

and force her to admit that “the first sin was intercourse” and “Eve was weak.” Mrs. Snell (Amy Irving), Chris (Nancy Allen), and Miss Collins (Betty Buckley) are all the agents of patriarchy who respond to Carrie’s refusal to accept her castration through attempts to disavow it. Snell and Mrs. Collins seek to transform Carrie, through fetishization, into an overvalued object, into a Cinderella who becomes queen of the senior prom. Chris seeks to punish Carrie by exploring her castrated body, dumping a bucket of pig’s blood on her in a symbolic reenactment of the opening shower scene. All of these female agents of patriarchy trigger Carrie’s transformation into telekinetic monster at the prom, though the film remains extremely sympathetic toward Carrie and openly critical of the forces of patriarchal repression, it nonetheless does constitute female sexuality as monstrous and punishes Carrie for her usurpation of phallic powers.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION

1930s Science Fiction

The SF film tended to be rare in the United States prior to the 1950s. The most famous film of this period, *Things to Come* (1936), based upon a story by British author H. G. Wells, was, by and large, a British production, though it was directed by an American, William Cameron Menzies, and distributed in England and the United States by an American company, United Artists. Wells’s work spawned a series of films about the Invisible Man (1933, 1940) and even an Invisible Woman (1940). At the more unusual end of the spectrum stands Fox’s *Just Imagine* (1930), a SF comedy that looks forward to Woody Allen’s *Sleeper* (1973). Set in 1980, it involves the revival of a man who died in 1930 and his adventures in the future. The Great Depression may have been the inspiration for a pair of disaster films—*Deluge* (1933), a film about a series of earthquakes that cause a tidal wave that floods New York City, and *It’s Great to Be Alive* (1933), in which a global epidemic kills every man on Earth but one. American SF during this period is best represented by the *Flash Gordon* serials produced by Universal (1936, 1938, 1940).

1950s Science Fiction

The explosion of science fiction films in the 1950s (less than a dozen SF films had been made between 1930 and 1950 but more than eighty were released in the 1950s) is undoubtedly due to the Cold War and anxiety about the atomic bomb. In fact, from the 1950s to the present, science fiction films function as barometers of cultural anxiety, addressing many of the Big Ideas facing post-war American society. Films about invaders from outer space, such as *The*

Thing, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *It Came from Outer Space*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, spoke to concerns about a communist takeover of the United States. The advent of the atomic bomb prompted another cycle of films exploring anxieties of the nuclear age. Scientific testing of the Bomb was imagined to have resulted in radioactive fallout (*The Incredible Shrinking Man*, 1957), the creation of gigantic mutations of nature in areas where atomic weapons had been tested (*The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*; *Them!* 1954), or the end of human life on the planet (*On the Beach*, 1959).

Nightmarish visions of alien invasions were inverted in a series of more upbeat films about our exploration of other worlds in films such as *Destination Moon*, *Rocketship X-M* (1950), and *Forbidden Planet*, in which science leads to the production of greater knowledge about the universe. In the 1960s, in the wake of Sputnik and the (subsequent) massive infusion of financial capital and public interest in the American space program, the genre of space exploration flourished, both on television in the *Star Trek* series (1966 on) and on the big screen with the British coproduction *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Marooned* (1969). At the same time, the nuclear arms race prompted hypothetical visions of a postapocalyptic landscape in which a handful of humans struggle to survive in a world dominated by the nonhuman—by apes in the *Planet of the Apes* films (1968, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 2001, 2011) or, by albino mutants, the byproduct of biological warfare, in *The Omega Man* (1971), or by the Darkseekers, mutants created by a virus. Ecological disasters, ranging from the disappearance of plant life on Earth (*Silent Running*, 1972) and overpopulation accompanied by food shortages (*Soylent Green*, *Logan's Run*) to global warming (*The Day After Tomorrow*, 2004) and the overheating of the Earth's core in *2012* (2009) addressed similar anxieties about the future of the human race.

1970s Science Fiction: Lucas and Spielberg

The genre of science fiction entered a new phase in 1977 under the guidance of a generation of filmmakers led by George Lucas with *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Unlike earlier science fiction films, *Star Wars* looked back to the past, not into the future. Set in a galaxy “far, far away” and “a long time ago,” the film, inspired in part by *Beowulf* and Arthurian legend, draws on the culture of medieval knights and centers its action around the abduction and rescue of a royal princess (in a reworking of the abduction plot of *The Searchers*, 1956). Influences in the creation of characters and the staging of specific scenes come from an eclectic group of earlier texts including J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, *Buck Rogers*, and *Flash Gordon* serials of the late 1930s, and World War II movies such as *Air Force* (1943) and *The Dam Busters* (UK, 1954). Hand-to-hand combat with light sabres draws extensively on the swordplay of the Japanese samurai, which date back to the twelfth century, while the Empire's stormtroopers seem inspired by Nazi stormtroopers of the 1930s and 1940s. More importantly, Lucas's narrative draws extensively on Joseph Campbell's study of ancient myths, which Campbell argues share

a common narrative structure. He calls this fundamental narrative the *monomyth*. In the monomyth, the hero (Luke Skywalker) receives “a call to adventure,” which he must accept or refuse. He leaves the ordinary world and enters a strange or magical realm where, often with the aid of a protector (Obi-Wan Kenobi) who provides him with supernatural powers, he embarks on “a road of trials,” a set of obstacles that he overcomes or fails to overcome. Upon achieving his goals, the hero returns to the ordinary world where he shares his prize or new knowledge with his fellow men. In short, what Lucas (and Spielberg) brought to the genre was a mythic dimension that the immediacy and topicality of many earlier science fiction films lacked. Although Spielberg did not directly evoke Campbell and the monomyth, he nonetheless did, like Lucas, consciously rework the *mythic* aspects of the narrative of *The Searchers* by putting the central characters of *Close Encounters* in pursuit of a child abducted by aliens.

At the same time, Lucas and Spielberg were less interested in science than in magic and mysticism. For Lucas, it is all about “the Force.” As Obi-Wan Kenobi explains it, “The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.” In *Close Encounters*, the moonstruck hero, driven by a vision of the Devils Tower implanted in him by his contact with a UFO, journeys on a quest for mystical enlightenment from an encounter with aliens. The heroes in *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* rely on intuition rather than reason and have no patience for the scientific method. What they achieve at the end of their journey is knowledge, but it is irrational, mystical, and romantic in nature and not scientific knowledge. In *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, Spielberg again associates the alien with the supernatural and the mystical. E.T. dies only to be magically reborn (with a glowing heart) moments later. His farewell gift to the boy, Elliott, is a transfer of anima/spirit through a glowing finger that touches the boy on the forehead, evoking the hand of God in “The Creation of Adam” in Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel.

Close Encounters and *E.T.* initiated a cycle of films featuring nonthreatening, benevolent aliens, including films such as *Repo Man* (1984), *Starman* (1984), *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984), *D.A.R.Y.L.* (1985), and *Cocoon* (1985). But the more traditional “evil alien” continued to threaten human life in films such as *Alien*, *The Thing*, *Aliens*, *Invaders from Mars* (1986), *Predator* (1987), and *They Live* (1988). In *Alien*, the science officer of the spaceship *Nostromo* is an android whose chief loyalty is to the duplicitous “corporation” rather than to the crew whom he betrays by trying to protect the alien monster. Ridley Scott returned to the themes of androids and ruthless corporations again in *Blade Runner*, a film that speaks to the anxieties of the age of information in which humans interact with computers and intelligent machines, and the differences between humans and intelligent machines become blurred to the point where “humanity” is no longer the sole property of humans. This age has begun to witness new scientific phenomena such as genetic engineering, machine-phase nanotechnology, and advanced work on artificial intelligence.

Posthuman Science Fiction

A number of the most interesting contemporary science fiction films (from the 1980s to the present) look at what it means to be human by contemplating the complexity of life in the age of the posthuman. The notion of the posthuman in science and literature concerns the changing nature of human identity in an environment increasingly dominated by artificially intelligent machines and a world in which humans increasingly interact with one another through the agency of such machines. *Blade Runner* represents one of the earliest and most compelling instances of what might best be described as the posthuman phase of the science fiction genre in which the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman have become less stable and more porous. In *Blade Runner*, postindustrial capitalism has transformed human beings into alienated objects who are forced to function as machines (e.g., the detective hero Deckard) and has sought to engineer objects (intelligent machines) in such a way that they behave more and more like humans (e.g., Roy Batty, one of the replicants Deckard has been assigned to destroy). In the director's cut of the film, Scott makes it clear that Deckard himself is a replicant by suggesting that his unicorn dream was implanted in him, much as Rachael's memories were implanted in her.

Posthuman themes and motifs inform an impressive series of major science fiction films of the 1980s through the first decade of the twenty-first century. A comic reworking of the boundary confusion that characterizes the posthuman occurs in *Short Circuit* (1986) when a military robot named Number 5 is struck by lightning, comes alive, and takes flight, fearing he will be disassembled (much as the replicants in *Blade Runner* fear they will be "retired"). Ulysses, the android in *Making Mr. Right* (1987), exhibits more sensitivity than the scientist who created him. He falls in love with the film's heroine who, knowing he is an android, also falls in love with him, and the scientist takes the android's place on a crucial mission so Ulysses can realize his human potential. Interactions between humans and machines find a more serious and more deadly dramatization in James Cameron's *Terminator* films. In *The Terminator* (1984), a cyborg assassin (Arnold Schwarzenegger) is sent back in time to kill a future rebel leader, and a human member of the rebel army is also sent back to protect the mother of that future leader. The future fate of humanity hangs in the balance of the film's set-piece battles between men and machines. By the time of the sequel, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), the original Terminator (Schwarzenegger) has been reprogrammed into a kinder and gentler Terminator and is sent back to protect the future rebel leader from a more sophisticated machine, a liquid metal man identified as a T-1000 Terminator. The original Terminator has become more human—he develops an almost fatherly affection for the boy he has been sent to protect and tries to avoid killing people.

In *RoboCop* (1987), another major movie franchise of the late 1980s and early 1990s, a murdered police officer is rebuilt as a cyborg and dispatched to bring law and order to a crime-ridden Detroit. As he gradually recovers his memory and hunts down those who killed him, the RoboCop becomes more and more

conflicted as to his identity, uncertain whether he is human or machine. In the final moments of the first film, he is recognized as more human than machine and, when asked for his name, identifies himself by his human name, Murphy. In perhaps the most poignant instantiation of the posthuman dilemma, in *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001), a couple who want a child adopt an android/boy with artificial intelligence who falls in love with his mother and desperately wants to be real (like Pinocchio). Ultimately rejected by his mother, he goes in search of the mythical Blue Fairy who can supposedly make him human. Rounding out the android cycle are the villainous Sentinels in *The Matrix* films (1999–2003) and Sonny, the humanoid robot in *I, Robot* (2004). Sonny can display emotions such as anger and fear and can even dream, having prophetic visions of the future. Though Sonny and some other robots initially appear to be malfunctioning and killing humans, the real culprit proves to be V.I.K.I., the mainframe computer that controls the robots.

A Case Study in Posthuman Science Fiction: *Blade Runner*

The posthuman dilemma—the delicate balancing act between the human and the intelligent machine that accompanies an attempt to maximize the potentialities of both without losing the important distinctions that define them as different—is perhaps most thoroughly explored in *Blade Runner* (1982). Replicants—androids that are stronger than humans and whose intelligence equals that of the scientists who created them—are treated as slaves, carrying out duties too dangerous (i.e., combat) or degrading (i.e., prostitution) for humans. A handful of replicants rebel, seize a space ship, and journey to earth in an effort to force their maker, Dr. Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel) to extend their four-year lifespan. Deckard (Harrison Ford), a former blade runner who hunts down and destroys replicants, is coerced into working for the police and “retiring” the replicants. Tyrell describes his new androids as “more human than human,” while he, Deckard, the police, and other human characters could be said to be less human than human. Over the course of the film—primarily through his contract with two replicants, Rachael (Sean Young), with whom he falls in love, and Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), leader of the replicants—Deckard becomes a rebel himself, refusing to follow orders and kill Rachael, achieving a humanity similar to that achieved by the replicant Batty who spared his own life in a prior scene.

Director Scott is enamored of machines and of the dystopian, industrial, urban culture that created them. In the opening shot of the film, the downtown landscape of Los Angeles in 2019 comes alive. The pulse of the city is registered in a series of rhythmic bursts of flames shooting up into the night sky from factory smokestacks. The movement of an airborne hovercraft through the brick, glass, and concrete valleys created by gigantic skyscrapers becomes a balletic spectacle of a machine (the hovercraft) interacting with other machines (the pulsing, neon-covered, city skyline). The space of the city determines behaviors within it. Within this metropolis, the human figures are mere specks; the human has, like Deckard, been dehumanized, a cog in the larger operation of the



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In *Blade Runner*, the human is represented as nonhuman (the hovercraft) and the nonhuman (the city) as human (the face on the plasma screen).

corporate machine that governs this new landscape. That structure, of course, is the Tyrell Corporation whose headquarters resemble a large semi-sparkling, computer chip. *Blade Runner's* futuristic Los Angeles has been asianized to resemble Hong Kong and Tokyo; those who can afford it have moved "off-world" to live; and the city's inhabitants are either too poor (the street vendors) or too unhealthy (Sebastian) to flee this urban wasteland.

In the posthuman universe, human existence is threatened by a technology it cannot control. Tyrell has attempted to control his creations. Fearing that, after several years, his replicants might develop human emotions, he limited their lifespan to four years. When Batty demands that Tyrell extend his life, Tyrell coldly replies with scientific excuses explaining why he cannot. Batty, in turn, kisses his "father" on the mouth and then kills him. The posthuman takes its revenge upon the human. But moments later, when Batty and Deckard confront each other in genetic designer Sebastian's automata-filled apartment, Batty recognizes his likeness in Deckard as they both struggle to survive. Their status as doubles is sealed as Batty, moments after his right hand cramps (a sign of his impending death), grabs Deckard's right hand and breaks two of his fingers (to punish him for the deaths of female replicants Zhora and Pris). Their common struggle to survive in this final encounter again casts them as doubles for each other. Perhaps Batty realizes, as he is about to die, that he could live on through Deckard, and this is why he rescues him from falling to his death. Batty laments that when he dies all his memories "will disappear, like tears in the rain." But Deckard's memory of him surely will not.

In the final moments of the original release, human (Deckard) and replicant (Rachael) unite and set forth into a new world where man and machine can

live together harmoniously, away from the watchful eye of the corporate state that would enslave them. In the director's cut, both Deckard and Rachael, as replicants, depart into an uncertain future, sure only that they are alienated from the world of the human. *Blade Runner's* replicants return us to the tale of *Frankenstein*, a novel that can be seen as the primary source of both genres and where the genres of horror and science fiction reveal themselves to be inextricably interconnected.

THE POSTHUMAN AS AFFIRMATION OF THE HUMAN

The genres of horror and science fiction function to manage our anxiety about being human, the potentially porous borders between the human and the nonhuman, and the threat and extinction of the posthuman. As human existence becomes increasingly tenuous in the twenty-first century world of global warming (and the attendant natural disasters of droughts, tsunamis, floods, and hurricanes), AIDS (and other pandemics), terrorism, ethnic cleansing, hunger, poverty, and financial insecurity, we rely more and more on these genres to affirm the centrality of the human, to warn us of the dangers to humanity's survival, and to imagine the posthuman in its many utopian and dystopian guises.