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Humanity at Risk?

Throughout history we have used film as a medium to represent our social and historical context. Technology and artificial intelligence stand up there as one of the biggest changes our society has gone through, and it still is questioned today. We've had films use technology as a major plot point of movies in the past such as *Metropolis* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, however those movies may have come decades before society could fully realize the significance of them. The original *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator* are two of the best movies to explore these themes. Also it could be argued they ushered a new generation of science fiction movies that not only serve as entertaining films but explore heavy themes that relate to our society. They set the standard and for almost 40 years now few have come close to rivaling their social commentary. In both of these works humanity is rivaled by cyborgs, replicants, or whatever the story calls them, ultimately they are evolutions of technology. Under the historical context, both these movies were released around the time computers were made. However, there is a large difference in ideological themes these movies present. *Blade runner* takes a more positive approach to the incorporation of technology into a dystopian society. *The Terminator* throws a homicidal cyborg on a mission to kill humans into our world. *Blade Runner* shows us replicants can be more human than humans, while *The Terminator* strictly sets the boundaries of man versus machines.

Blade Runner and The Terminator have vastly different views of androids, but still share the same subtext of the rise of technology.

What viewers are introduced to inot these movies are two completely different worlds. “Like Frankenstein, it concerns the horrors of modernity and scientific rationality and contains a monstrous, human-like figure created by science which eventually threatens human existence”(Jancovich 2). The world created in *The Terminator* is threatened by the innovations of technology. The sense of fear of what man can create relates to the story of Frankenstein, a deadly creation. The deeper message in the film has an agenda against the rising modernity in our own society by showing us the capabilities. This has an influence on viewers because the setting is a simple Los Angeles in 1984. The choice by the director to not place our story in a futuristic or cyberpunk society has greater effect on the moral of the film. However in *Blade Runner* it is the complete opposite, but containing the same message. The setting is Los Angeles, 2019 set in a world far beyond any expectations for our society. The city “projects a world in which technologies of image and memory production render human experience and memory ultimately indistinguishable from the experience of, and the memories created for, the replicants”(McNamara 1). Postmodernism is seen once again because it shows us how technology can be the demise of humans. Rather than a cyborg coming to kill you, *Blade Runner* gives a slow death by removing what makes a person human. The advancements render humans obsolete for most things and show a bleak world that contains little animal life. This setting of this film has a lot to unravel and explain, but what stands out most is the juxtaposing features of the large cityscape and barren lands after that. In the act of trying to progress society, we’ve ultimately set it back.

An important aspect that people need to examine when watching these two movies is how the so called machines look. In *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, they look exactly as we do. They share the same skin, walk like us, and talk like us. The designs on the outside resemble the concept of the uncanny valley, it leaves us with a strange feeling about the true nature of these machines. Although where these movies differ is because of what lies beneath. The T-800 in *The Terminator* shows its true nature when it is stripped of the “skin” it is wearing. What used to be a version of Arnold Schwarzenegger is now a metal machine. The menacing red eyes symbolize the cold-blooded nature of it. The metal doesn’t look like a human skeleton, it looks like a manufactured piece or machine parts. The choices of anatomy also prove the director’s intents, they want to point the machines out as the end of our existence. The replicants in *Blade Runner* also share the same exterior of humans, but what is interesting is that they bleed. When a film shows something bleed, it usually symbolizes a certain mortality and humanity of a character. A replicant is also said to be made by using organic material. Other than an increase in physical limitations the replicants have, they don’t stand out among the normal humans. There is a lot to be said about the ideas presented in these films by just examining the design of the characters. These two movies also give two drastic differences in the ways the T-800 and replicants think and act. The T-800 is a true mechanical sense of desire, it learns of its objective and goes after it. It did become sentient, but there are limitations in what it wants to accomplish and how it can. It has no ambition in making emotional connections with others, it doesn’t look to gain knowledge, but most importantly it doesn’t question its existence. Meanwhile, replicants go about their day and act as any normal human would. Identity is the number one goal the characters in *Blade Runner* seek. “The replicants that we encounter in the first *Blade Runner* film

are self-aware and seek age-old answers to the problems of identity and purpose despite the fact that they are born of technology, artificial”(Kaylique 1). They share the question of existentialism that humans have. The replicants have passion for knowledge and compassion for others, but still feel empty due to not knowing why they were created.

In the 1980's apple began pushing out the macintosh to consumers. That combined with generations of technological advancements make for an interesting topic. The ideological themes of cyborgs, artificial intelligence, postmodernism, identity, and sexuality are all present in the films we watch. They all show up in the two films being examined, but the agendas of the movies differ. In *Blade Runner* at the end, the protagonist Deckard is saved by the thing he is seeking to kill. There is an emotional embrace between the protagonist and antagonist which show us how all along the humans were wrong. In a dystopian world run by technology, the humans are taught to hate replicants, and in the act we lose what makes us human. To be human is to love others and embrace others. “Man's descent into disillusion has cost him his humanity. Perhaps Nietzsche was right when said that ... 'God is Dead ... and we have killed him' (2018), and when he predicted the fall of humanity. When Man becomes the creator of replicants, he becomes God-like in the creative sense. Man is no God, however, just a finite creator”(Kaylique 1). Overall, *Blade Runner* has a positive message and is telling us to not lose our humanity by trying to destroy what we make. Accept the natural order of evolution and work with it to make a sustainable society. *The Terminator* can be viewed as a horror film, and horror is there to make us unsettled and tap into our hidden fears. Similar to *Blade Runner*, the antagonist is a creation of man. Instead of us sharing qualities with our creations, *The Terminator* tells us to be cautious of

what we can make and to destroy them. The two films share many similarities, but one has a positive outlook on artificial intelligence and one has a strong negative view of it.

Works Cited

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