. Thus, modularity allows questioning the possibility of a nomadic subjectivity that breaks the male-female dualism and the hierarchy attached to this dualism.



As it will be remembered from Deleuze's views, the process of becoming corresponds to not giving up being oneself completely while increasing by sensing different becomings. The experience of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master's merging on the network describes such a becoming. After this merger, when the character Batou asks Kusanagi, "Is he still in you", referring to the Puppet Master, Kusanagi, who is in the body of a little girl, answers that "in front of you, neither the program called Puppet Master nor the woman known as Major". In her answer, an idea of subjectivity pluralized by different becoming resonates. It is a hybrid, heterogeneous, fluid body formed by merging two insubstantial bodies. As Corbett (2009) and Miner (2014) pointed out, this is a new body with the potential and hope to collapse ontological distinctions and make new life forms possible, created by agents who can take responsibility for technology instead of rejecting or being a victim of it.

All these discussions about the body are closely related to the attitude toward the role of technology in our lives. When interpreted from a transhumanist perspective, the cyborg body gains a humanist identity; but within the framework of posthumanist approaches, it can reflect criticisms of anthropocentrism. In this context, the cyborg is open to argument on the axis of humanism, which includes admiration for the bio-technologies of the future, as well as within the framework of anti-humanism with its aspect that overthrows the myths of origin.

Conclusion

In philosophical and sociological debates on the transformation of the body, it is often emphasized that the body becomes more visible than ever before as a kind of area of diversity and attraction. The body, which has become the foremost place of self-realization or, in other words, the production of self-image, has turned into a project in connection with the perfection of physical appearance, overcoming biological limitations and immortality desires. The body, whose boundaries are expanded, possibilities are increased, redesigned, hybridized, and fluidized through technology and medicine, has ceased to be a tomb where the soul is trapped.

Cinematic images, and especially cyborg figures, are examples where ideals related to the body, and the modularization of the body become visible at the most extreme level. In the films examined within the scope of the study, it is seen that artificial humans or cyborg characters have similar diversity in terms of the components that make them up and the elements that make them human. In these films, methods such as the mechanical parts attached to the organic body, the transplantation of the organic brain into a prosthetic body, the placement of the characters who have entirely lost their organic integrity in another body, the artificial intelligence gaining subjectivity by developing itself and merging with another human, and disembodied forms of existence, are the imagery of the artificial human.



The body, constantly changing and fluidizing through various design instruments and advanced technology in films, is closely related to social body fictions, which are transformed into an object of desire and constantly reshaped in the social arena with fashion and aesthetics discourses. As the body is a product of consumer culture and identity politics, it has gained a privileged place and become visible by getting rid of its former invisibility. However, this visibility is superficial. It results from the reflexive logic of social formation, which Bauman (2018) defines as liquid modernity, and Giddens (2014) the late modern period. In this context, the fragmentation and modularity of cyborg bodies in films can be associated with the necessity of the modern individual to construct, perform, be fluid, and have a view of himself in a state of constant change (Giddens, 2014, p. 267) that Giddens also emphasizes. In such a relationship, the cyborg indicates that although the body is not in a weak position against the mind or spirit, it has lost its identity with the self and has turned into a raw material open to all kinds of modifications. For the cyborg, it can also be called the technological beautification of the body, which is the object of desire games. The cyborg body, created by the combination of the organic and mechanical, exemplifying an uncanny existence, is imagined as a field of attraction with the strength and durability promised by the mechanical, its unlimited design, and modification ability.

In the films examined, the attraction of the cyborg body is related to the visual pleasure embodied in the image of women, who are at the center of the narratives, designed as heroes who are omnipotent with their beauty and unstoppable energies, as well as the power and modularity it promises. The bodies of cyborg women, eroticized, fragmented, and fetishized, transformed into desirable surfaces with color and light arrangements, are transformed into a cult of perfection through concepts such as strength, durability, and desire. The cyborg female characters' resistance identities, physical capacities, speed, determination, and abilities also establish them as subjects and present them as alter egos. This cinematic strategy prioritizes the gaze toward the body. This body design, established with the view of the omnipotent external subject of the cinema – the spectator – corresponds to a “social body”. Thus, the body, established as an entity in itself and glorified as a perfect design, is, in fact, the object of desire plays and a spectacle.

One dimension of the discussions about the body in the films that are the subject of the study is the questioning of whether the cyborg characters are human enough, what it means to be human, and how the body can be made sense of under these conditions. In this context, cyborg characters present somewhat ambiguous images. The main element that makes these characters uncanny is that they simultaneously contain the idea of a dependent subjectivity, which is the object of desire production policies, and an unlimited, unbound, rootless subjectivity based on becoming. In other words, a traditional, dualist, hierarchy-producing subjectivity approach and a radical, egalitarian, and posthumanist understanding of subjectivity that disrupts the dual thinking structure constitute the two faces of the cyborg body. Although it is possible to interpret them as indicators of the outputs of liquid



modernity, the discussions brought up by cyborgs on the axis of the concept of posthuman indicate an intellectual richness. This richness is about sensing the other in a connective, multi-layered understanding of the subject that expands the existential focus towards non-humans and the pluralization this sense will provide. This idea of subjectivity also radically expands the boundaries of the ontological definition of human. Therefore, the cyborg bodies in the films provide inspiring intellectual openings in the context of enabling the imagination of a posthumanist future in which interspecies hybridization is perceived as an ethical possibility. In this framework, the androgynous installation of cyborg women can also be interpreted in the context of Haraway's blurring of boundaries by cyborg as a posthumanist, post-gendered possibility.

Nevertheless, questioning cyborg characters with artificial bodies about not being human enough or seeking a self-defining self is more limited in recent examples. For example, in *Ghost in the Shell SAC_2045 - Sustainable War*, the body's surface and its aesthetic design are emphasized more, while the inner questions of the characters, the discussions about existence and who they are, are much less involved. It is either very limited or unclear which characters have a fully biological body and which are partially or entirely artificial. It is seen that the characters whose minds are transferred to an artificial body do not question this situation. Death in the biological body and rebirth as a machine synthesis has become commonplace. Being a human, a cyborg, or an utterly artificial machine is not portrayed as a privilege; the soul as a complementary part of the body, and the relationship between the two is less and less problematized. Conducting new studies examining this trend, which is also observed in web series such as *Ghost in the Shell SAC_2045*, *Altered Carbon Resleeved*, from the perspectives of the transformation of the cyborg figure, of how new forms of representation can be interpreted in terms of philosophical discussions, and of its relationship with sectoral orientations and changes in the audience profile, will enrich the discussions in this area.

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