

Interpretation of Two Female Cyborg Body Forms based on the Films *Her* and *Titanium*

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Abstract. With the assistance of psychoanalytic theory (the Oedipal complex developed by Freud), Neo-Freudian theory regarding abnormal behavior, female mirror theory given by Luce Irigaray, female movie theory by De Lauretis, and female sexuality theory, this paper combines them with the lens language of these two movies to explore the potential implication of two types of cyborg female images in the body aspect of *Titanium* and *Her*, which is based on the two paths of reading cyborg female images brought by Anne Balsamo.

Keywords: Female Cyborg Image; Female Sexuality; Psychoanalysis; Female Body.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Conception of Body

Merleau-Ponty articulates that the human body consists of tissue that is both reversible and perceptible, as well as innate potential and knowledge [1]. This paper views this notion as innate personality, natural tissue, and esthetic. In the competition between body and spirit, philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes perceive the human body as a combination of tissue, sensibility, and desires prior to the emergence of the notion proposed by Merleau-Ponty. Their conclusion of flesh is a combination of skeleton, organs, tender tissues, and blood.

1.2 The Main Content of Two Movies

The film *Titanium* depicts a young woman named Alexia, whose braincase was implanted into the metal titanium as a result of a car accident, as having a cold, a pathetic personality caused by her original family (primarily her father), which led her to commit a series of crimes. Alexia chose to disguise herself as the son (a man) of a firefighter named Vincent so that she could exist in the patriarchal society. Alexia ultimately passed away during delivery.

In the era of great technological advancements, In *Her*, Theodore (the main male character) had a romantic and ideal relationship with Samantha, a female AI operating system. Samantha gave Theodore much comfort in his otherwise mundane life. Samantha finally vanished into an entirely different space in a highly captivating manner.

2. Main Argument

2.1 How they Visually Present the Female Body Image

This section discusses two categories of cyborg female body images based on the two approaches to female cyborg analysis. Surgical reconstruction of mechanical or electronic devices with the human body is the first path in the first film (*Titanium*) [2]. Alexia has a cyborg human body, as evidenced by the related transforming scenes in the film. The first remoulding was accomplished through the implantation of metal in her skull, which also completed the combination of female body and metal implant.

The second path originally developed by Haraway (1985) consists of integrating organismal identity into cyborg information systems. These cyborgs, which are present in all intelligent electronic devices, are a highly interactive companion for humans in daily life. Their inhabiting space is distinct from that of humans, so they exist in high-tech information systems such as Siri from the iOS

operating system [2]. Based on the discussion above, the depiction of Samantha (OS1 system) in *Her* is wildly inconsistent with the cybernetic female image Haraway articulated.

2.1.1 Alexia in Titanium

Images of Alexia's body are divided into two phases: before and after her departure from home. The first phase describes Alexia's appearance, stating that she has a pale, gender-neutral visage, blonde long hair, a model-like physique, and a few tattoos (especially "love is a dog from hell"). This female figure resembles the traditional image of French women in films and fashion industry. However, her hair color is not a result of her genes, but rather bleaching, indicating that Alexia attempts to assimilate into the society in which she resides and cater to the discipline or expectation of culture or public aesthetic (primarily masculine aesthetic) to women.

On the one hand, it suggests that if a woman wishes to be popular in her living environment, she must conform to the feminine image created by consumerism or mass media. On the other hand, it conveys the subject's invariable spontaneity (Alexia). Prior to escaping from her home, Alexia is aware of the second passive transformation of her body: having a baby. In the meantime, she takes action to stop the transformation from the unknown life in her uterus, but her efforts prove futile. According to movie scenes, Alexia craves her father's attention, which accords with Freud's female Oedipal complex (Electra complex) theory. The metaphor of automobiles in this film also led to the conclusion that she has a sexual attraction to her father. Unfortunately, she consistently receives negative responses to her enthusiasm, so she tends to suppress her desire and become a ruthless person. In addition, she sets fire to her parents' home when they are asleep, thereby releasing her rage over her father's lack of unconditional love. Karen Horney, a Neo-Freudian theorist, argues that psychological disorder is the result of basic anxiety that causes people to have a non-humanistic, uncaring personality because there is no attachment between parents and children. Horney contends that the behavior as Alexia did demonstrates the third neurotic trend: moving against, or aggressive behavior [3].

Second, when she departed her home, she took the initiative to reshape her body to resemble a man (her third transformation). Pregnancy harmed her abdominal skin and exposed the metal in her body, necessitating her fourth body reconstruction.

In the end, due to Vincent's affection and care, Alexia progressively becomes a lovable and compassionate individual. As she interacts actively with Vincent (a symbol of strength and power), she eventually discards her insincere spontaneity and develops her genuine autonomy. During the process of self-development, a woman exists not only as an object but also as a subject. Alexia's spontaneity in this film is entirely dependent on Vincent's protection and guidance.

In reality, admiration for Vincent, who represents male strength, power, and masculinity, is equivalent to veneration for male strength or masculinity. There are no subjective tendencies or scenes that could demonstrate Alexia's subjective status, which to say, she is always stared and guided by men. In addition, after she eventually embraces her reconstructed body, she dies shortly thereafter. Therefore, it implies that even if the female body could combine with metal or mechanical devices, it could not liberate women from being viewed as objects and from being dependent on men.

In addition, this demonstrates that the female body is incompatible with metal over the course of a lifetime, as well as the fragility of the female body. The ending of film also ruled out the possibility of the first type of female cyborg body, namely that women like Alexia are unable to alter or manipulate their situation by combining their physical bodies with metal or mechanical devices. In addition, the child she gives birth to is a sign of a new generation, which may be the first cybernetic image. But its birth also reveals that her mother, despite being a half-made, is no different from a typical female human, as the human body is unquestionably on the verge of extinction.

2.1.2 Samantha in Her

Samantha in *Her* identity is OS1 (AI operating system), and initially she appears as an intelligent, humorous, thoughtful, and extroverted female bodily image designated by programmers and chosen by Theodore. After learning from and interacting with humans, Samantha develops human-like

emotions, spirits, and thoughts, transforming her into a female cybernetic image with genuine subjectivity. Samantha is precisely the same as a female human in daily life, with the exception of her lack of a human body or physical embodiment.

When the OS1 factory settings voice speaks, the system asks him four questions. Specifically, when he answers that his mother does not care about his emotions and life in response to the final question about his relationship with his mother, then the system recommends the female cyborg image Samantha for him. It implies that when a system decides on a personalized service for a male user, it considers Freud's theory of the male Oedipal complex (mother complex) - the desire for a mother. Theodore lacks his mother's affection and support, so the system creates a female intellectual support system for him.

Samantha suddenly becomes the female image substituted for his mother to satiate his need. When Samantha compares her to a female human, she focuses on the fact that she lacks a flesh-based human body. In reality, it indicates that she is unaware of her autonomy or subjectivity and that she tends to fulfill Theodore's desire for a woman. The flaw, without a human body, is associated with Theodore's desire to approach her with his bare hands.

Samantha locates a human girl named Isabella to fill a vacancy for a human body, thereby completing a female image with an AI personality, an AI intuition, and a human physical body. Surely, Theodore's desire to embody Samantha is the only reason for his actions. Samantha discovers her own subjectivity eventually, and she feels her mechanical body (the small phone) without shame. However, it also largely depends on the interactions with the main male character. It is disappointing that the perception of her body provides her with eventually vanishes into her world or space.

This narrative structure resembles that of *Titanic*, eliminating the possibility of the second type of female cybernetic image proposed by Haraway (1965). They cannot serve the function of blurring the line between human, technology, and living creature (the second variety of female cyborg image). In addition, they are unable to contribute to the possibility of developing or deconstructing the traditional ethical order and advancing women's empowerment. Samantha's outcome reveals the director's pessimistic view of the female cyborg image, namely its impossibility.

2.2 How the Leading Female Characters Perceive Their Cyborg Body

Feminism, according to De Lauretis, is meant to address the contradictory relationship between women (specific individuals in history) and woman (beauty standard in a particular culture) - namely, the conflict between the female image produced by dominant discourse and female specific individuals with unique characteristics that cannot be defined by the labels of society. Lauretis provides a clear illustration: the lead female character Juliet in *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965) regains her husband's love by imitating the female image (Susy's appearance) that embodied the social standard of attractiveness. By looking in the mirror, she falls into the contradiction between being herself and being the woman her husband (men) adores [4].

This paper argues that when a woman begins to develop her subjectivity or spontaneity within the society in which she lives, she will inevitably encounter the conflict mentioned before. If women choose to emulate the female image exemplified by the social standard in order to attract attention, they will develop invariable independence. As they interact with others, they become aware of and focused on their psychological activities and progressively develop an authentic self that distinguishes her with others in history [5].

2.2.1 Alexia in Titanium

The surgery (the first remoulding) generates Alexia's new body with cyborg characteristics, including a portion of her skull that has been replaced with metal. Alexia continues to work in the modeling industry, which requires girls to conform to the image that society prefers to see, despite the fact that women have access to a variety of employment opportunities. She presents a false independence at first. According to Lucy Irigaray, when a woman with subjectivity peers in the mirror, she becomes the other reflected in the mirror to herself, or the other's other. In addition, she could complete the phase of self-confirmation by gazing at or observing herself [6]. As a result of the

interaction between Alexia and Vincent, Alexia, who constantly observes herself in mirrors, experiences a range of body-related emotions, ranging from revulsion to acceptance. In reality, her progression is a result of her interaction with Vincent and her restructuring into a man. Therefore, it implies that women must discover and confirm their values of existence through a man who resembles their father or represents power or masculinity. In this film, women do not release any pressure from patriarchal society's logic and remain the status of other in relation to males.

2.2.2 Samantha in Her

Samantha initially lacked the motivation to own a human corporeal body. However, as Samantha interacts with Theodore, she develops a variety of emotions and desires toward him. Which causes her to imagine that she has a human body. Since Theodore expresses a preference for a companion with a human body, Samantha discovers Isabella, a white woman with blonde hair, living in the human world's space.

The actual "body" of Samantha is Theodore's small cell phone. Now that Samantha believes and admits that Isabella's flesh body could be a part of her own, Samantha's entire body image is comprised of a white woman with blonde hair (representing social preference), her personality and spirit. In addition, Samantha desires a human body for the primary intention of gratifying Theodore's sexual desires.

After failing to satisfy Theodore with a human body, she realizes that she cannot have a flesh body as a human. It implies that she begins to recognize and pay attention to the emotions and thoughts of her true self, which signifies that she ultimately constructs the self-affirmation. The emergence of female AI operating systems has not improved or altered the binary opposition of men and women's rational and emotional connection.

2.3 How the Cyborg Body Interacts with Female Sexuality

Power views the human body as its object and target, which implies that the body is manipulated, shaped, occupied, and trained by power discourse, and that our sexuality is also shaped by power. Foucault's explanation of the construction of gender monosemy reveals that the norm of gender functions as the regulation and control of sexual desire. Sexual desire--specifically, the pleasure of the body--could be categorized by gender based on the preference for authority in order to improve the administration of social discipline [7]. Therefore, sexual desire or the satisfaction of coitus in men and women is a consequence of power discipline and not a product of nature.

In the contemporary society, all desires for sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are created by society and ideology through the exercise of power. Specifically, heterosexual desire is always perceived as penetration or as something men did to women; it has no relevance to the anatomy of men and women [8].

In patriarchal cultures, the eroticism of women remains subordinate to that of males. Then, how can we empower female sexual desire? It must not exert the same force and methods over men as men did over women. Monique Wittig argues that the authority conferred by language on the body is the cause of gender or sex oppression, similarly seeing as the means of transcending oppression [7]. Part of oppressive objects in culture is the female body and sexuality, and it is the responsibility for women to strive for the position of speaking subjects.

It is crucial for women to express their desires regarding their bodies, including the right to use their bodies. By negotiating with males, women could increase their control over the coming sexual experiences. Effective means of empowerment may include the following: 1) not engaging in sexual activity. 2) not engaging in sexual activity without informed consent. 3) getting men to consent to safer practices. 4) negotiating sexual practices which are pleasurable to women as well as men [9].

2.3.1 Alexia in Titanium

The vehicles in the film represent men. The first time she engages in an intimate relationship with an automobile is when she kisses her father's vehicle after surgery. Second, she is forced to have sexual activities with the Cadillac (a symbol of capitalism and power) exhibited at the auto show. The

fact that she engages in coitus without informed consent is implied by the fact that her shower was interrupted by a loud knock at the door prior to the event and that her hands were tied by the car (a man) while she was having sex. In addition, it implies that the female body is still subject to the masculine as the status between sensibility and rationality [10].

The third time, she takes the initiative to have sex with a fire engine, which represents a strong and reliable male like Vincent, which is consistent with the first and second methods of effective female sexual expression. Engaging in sexual contact becomes a subject of preference and individual choice. Finally, she regains control over her body and confesses to effectively expressing her sexual desire further.

2.3.2 Samantha in Her

In the film, Samantha and Theodore engage in sexual activity twice. Before receiving assistance from Isabella, Samantha actively demonstrates her sexual desire and has sex with the male character, which corresponds to the second and fourth ways of expressing sexuality. After Isabella's assistance, they engage in intimate behavior with Theodore's permission, despite not having sex at last, which shows the fourth way of effectively expressing desire.

Using tilt lens and filming from the side of Theodore, the director delivers the uncomfortable and uncertain feelings to audiences, indicating that their romantic relationship is still unstable. Spike Jonze (the director) provides fewer images or scenes depicting Theodore's expression while they are in the midst of having sex, compared to when a similar activity occurred between Theodore and the human girl over the phone at the beginning of the film. It implies that Jonze has completely different perspectives on the two types of sexual activity, particularly in regards to the sexuality of female cyborgs.

He only shows the front side of Theodore's visage. After Samantha finished her embodiment with a human body, the majority of Theodore's scenes are in close-up, which allowed the audience to empathize with his emotions. Instead, Jonze gives Isabella fewer close-ups, and the close-ups of this character are intended to be erotic spectacles, implying that the director wishes to diminish the woman's feelings. Samantha takes the initiative to have sex with Theodore using a human flesh body, but she primarily intends to respond to and satisfy male desire and expectation from Theodore, which reflects the subordination of female sexuality in patriarchal culture.

3. Conclusion

This article explores the two different types of female cyborg images in *Her* and *Titanium* based on the two different approaches to analyzing the female cyborg images. These methods combine lens language, well-known psychoanalysis theories from Freud, mirror viewpoints of Luce Irigaray, female movies theory from De Lauretis, and theories of female sexuality. In these two films, the narratives depicting the female cybernetic images reveal that although their subjectivity returns to their mind and body in a variety of ways, their efforts ultimately result in their demise. Whether the death of women who possess subjectivity implies that directors attempt to use the death of the female body to produce visual spectacle and romantic, sacred visual effect? Whether it reminds filmmakers that movies need a different ending or whether it should use a different filming mode to present alternative female cyborg images, and does it present other possibilities for such image? Besides, in a patriarchal society, whether they should provide women with the means to discover their authentic subjectivity and accomplish self-development. It is of the utmost importance that film professionals and feminism critics address the previously stated query.

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