

# Unmasked Androids: Staring Faces in Science Fiction Cinema

## Androïdes démasqués : regards fixes dans le cinéma de science-fiction

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article examinera le jeu de l'acteur dans la construction de personnages androïdes dans des films de science-fiction. Nous verrons comment l'androïde cinématographique rend visibles des tensions importantes entre identité et expression, entre jeu et performance, et également entre visage et masque — tensions qui motivent le motif visuel récurrent du « démasquage » de l'androïde afin de révéler son inquiétant regard. De *A Clever Dummy* (1917) jusqu'à *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), nous analyserons certaines stratégies narratives et esthétiques qui transforment l'acteur en personnage-machine, soulignant aussi ses possibles rapports avec les premières manifestations occidentales de la figure de l'androïde et avec son développement récent dans l'usage de masques vidéographiques par les artistes Otávio Donasci, Tony Oursler et Denis Marleau.

# Unmasked Androids: Staring Faces in Science Fiction Cinema

João Vitor Resende Leal

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the actor's performance of android characters in science fiction films. The author discusses how the cinematic android stresses conflicts between identity and expression, acting and performance, face and mask—conflicts that culminate in the recurring visual motif of the “unmasking” of the android to reveal its uncanny gaze. From *A Clever Dummy* (1917) to *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), this article analyzes some of the narrative and aesthetic strategies that transform the human actor into an inhuman character, also pointing to early manifestations of the figure of the android in Western culture and to some of its recent developments through the use of videographic masks in the work of artists Otávio Donasci, Tony Oursler and Denis Marleau.

This article investigates the tension between the human and the inhuman—between the natural and the artificial, the familiar and the unknown—which, once materialized in the figure of the cinematic android,<sup>1</sup> urges us to rethink the relations between identity and expression, acting and performance, face and mask. Through the panoramic view proposed here—more concerned with examining the recurrence of androids' staring faces in science fiction cinema than with developing in-depth analysis of specific films—we will observe how this tension is rendered by human actors and actresses performing android characters. To better frame this investigation, I will briefly refer to the myth of Galatea as the primary archetype of Western culture's androids, and devote a final section to the work of contemporary artists who, by their use of videographic masks, wind up reinvigorating the questions raised by the cinematic android. By articulating film and theatre studies, literature, art history and psychoanalysis, this article will not only establish the unmasking of fictional creatures as a tenacious motif that reinforms conventional understandings of the human

face, but also present a distinctive perspective on the relationship between actor or actress and character in audiovisual media.

The slapstick comedy *A Clever Dummy*, directed by Herman C. Raymaker for Mack Sennett's Keystone Studios in 1917, may provide an exemplary introduction to what will be discussed here. In this short film, an inventor creates a mechanical life-sized dummy modelled after his building's janitor. Behind the complexion of the janitor, the dummy consists of clock-like gears connected to a remote control in which several buttons indicate the possible moving parts and actions: Arms, Legs, Dance, Boxing, and so on. This science fiction premise takes on comic contours when the janitor, hoping to draw the attention of the adorable inventor's daughter, secretly takes the place of the dummy.

By the time the film was produced, Ben Turpin, the actor playing the janitor/dummy, was already well known in Hollywood for his spirited physical performances and his moustache—he was somewhat of a precursor and competitor of the Tramp character immortalized by Charlie Chaplin.<sup>2</sup> His most distinctive feature, however, was his very noticeable crossed eyes, which he held as his trademark—a 1928 *Time* article reveals that, trusting his eyes were the main reason for his success as a comedian, Turpin had them insured for one hundred thousand dollars, “the money payable to his producer, Mack Sennett, if the eyes become normal.”<sup>3</sup>

In the film's principal scene, the inventor offers some businessmen a demonstration of what his dummy can do. He does not notice that it is the janitor who, having hidden away the dummy, now pretends to respond to the commands made through the remote control. At this moment, Turpin's performance is supposed to work on two levels: he has to be believable as a mechanical dummy for the other characters in the scene and, *at the same time*, he needs to show the audience that he is in fact the living janitor and not his look-alike dummy. Should he either overstress the janitor's presence or be too convincing as the dummy, the scene's humour would be ruined. Of course, given the film's slapstick framework, there is no need for much subtlety; nevertheless, Turpin's performance seems accurate, successfully blending the stiffness of the dummy with the sloppiness of the janitor. Once



**Fig. 1.** Ben Turpin as the janitor/dummy in *A Clever Dummy* (Herman C. Raymaker, 1917).

the businessmen are satisfied with the demonstration, two close-ups of Turpin's face highlight his crossed eyes, sealing the complicity between the actor, his character and the audience.<sup>4</sup>

Turpin's performance in this scene clearly demonstrates how the representation of android characters by human actors and actresses triggers questions about the human nature and figure—that is, about what it takes and what it means for a human-shaped creature to be considered human or inhuman. As we understand them, these questions are inevitably associated with the techniques and tools employed by the actor or actress when embodying the android, from body language and costumes to the makeup and prostheses that help shape the character's facial expressions. It is ultimately the work of the actor or actress that will provide a natural and somewhat familiar quality to the inhuman being, or, on the contrary, elicit the inhuman being's artificiality within an otherwise familiar human form.

### **Uncanny Beings**

We can trace the figure of the android back at least to the Greek myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. As told by the Roman poet Ovid in the tenth book of his *Metamorphoses* (8 BC, pp. 126-27), Pygmalion was a sculptor who fell in love with one of his statues: Galatea seemed so beautiful and pure, like an authentic young woman who was only too shy to actually move, that Pygmalion pleaded with Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, for a wife similar to her. On her feast day, Venus answered his request by turning the statue into a living woman.

Art historian Victor Stoichita remarks that all manifestations of Galatea's transformation into a living woman are attached to her corporeal responses, in a haptic scene of sensuality to be enjoyed by Pygmalion: he feels the throbbing of a pulse in her veins, her body warm and soft as melting wax. "Ovid could have made use of other symptoms of animation, such as breathing, a moving hand, eyes opening . . . but he did not" (Stoichita 2008, p. 19). Galatea does not act or speak, she has no distinguishable motivation or psychological trait: she may have become human, but her humanity remains strictly confined to the yearnings and the touch of her creator.

Reworked over countless fantastic narratives,<sup>5</sup> the figure of Galatea became that of an archetypal woman manufactured with the sole purpose of welcoming male desires. For this reason, under the sign of Galatea, androids in general (from automata and dolls to the audiovisual characters analyzed here) have been consistently mobilized by feminist, post-gender and post-human (or transhuman) approaches, proving themselves as characters which effectively question and ultimately reconfigure the fundamental notions of identity, subjectivity, corporeity and gender roles.<sup>6</sup> Instead of directly engaging with gender and post-human perspectives, however—which we nonetheless can only endorse—my purpose, rather, is to apprehend the android in a pretextual, affective dimension. This means that I am not looking to untangle sociocultural representations or to criticize moments of fetishistic spectacle staged for the male gaze, following authors such as Judith Butler and Laura Mulvey, but rather to acknowledge the android's expressiveness as raw intensity, in the line of what Elena Del Río (2008, p. 4) has termed “powers of affection.” Like Del Río, I am more concerned with forces “unassimilable to language, binary structures and ideological functions,” that is, with “sensations and affects that bear no mimetic or analogical ties to an external or transcendental reality.”

The effort to describe the major affect generally associated with androids finds its most tangible answer in the notion of the “uncanny.” In a short essay published in 1906, the German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch (1906, pp. 9-12) sought to explain the unpleasant feeling caused by one's uncertainty concerning the physical nature of objects such as wax figures and automata—objects which, by virtue of their realistic appearance or of the complexity of the mechanisms that animate them, seem to be alive even to those aware of their artificiality. This uncanny feeling (from the German *Unheimlich*), as he named it, was later redefined by Sigmund Freud (1919, p. 620), who understood it not exactly as uncertainty before the unknown, but rather as a psychological reaction to something terrifying which nonetheless “leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.”

Despite their differences,<sup>7</sup> both Freud and Jentsch refer to the uncanny when dealing with the experience of death, with

manifestations of so-called occult powers (magic, witchcraft), and with the seemingly incorrigible animism of human imagination, which tends to bring life to inanimate figures and objects. Unfortunately, neither Jentsch nor Freud extended their concerns to the cinema, where the motion obtained through the sequencing of static images soon proved capable of animating the strangest creatures and where androids of all kinds seem to have found their natural habitat.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Gaze of the Android**

One of the films which best explores the uncanny quality of the android is *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927). In a dystopian future, the population of Metropolis is divided between an industrial elite in majestic towers and the underground workers who operate the great electric power machine. In this social hierarchy where the workers' bodies, rigorously disciplined, are almost dehumanized, the young charismatic leader Maria urges her comrades to rebel against the oppressive elite and fight for their freedom. In response, the wealthy city master, eager to disrupt the imminent rebellion, kidnaps Maria and sends an identical android back to the underground.

The actress Brigitte Helm plays Maria and the android in very distinct ways: while Maria is a delicate and virginal figure with slow and measured gestures throughout the film, her mechanical double is aggressive and histrionic. Other than that, only the black mascara allows us to identify the android, a detail that is brought forward in a crucial moment: when the city master demands her to "destroy the work of the woman in whose image you were created," the android expresses her agreement by simply blinking one eye. Captured in close-up, Helm's face summarizes the ambivalence of the character: as a machine, she is capable of following the most unrighteous orders without question, but she also demonstrates a complete understanding and control of the subtlest human expressions.

The physicality of the android character, overtly pronounced in Turpin's and Helm's performances described above, is frequently highlighted in science fiction films. For instance, several films present the audience with unexpected musical numbers with dancing



**Fig. 2.** Brigitte Helm as Maria (top) and the android in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927).



androids—Brigitte Helm performs an erotic dance in a dream sequence of *Metropolis*, and recent films such as *The Machine* (Caradog W. James, 2013) and *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2014) emphasize the androids' corporeity by having them dance. In more extreme situations, the human-shaped creature animated by inhuman forces is shown as a malleable, multipliable and interchangeable entity, an undifferentiated body that is often omnipresent or indestructible and hence surprisingly expendable—this is the case with the liquid metal android T-1000 (Robert Patrick) in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991), with the human body replicas occupied by alien forces in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956), and with the human bodies converted into yet another copy of the computer program known as Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) in *The Matrix Reloaded* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 2003).

While the android's body seems to yield easily to various performative and plastic exercises, however, its face—or at least its unsettling gaze—seems to resist most of the deformations and disfigurements proposed by science fiction narratives, sheltering what we are tempted to define as a disturbingly human singularity. It is in this way that, even after having his body grossly destroyed, Ash's head (Ian Holm) survives in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), as does Bishop's head (Lance Henriksen) in *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992). These are faces that refuse to die, implying that as long as the face is on screen, the character remains uncannily alive; the artificiality and expendability of the body are suddenly sublimated by the vivacity of facial expressions.

I would like to suggest that, more than anything else, it is the android's gaze that provides the energy that empowers the whole character—up to the point that we need only a single eye, in the form of a dot of red light, to personify HAL 9000, the artificial intelligence system attempting to eliminate its human operators in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968). In a way, the whole drama and spectacle of the cinematic android lie in figurative strategies for portraying the character's gaze.

The best example to support such a claim is probably *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982). Here, the synthetic creatures called replicants, originally manufactured to aid in the colonization of



**Fig. 3.** Brigitte Helm as the android in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927).



**Fig. 4.** Caity Lotz as Ava in *The Machine* (Caradog W. James, 2013).



**Fig. 5.** Sonoya Mizuno as Kyoko in *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2014).

new planets, express themselves—and cry and bleed—exactly like the humans who hunt them. Their inhuman nature can only be verified through some sort of polygraph test that detects almost imperceptible changes in their retinas. In order to convey for the audience that they are artificial creatures, the replicants are often depicted with a peculiar opaque glow that gives their eyes the aspect of reflecting mirrors—eyes that deny any access to a supposed inner self. Further, this thematic concern with the characters' eyes is reiterated several times: the film's very first shot is a close-up of an eyeball—as is the first shot of the sequel *Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve, 2017)—and, at the end, the replicant Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), judging himself a perfected human being and eventually proving himself more emotive than the humans themselves, takes revenge on his creator by piercing his eyes.



**Fig. 6.** Ian Holm as Ash in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979).



**Fig. 7.** Lance Henriksen as Bishop in *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992).

## The Movements of the Soul

Western culture apparently dreamt of eye scanners such as *Blade Runner's* polygraph device long before they were actually invented. The idea that the eyes express the inner self and the deepest feelings of a person seems not to have lost its eloquence since the Renaissance: better than through words or gestures, it is through the eyes that one expresses what Alberti called, in his famous 1435 treatise *De Pictura*, “the movements of the soul” (quoted in Bredekamp 2015, p. 278). Similarly, the Italian scholar Giambattista della Porta wrote in his 1586 *De Humana Physiognomoniam* that “the eyes are the soul of the face” and “the doors of the soul” (quoted in Courtine and Haroche 1988, p. 73), and the French philosopher Marin Cureau de la Chambre stated in his 1660 *L'art de connoistre les hommes* that one of nature's main purposes for our eyes is to be able to contradict our words whenever we are unfaithful to the truth (quoted in Courtine and Haroche 1988, p. 36).

In the cinema, the close-up renewed the reputation of the face and eyes as bearers of an individual's true self. For Béla Balázs (1948, p. 61), the human face, isolated in time and space by the close-up, detaches itself from its own materiality to become expressive without resorting to words: “we see, no longer a figure of flesh and bone, but an expression, or in other words . . . we see emotions, moods, intentions and thoughts.” By means of the close-up, cinema had finally discovered the human face and the “deeply moving human traged[ies]” that come with it (*ibid.*, p. 66).

As with the concept of *photogénie* developed by French avant-garde essayists such as Jean Epstein and Louis Delluc, Balázs's notion of physiognomy presupposes an ultimate sublime truth to be revealed by/in the film image.<sup>9</sup> For him, if the essence of a person surfaces in his or her face, the essence of this face could only be attained through the close-up. Such an assumption is supported by the fact that naturalistic cinema (or at least mainstream Hollywood cinema) has never really invested in an aesthetic form that truly honours the body—however agile, well-trained, well-groomed and well-dressed they may be, the bodies in this cinema tend to go unnoticed, for it is usually the face of the actor or



**Fig. 8.** Rutger Hauer as Roy Batty in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982).

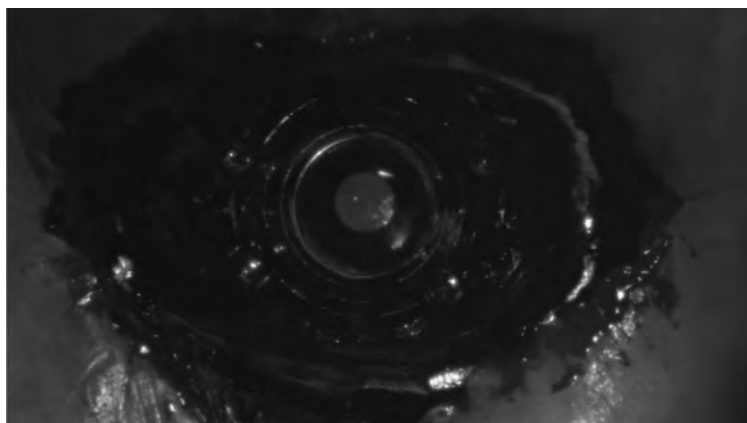
actress which displays the essence of his or her work (Aumont 1992, p. 50).

This attention to facial expressions should not be taken as an attempt to decipher individual traits, behaviour, feelings and intentions by scrutinizing this nose shape or that mouth contraction—the days of disciplines such as physiognomy and phrenology are long gone.<sup>10</sup> The interpretation of facial expressions is “as scientifically sound as palm reading,” but “the power of the face is nevertheless sustained—not because of ‘what it expresses’ but because it does not give itself away” (Steimatsky 2017, p. 21). In other words, what draws us to the face is precisely its irreducible affective quality, its capacity to communicate and yet somehow evade descriptions, discourses and interpretations. For this reason, the face is a particular kind of image, one that captures our attention, arrests and traps our gaze into its own eyes.<sup>11</sup> This face-as-image may eventually be readable to some extent, but the possible readings are beyond our concern here.

### **The Powers of the Mask**

If Ben Turpin’s crossed eyes and Brigitte Helm’s blinking eye already seemed to suggest something between the natural and the artificial to be perceived in the android’s gaze, more recent science fiction films, taking advantage of technical advances in makeup and special effects, try to explore the uncanny effect in some of the extremes of horror, melodrama and suspense. The unmasking of the android and the sudden revelation of its “true” identity through its “true” eyes have become moments of great reflexivity and dramatic intensity, as well as recurring visual motifs.

At a pivotal moment of *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), for example, the android T-800 (Arnold Schwarzenegger) needs to repair a serious wound in his face. Inexpressive before the mirror, he slowly extracts an injured eye and wipes its empty socket with a towel. With the camera assuming the point of view of the mirror so that the audience and the T-800 are face-to-face, we notice that behind the human-looking face there is a mechanical eye, a red globe encrusted in a metallic skull which we now appreciate for a few seconds in full close-up. Schwarzenegger’s deliberate slowness (the actor’s performance blends almost



**Fig. 9.** Arnold Schwarzenegger as the T-800 in *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984).

perfectly with that of the mechanical double that replaces him in some of the shots) and the dark and silent atmosphere of the scene create a tension that is only dissolved when the character, having completed the operation, covers his face with a new mask: a pair of dark glasses that will allow him once again to get by as a human being.

In another exemplary moment, the “mecha boy” David (Haley Joel Osment) from *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001) wishes to become a real child in hopes of conquering the love of his human foster mother. Before his wish is granted, however, he is confronted with evidence of his own artificiality as he learns that his face is in fact a high-tech mass-produced mask. The staging of this scene categorically explores the visual motif of the unmasking: we see David (and he sees us with his never blinking eyes) through the empty sockets of a mask identical to his face, but while the mask remains devoid of any expression, David’s face betrays his astonishment and disbelief. It is interesting to notice that the android Ava (Alicia Vikander) goes through a similar situation in *Ex Machina*: at the film’s climax, she interrupts her escape from captivity briefly to contemplate a replica of her own face displayed on a wall along with a series of ritualistic and theatrical masks. Contrary to David, she remains impassive before her prototype, but her sudden curiosity feels as impossibly human as the boy’s despair.

Acting has always been about wearing masks, literally or metaphorically; what the android character does is unequivocally demonstrate how disturbing this experience can actually be. It seems to us that the dissociation of mask, face and eyes operated by the android brings forth an unnatural and powerful gaze. According to the art historian Hans Belting (2017, p. 7), by having human eyes peer through a synthetic mask, or on the contrary, by having artificial eyes peer through the sockets of an actual human face, “the vivid interaction between gaze and facial expression is disturbed or interrupted” in such a way that the gaze becomes charged with an uncanny force:

At that point the gaze, which we can suddenly no longer interpret, acquires an uncanny force that renders us powerless. When we find ourselves restricted to such a gaze, disembodied from the face,



we are no longer capable of exchanging glances, an action that belongs to the fundamental experience of our faces.

The unmasking of android characters in science fiction cinema challenges the actor or actress to concentrate, in a single face and at the moment of a single performance, different—and often conflicting—identities. The android therefore very consciously explores cinema’s vocation for violating the assignment of a singular identity to each exterior appearance— “no art can associate the same body with different people with the same freedom as



**Fig. 10.** Haley Joel Osment as David in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001).



**Fig. 11.** Alicia Vikander as Ava in *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2014).

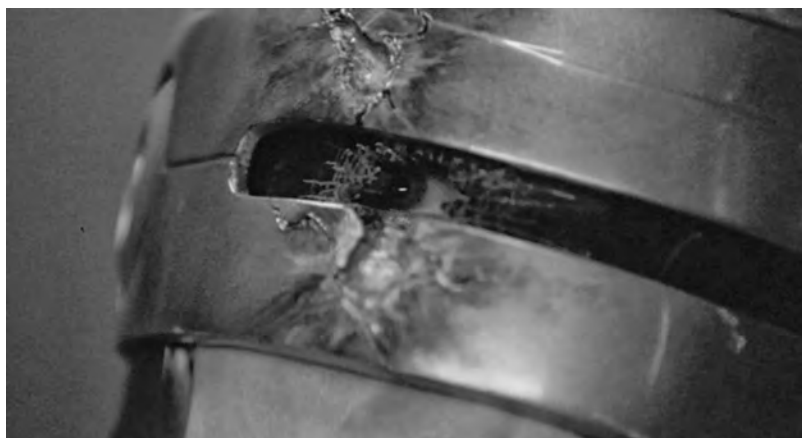
the cinema” (Wulff 1997, p. 15). In other words, the cinematic android satisfies what Nicole Brenez (1998, p. 189) understands as cinema’s primary quality: the bold confidence in the genius of associations (“le génie du lien”) instead of in the establishment of entities. From Galatea to the human-brained android Mira Killian (Scarlett Johansson) in *Ghost in the Shell* (Rupert Sanders, 2017), from *The Sandman*’s Olympia to the amnesiac cybernetic policeman Alex Murphy (Peter Weller) in *RoboCop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), what is at issue are the different ways to inhabit a body and, through the close-up, the different masks to be stared at in the face—the remnants of different identities in a single gaze.

### **Magnified Faces**

Other than in science fiction cinema, we can find an invigoration of the uncanny—one that also resorts to recreations of the face to better interrogate the foundations of human nature and the human figure—in artistic uses of videographic masks.



**Fig. 12.** Scarlett Johansson as Mira Killian in *Ghost in the Shell* (Rupert Sanders, 2017).



**Fig. 13.** Peter Weller as Alex Murphy in *RoboCop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987).

Essentially a human face captured in video and projected onto a mannequin, a sculpture or a performer wearing a blank mask, the videographic mask “functions like a skin that perfectly coats the forms of the mask,” often producing “a reality as intense as that of the physical world” (Isaacsson 2010, pp. 31-34). For this reason, and perhaps more explicitly than cinema’s unmasked androids, the characters forged by the videographic mask work on an affective level—their fundamental uncanniness, driven not only by the prominence of the face but also by the physical absence of the performer—reverberates in such a way that they can largely dispense

with conventions and meanings. These are characters which exist in an almost ideal dimension of pure presence,<sup>12</sup> taking us further away from the orbit of narratology and its assumption that fictional characters must be given psychological traits and motivations analogous to those of real persons. Here, the performer is no longer required to play a role, to represent something or someone, but rather to produce presence effects strong enough to remediate his or her own absence by means of the moving image.<sup>13</sup>

In an interesting first incidence of the videographic mask, the Brazilian artist Otávio Donasci has been developing since the early 1980s series of so-called “video-creatures” in which video monitors attached to the performers’ heads function as animated talking masks. Originally conceived for theatrical plays, in which the prominence of the face is emphasized by the large black robes covering the performers’ bodies, Donasci’s video-creatures have also been employed in dances, performances and live art installations.

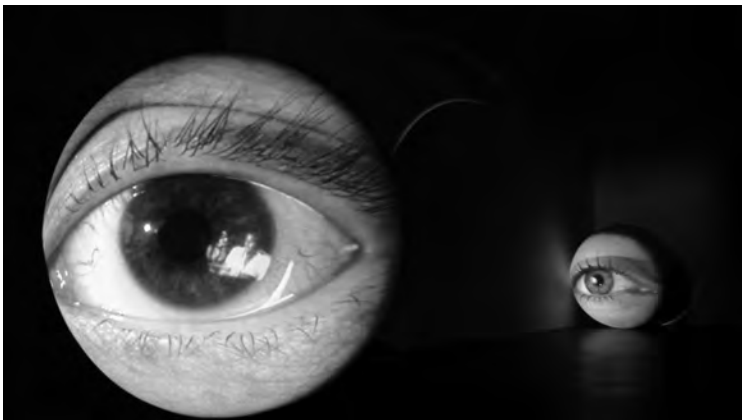
In a very different approach, the American artist Tony Oursler experiments with the combination of sculpture and video in installations which, following the path of surrealist and psychedelic artists, isolate and rearrange elements of the human face. From the inaugural cloth doll with an animated face *Crying Doll* (1993)—reworked in the music video for David Bowie’s *Where Are We Now* (Tony Oursler, 2013)—to the giant-eyed *Caricature* (2002), the face becomes an amorphous body or, in the case of later works such as *Obscura* (2014), the whole body is defined by the simple contours of a single eye.

And in theatre, the Canadian director Denis Marleau has been exploring the videographic mask since the late 1990s. In his staging of Antonio Tabucchi’s *Les trois derniers jours de Fernando Pessoa* (1997), a dying Fernando Pessoa is visited by the heteronyms he has invented thanks to a doubling staging strategy: live on the stage, actor Paul Savoie discusses with another actor whose face and voice take the form of pre-recorded, projected performances of Savoie himself. The timing of the dialogue and the technical quality of the projections attain such a degree of realism that they paradoxically incite the phantasmagoric, as the heteronyms not only appear alive but actually feel more vivid than the poet on his deathbed. Five years later, in 2002, Marleau chose



**Fig. 14.** Otávio Donasci's "video-creatures"; Donasci himself wearing a video monitor.

to completely replace the actors on the stage by videographic masked mannequins when adapting Maurice Maeterlinck's work *Les aveugles* (1890). Marleau is quite aware of Maeterlinck's idealization of a symbolic theatre in which human presence would no longer be necessary; his twelve blind individuals lost in the woods are depicted as floating heads (performances by Paul Savoie and Céline Bonnier). As a consequence, the play winds up manifesting "an oddly present absence, like a new *aura*—'the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be,' as defined by Benjamin" (Krynski 2002, p. 26).



**Fig. 15.** Tony Oursler's installations: *Crying Doll* (1993); *Caricature* (2002); *Obscura* (2014).



**Fig. 16.** Paul Savoie in Denis Marleau's *Les trois derniers jours de Fernando Pessoa* (1997, photography by Josée Lambert); *Les aveugles* (2002, photography by Stéphanie Jasmin).

Despite the very palpable differences between the specific creations of Donasci, Oursler and Marleau, their work enables us to question the very idea of what an audiovisual character is (or can be) and of the affective powers of performance. Even when

we remove them from their original contexts, the creatures that emerge from the videographic masks seem capable of sustaining an ineffable fiction, a sensorial drama that does not require any narrative structure. Just like the unmasked android, the videographic masked character blurs the line that usually distinguishes not only the head from the face—as Deleuze and Guattari (1980) would probably put it—but also identity from expression, acting from performance, face from mask. Both kinds of creatures invite us to rethink the boundaries between the organic, the mechanical and the virtual, the moving image acting once again as the goddess of love and beauty who awakes the inanimate into life.

### **Conclusion**

Taking the risk of eventually neglecting important differences in the way each android/videographic masked character is developed in each particular work, the panoramic view proposed here has privileged the discussion of how such creatures, ambiguous both in their material constitution and in their identities, ultimately express conflicts between the natural and the artificial, the familiar and the uncanny. By means of conclusion, I would like to suggest that these conflicts are otherwise noticeable in societies marked by the mechanization of gestures and the mediatization of human relationships, haunted by an imminent triumph of reason and technology over affect and the individual. It is therefore hoped that, however modest, this study may be thought-provoking beyond the realm of fictional characters.

It should also be reiterated that the present approach, primarily interested in the acknowledgment of the affective, uncanny powers of the face, mask and gaze, should by no means be seen as undermining socioculturally motivated approaches such as those proposed by feminist and post-human theories, which also welcome the figure of the android as a key subject of investigation. That said, the present author does believe that the signs of human presence in artificial creatures, as analyzed here, are intricate enough to reinvigorate the challenge of defining what it means, exactly, to be human. Through the characters examined here, between the inexhaustible energy of their gazes and the torpor of their realistic masks, the human face reaffirms itself as an enigma,



a surface which both reveals and conceals, conveying desires and sensations while obstinately denying absolute meanings. It seems that, in the end, the simplest movement, the slightest glance, is enough to trouble this familiar surface and reveal its own unexpected uncanniness.

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#### NOTES

1. The term android refers to that which has the exterior form (from the Greek *oide*) of a human being (*andro*). The terms robot and cyborg, often taken as synonymous for android, imply more specific ideas: robot comes from the Czech *robota*, meaning forced labour, while cyborg is a neologism blending the words cybernetic and organic.

2. Turpin's first appearance on screen was in 1907, and the Keystone Studios produced Chaplin's first films in 1914. Turpin and Chaplin worked together in four films directed by Chaplin for the Essanay Studios in 1915: *His New Job*, *A Night Out*, *The Champion* and *A Burlesque on Carmen*.

3. Quoted by Alexandra Silver in "Ben Turpin's Cross-Eyes," *Time*, 1 December 2010, [http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2015171\\_2015172\\_2015093,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2015171_2015172_2015093,00.html).

4. Following a suggestion made by Donald Crafton, who considered Turpin's rolling eyes an element of "pure spectacle" that illustrates what Eisenstein called "attraction," André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning (1989, pp. 380 and 373) went on to describe as a "cinema of attractions" the early period of cinema when "narrativity did not yet dominate at the level of cinematic discourse." Even if *A Clever Dummy*, with its fairly defined causal plot, is not a "cinema of attractions" production, Turpin's direct address to the audience in the close-ups described here can be understood as "attractional" moments which go beyond (or fall short of) the film's narrative.

5. Automata are presented as ideal women, for instance, in *The Sandman* (E.T.A. Hoffmann, 1817), *The Future Eve* (Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, 1886) and *The Stepford Wives* (Ira Levin, 1972), whereas in *The Carpathian Castle* (Jules Verne, 1892) and *The Invention of Morel* (Adolfo Bioy Casares, 1940), the mechanical creature is replaced by audiovisual projections which make present the female figures with whom the male protagonists inadvertently fall in love.

6. This reading of the android was originally presented by Donna Haraway (1985) in her influential *A Cyborg Manifesto*, and was further developed in works such as *Death 24x a Second* (Mulvey 2006), *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids and Other Artificial Eves* (Wosk 2015) and *O Corpo Mecânico Feminino* (Monteiro 2016).

7. Freud's disapproval of Jentsch essentially concerns the interpretation of Hoffmann's *The Sandman*: Jentsch assigns the uncanny effect to Olympia, the android with whom Nathaniel falls in love, whereas Freud sees Olympia as a secondary plot element, the uncanny feeling being rather elicited by the salesman Coppola, whom Nathaniel recognizes as an old friend of his own father (Mulvey 2006, pp. 37-50).

8. According to Jay P. Telotte (1995, p. 95), the first science fiction films with android characters were directed by James Stuart Blackton for the Vitagraph Studios in 1907. It quickly became one of early cinema's most popular genres.

9. Jacques Aumont (1992, pp. 97-98) notes that despite the nuances that distinguish physiognomy from *photogénie* (and despite the difficulties in precisely defining both terms), Balázs, Epstein and Delluc seem to equally understand cinema as a "systematic

operator of truth that submits everything to its magical, ineffable power of revelation. If *photogénie* is another name of such magical power, physiognomy is one of its sensible incarnations.”

10. Despite the discrediting of physiognomy and phrenology as pseudo-sciences, Hans Belting (2017, p. 8) sees them as relevant precursors of contemporary neurology, which replaces the interest in facial features and skull proportions with interest in the morphology of the brain. Physiognomic studies have also led to consistent analysis of the close-up in photography (Faber 2014) and of the strategies for creating meaning in actors’ performances in cinema (Maciel Guimarães 2016).

11. That the eyes are the centre of gravity of the face is an idea often explored in animated films, as explained by animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (quoted in Aumont 1992, p. 56): “As we always did when confronted with a new problem, we went to the real thing: the face, the eyes, and the brows. . . . An *inbetween* out of place or poorly drawn may get by on an arm or a leg, but never on an eye. As Walt [Disney] had said, the audience watches the eyes, and this is where the time and money must be spent if the character is to act convincingly.”

12. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004, p. xvi) considers presence to be an immediate cognitive dimension that precedes and counters meaning: “If we attribute a meaning to a thing that is present, that is, if we form an idea of what this thing may be in relation to us, we seem to attenuate, inevitably, the impact that this thing can have on our bodies and our senses.”

13. Here I follow the distinction between acting and performance developed by Philip Auslander (1997): acting is a representational practice, whereas performance frees the actor or actress from the character by exploiting his or her bodily presence at a specific time and place. On the differences between acting-representation and performance-presence, see also Josette Féral (2008) and Jean-Marc Larrue (2008).

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## RÉSUMÉ

### Andróides démasqués: regards fixes dans le cinéma de science-fiction

João Vitor Resende Leal

Cet article examinera le jeu de l’acteur dans la construction de personnages andróides dans des films de science-fiction. Nous

verrons comment l'androïde cinématographique rend visibles des tensions importantes entre identité et expression, entre jeu et performance, et également entre visage et masque — tensions qui motivent le motif visuel récurrent du « démasquage » de l'androïde afin de révéler son inquiétant regard. De *A Clever Dummy* (1917) jusqu'à *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), nous analyserons certaines stratégies narratives et esthétiques qui transforment l'acteur en personnage-machine, soulignant aussi ses possibles rapports avec les premières manifestations occidentales de la figure de l'androïde et avec son développement récent dans l'usage de masques vidéo-graphiques par les artistes Otávio Donasci, Tony Oursler et Denis Marleau.