

The politics of cyborgs in Mexico and Latin America

A política dos ciborgs no México e na América Latina

Mary Elizabeth Ginway¹

Abstract

This article focuses on the cyborg body in contemporary Mexican science fiction, contrasting it with its depiction in other countries of Latin America. Beginning in the 1990s, Mexican science fiction authors write stories about implants and neo-cyborgs, anticipating Alex Rivera's portrait of "cybraceros" in his (2008) film *Sleep Dealer* by nearly a decade. The defiant cyborgs of Mexico are distinct from those of the Southern Cone, where they relate most often to torture and unresolved political issues from the period of re-democratization, and from those of Brazil, where they are related to issues of race and urbanization. While in Mexico and Brazil the cyborg is often used as a critique of neoliberal policies and the privatization of public industries, the insistence on the embodiment of cyborgs in Mexico is often tied to labor and border issues, problematizing the idea of cyborg-mestizaje or hybridity. Heriberto Yopez questions concepts of hybridity that diminish the inherent sense of difference and struggle through a discourse of conciliation. The Mexican cyborg figure that insists on the importance of its body time and again demonstrates its resistance to facile notions of political and cybernetic hybridity.

Keywords: Cyborgs. Science fiction. Neoliberal policies.

Resumo

Este artigo enfoca o corpo cyborg na ficção científica mexicana, contrastando-o com as representações em outros países da América Latina. A partir dos anos 1990, autores de ficção científica mexicana escrevem histórias sobre implantes e neo-cyborgs, antecipando em quase uma década o retrato de "cybraceros" de Alex Rivera em seu filme *Sleep Dealer* (2008). Os cyborgs provocadores do México são distintos daqueles do Cone Sul: eles se relacionam mais frequentemente à tortura e a outras questões políticas não resolvidas do período de redemocratização, enquanto os do Brasil estão relacionados a questões sobre raça e urbanização. Enquanto no México e no Brasil o cyborg é frequentemente usado como crítica às políticas neoliberais e à privatização de empresas públicas, a insistência na personificação do cyborg no México é frequentemente amarrada a questões sobre trabalho e fronteira, problematizando a ideia da mestiçagem-cyborg e da hibridação. Heriberto Yopez questiona conceitos de hibridação que desmerecem o sentido inerente de diferença e luta por meio de um discurso de conciliação. A figura do cyborg mexicano que insiste na importância do tempo de vida de seu corpo, novamente demonstra sua resistência a noções fáceis de hibridação política e cibernética.

Palavras-chaves: Cyborgs. Ficção científica. Políticas neoliberal.

¹ Ph. D. Spanish and Portuguese. Associate Professor of Portuguese - University of Florida. E-mail: eginway@ufl.edu.

Introduction

In Alex Rivera's (2008) film *Sleep Dealer*, traditional Mexican culture collides with modern technology. Filmed mainly in Tijuana, "The City of the Future," *Sleep Dealer* portrays a world in which Mexican workers can get implants that allow them to work in factories and in other remote locations throughout the United States, thus allowing the U.S. to profit from Mexicans' labor without having to accept their actual presence or bodies. The bodies of these Mexican "cybraceros," or cyber-laborers, occupy a new type of border space, caught between technology and tradition in a suspended state that captures the presence and absence of Mexicans in the United States and the American imaginary.

Beginning in the 1990s, other Mexican science fiction authors write stories about implants and neo-cyborgs, anticipating Alex Rivera's portrait of "cybraceros" by nearly a decade. Like the workers in *Sleep Dealer*, the main characters in these short narratives gain few benefits from their implants, despite their connection with the latest technology. This experience is distinct from that portrayed in American cyberpunk, as in the classic novel *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson, in which implants and virtual reality offer the underclass a sense of power, or at least, for the hacker Case and his girlfriend Molly, the hope of an escape from drudgery or poverty.

In this study, I show how these Mexican narratives construct a defiant, politicized vision of the futuristic interface between the body and technology, radicalizing the vision depicted in Rivera's film. While Néstor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures* (1989) was the first attempt to theorize about the border area and the experience of uneven modernization, Heriberto Yezpe (2005) questions this concept of hybridity because it often diminishes the inherent sense of difference and struggle through a discourse of conciliation:

In denial of otherness we constructed 'hybrid'. We have naturalized the 'hybrid' category so much,

that the mere mention of this category as purely cultural, artificial, contextualized (in imperialistic epistemology) seems a 'menace', an evil return to 'Nationalism' or 'Pure'. Using the 'hybrid' category we have remained Hegelian. We arrive to syntheses. [...] But resistance is what really takes place where hybridism is now used [...]. And the hybrid category is all about denying resistance (YEPEZ, 2005).

Here I wish to argue that the concept of estrangement as used in science fiction captures Yezpe's sense of difference and otherness. Because of the economic, cultural and racial stigmas suffered by its characters, Mexican cyberpunk is infused with a sense of defiance captured by the image of the cyborg. In this sense, the cyborg figure in Mexico is different from that found in other Latin America national literatures, where cyborgs are often associated with issues relating to dictatorship, on the one hand, or race and class, on the other.

The initial shots of *Sleep Dealer* appear to pay homage to Canclini's hybrid cultural mix, yet the later images of the cyborg workers offer a more problematic view of labor and border relations. At the beginning of the film we witness a conciliatory type of cultural hybridity when the protagonist, Memo Cruz, goes to a party where young and old alike dance to hip-hop music at a family gathering, in a home where the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe hangs on the wall beside a television broadcasting traditional Mexican movies and the latest American reality shows. However, this blend of the traditional and the modern is undermined when Memo's home becomes the target of a drone attack because of his inadvertent hacking into U.S. military surveillance transmissions. Soon after, he begins a journey to Tijuana where he will become a "cybracero" and gain a more critical view of technology and cyberspace.

For Miguel Ángel Fernández Delgado, the editor of the SF anthology *Visiones periféricas* (2001), Mexican cyberpunk uses metaphors from the language of software to create a cyber-atmosphere that is set in the hardware of urban or punk counterculture. The predominance of cyberspace, drugs, implants, and interfaces between human

and machines in these Mexican cyberpunk texts is immediately recognizable, yet as cyberpunk its outlook is distinct from the use of cyberspace or the posthuman experience depicted in *Neuromancer* (1984) or Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992). In these novels, the hacker is a heroic figure able to fight the system and give the corporate powers a run for their money by breaking codes, either to free artificial intelligences from corporate masters or to foil human subjugation by using mysterious computer viruses. In this near-future world of Gibson's *Sprawl* or Stephenson's post-nationhood, the landscape seems to be post-corporeal and post-political, yet is still a place where individual action is possible. Larry McCaffery sees a positive connection between cyberpunk and its capacity to subvert corporate discourse, explaining that the genre is mainly concerned with larger SF themes such as the nature of the body, information and new forms of intelligence. For McCaffery (1991, p. 15), American cyberpunk holds a "mystical sense" or a "dance of data", a type of exultance that is not part of the subgenre in Latin America, where cyberpunk explores political resistance and tensions between humans and machines, making the presence of the body and the body politic central.

In order to discuss cyberspace, the concept of the cyborg, and the posthuman in the context of Latin American cyberpunk, it is useful to review theories by N. Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway. Hayles has argued that, over the past decades, informational technology has brought about a "systematic devaluation of materiality and embodiment" (*Posthuman* 48), and she herself attests to virtual reality's "disorienting, exhilarating effect" (*Posthuman* 27). For Donna Haraway (1991, p. 176), in contrast, the cyborg is a feminist possibility, a new construct that avoids the pitfalls of gender roles and

essentialist myths of embodiment, "rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine".

It is this sense of embodiment, I argue, that persists in Latin American science fiction, whose cyborgs refuse to dematerialize in cyberspace and where writers insist on combining cyberpunk with a sense of horror and politics. The use of the body in Mexican cyberpunk captures the unstable nature of the border area between the United States and Mexico, where the combination of the bodily presence of workers or outsiders struggles against the cybernetic insider of corporate power.

Mexico's first cyberpunk novel, *La primera calle de la soledad* by Gerardo Horacio Porcayo (1993), touches on several of these themes. The protagonist, a hacker known as Zorro, is missing twenty percent of his face and has a prosthetic eye and leg. His abject appearance, both empowering and frightening, sets the tone for the novel. After attempting to penetrate the security system of a powerful corporation, he finds himself the victim of a new religious sect, imprisoned and tortured by its protectors. The physical violence combined with the hallucinations induced by his "electric dreams" include an image of his girlfriend's Clara's murdered, worm-eaten corpse. The narrator, who appears to be alternately in an insane computer labyrinth, a torture session and a witness to the rituals of an apocalyptic lunar religion, experiences the body and mind in a way that borders on horror. Ultimately, Zorro's hacking abilities are used to break the "ice" or protective code of an American corporation that wants to use the Mexican population as guinea pigs for its new nanotechnology. Conspiracies and betrayals abound in this novel,² yet the experimentation on the body at both the individual and collective levels reminds readers of the embodied culture in Mexico, setting the tone for Mexican cyberpunk stories to come.

² For a detailed reading of this novel, its circular structure and the use of cyberspace, see Juan Ignacio Muñoz Zapata's book chapter "Narrative and Dystopian Forms of Life in Mexican Cyberpunk Novel *La Primera Calle de la Soledad*."

Cyborgs in the Southern Cone and Brazil

The differences among the manifestations of the cyborg in different Latin American cultures, where science fiction has proved a rich experimental ground for the image of the cyborg, are revealing.³ In the Southern Cone, the cyborg figure relates most often to torture and unresolved political issues from the period of re-democratization, while the cyborg in Brazilian science fiction generally relates to issues of race and urbanization, although in both cases, the cyborg may be used as a critique of neoliberal policies that privatize public industries. J. Andrew Brown has examined the science fiction of Argentina, Chile and Bolivia, where the cyborg is a metaphor of the contemporary struggles in these nations to resolve issues raised by the torture and dictatorship of the 1970s combined with the presence of new technology. In *Turing's Delirium* (2003), by Bolivian author Edmundo Paz-Soldán, for example, hackers demand that those who participated in state terrorism during the former dictatorship pay for their crimes. The hackers are moved to protest by the fact that the newly elected president has refurbished his image and distanced himself from his former dictatorial policies, including disappearances. At the same time, “cyberhacktivists” attempt to organize a protest against a foreign utility company whose neoliberal privatization of infrastructure exploits the local population. While characters use avatars, drugs and machines in a way that associates them with cyberpunk, the text itself portrays only present-day technology. Here, cybernetic power is wielded alternately by hackers and by agents of the new neoliberal government and their avatars, in an ambivalent look at the way that cybernetic technology can be used either to cover up the past

crimes of the dictatorship or to unleash action by subversives against the current regime. Paz-Soldán generally avoids the “monstrous” characterization of cyberspace and does not pit human against machine in a reductive way, but rather attempts to illustrate the political uses and abuses of cybernetic technology in Latin America.

Dictatorship and its aftermath are the topic of Argentine Carlos Gamerro's novel *Las islas* (1998), in which a former soldier of the Malvinas War becomes a hacker. In order to describe the characters in this novel, Andrew Brown cites Katherine Hayles's idea that our “posthumanity” includes the use of prosthetics and other devices. Thus, in Gamerro's novel, the hacker, who has a piece of shrapnel lodged in his skull, resembles a cyborg. Later, when he has sexual relations with a female victim of torture, he inadvertently activates her scars by touch, as they fill with electricity revealing the traces of the rape and the electroshock treatment she suffered.⁴ Along these lines, Brown also cites Chilean Eugenia Prado's novel *Lóbulo* (1998), in which a woman is gradually transformed into an organic machine by the narrative's end, such that at the moment of her death, paper issues from her mouth offering a record of the disappeared, as if she were a type of printer. In this cybernetic metaphor, Brown notes that, although the author has a feminist agenda, she does not use the image of the cyborg in the way that Donna Haraway does, as a post-feminist construct that frees women from the patriarchal structures of society, but rather discovers herself to be an isolated cyborg, unwillingly torn from connections with others and family by dictatorship⁵.

³ If we consider Latin America to be part of colonial or neo-colonial culture, then it has its own version of cyborgs and posthumans. This runs contrary to Joseba Gabilondo's (1995, p.424) affirmation that “there is no such thing/subject as a ‘postcolonial cyborg,’ because postcolonial subject positions are always left outside cyberspace.”

⁴ For details about Gamerro's novel, see Brown (2010, p. 113-123), *Cyborgs in Latin America*.

⁵ For more details about Prado's novel see Brown (2010, p. 59-74).

In general, the American cyborg in films and popular culture is non-procreative and does not fit into traditional family roles, representing a creature with a new sensibility, according to Cynthia J. Fuchs. Citing popular representations of cyborgs in the films *Robocop*, (1982), dir. Paul Verhoeven, *Eve of Destruction* (1990), dir. Duncan Gibbins, and the Borg from the television show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Fuchs argues that the representation of these psychotic, violated or violent cyborgs effectively captures gender and racial anxiety in American society. The use of the cyborg for exploring societal ideas about gender is reinforced by Haraway's (1991, p. 163) idea that "The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled postmodern collective and personal self", thus providing a subversive tool for gender and feminist interpretations.

However, race and technology, not gender, are more central to Brazilian Cid Fernandez's (1993) story "Julgamentos" (Judgments), a near future noir thriller about violence against androids loosely based on Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982).⁶ In the story, the androids' connection with technology causes workers to fear that they will take their jobs, thus inciting unrest. Since pure technology is perceived as threatening, the story uses the figure of a cyborg, Vânia, to mediate such fears. First, she is of mixed race, making her a racial "hybrid." Second, she was born in the favela, yet manages to win the love of a middle class man, thus overcoming class struggle. Third, as a cybernetic being or blend of the human and machine, she mediates between human and machine. Yet unlike Haraway's postgendered cyborg, Vânia is able to have children, along with

her future husband, who also becomes a cyborg. The integration of cyborgs into a conventional family structure thereby deconstructs the fear of technology, much as the assimilation of blacks into Brazilian culture eases racial and class tensions. Despite their otherness, these cyborgs are able to continue to participate in Brazil's traditional social values of assimilation, which, as we shall see, contrasts with Mexico's more defiant cyborgs, who resist the language of hybridity.

Brazilian Roberto Causo proposes a more subversive cyborg in his story "Vale tudo" [Anything Goes] (2010). When black American journalist Jareen Jackson goes to Brazil to interview André Mattar, a former soldier and cage fighter who has become a police-reality-show host, she finds herself wounded by his enemies in an unexpected shootout. She awakens to find herself with Ferraz and Sombra, two underground favela hackers, and discovers that she has undergone a brain implant operation. As a foreign journalist, they know she will be granted an interview with Mattar, and for this reason they have implanted a special orbital processor⁷ or biochip into her brain so that she will be able to penetrate Mattar's security system and uncover his scheme to be elected governor of São Paulo. Causo sets part of his story in Capão Redondo, a favela or lower income area that is often the site of drug trafficking and police violence. He dedicates the story to Ferréz, an actual author and activist from this favela, who also appears in the story, thinly disguised as the character Ferraz.

In the final confrontation between Jareen and Mattar, the images of the cyberworld address the

⁶ This text could be considered "tupinipunk" according to Roberto Causo, because it has no connection to cyberspace. See Ginway, Brazilian Science Fiction, 150-165 for more analysis of "Julgamentos," also Ginway's chapter "The Body Politic in *Brazilian Science Fiction*," 202-205

⁷ She has a "Zé Arigó" processor (a reference to Fausto Fawcett's Santa Clara Poltergeist [1991]), which refers to Arigó, a self-proclaimed psychic surgeon who performed surgery with no anesthetic by channeling spirits. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Z%C3%A9_Arig%C3%B3.

financial labyrinth of Brazilian debt to foreign masters, from the nineteenth century to the present. It is no coincidence that all the characters in the story are black, recalling the ghost of slavery that haunts the social and economic realities of Brazil. Once in Mattar's world, Jareen finds herself lost and pursued in his Minotaur-like labyrinth of cyberspace, but she manages to confuse and defeat Mattar, and all the key information pours out of him: secret bank accounts, the plans of the nuclear plant he destroyed, the names of political appointees, the trails of funds to be channeled out of the country, etc. Eventually, Mattar's brain begins to dematerialize into pure code, pixels, dismantling his mind and power. The American black woman, kidnapped and implanted by favela hackers, becomes the means to bring down a corrupt public figure and reveal the ghost-like or "spectral" nature of modern capital.⁸

While Cid Fernandez's 1993 story about the *mulata* cyborg affirms Brazilian racial myths of integration and harmony along the lines of hybridity, Causo's story contains confrontation and struggle, giving the favela characters agency to fight against foreigners and the corporate powers that oppress and exploit Brazilian financial and natural resources.

Mexico and Implants

Mexican science fiction, with its economic and political issues related to the border with the U.S., demonstrates the cultural and racial tensions resulting from economic hardship on the borderlands in places like Tijuana or Ciudad Juárez, the free-trade capital of the world. In the photo-laden study *Here is Tijuana!* (2006, p. 140), authors Fiamma Montezemolo, René Peralta and Heriberto Yopez remind us that "The border between Mexico and the United States is 3,000 kilometers long and is the most asymmetrical border in the world". Neoliberal

policies and consumer society are often the target of Mexican SF, where a cybernetic or simulated life, reminiscent of Baudrillard's simulacra, becomes the new currency of exchange through implants, drugs and other bodily invasions.

In most instances, the Mexican cyborg body is a site of exploitation rather than empowerment. In Rivera's *Sleep Dealer*, the protagonist Memo becomes cyborg-like when he decides to work in the cyber 'maquiladoras' in Tijuana. He has implants placed in his shoulders, arms and hands so that he can move machinery cybernetically once he is connected to the system. Memo has left his home after having aroused the suspicion of the U.S. military, who, believing him to be part of a terrorist operation targeting a privately owned and operated dam, sends a missile to destroy his home, resulting in the death of his father. At work, his body, penetrated by nodes, is no longer his own. As a cybracero, he moves like a robot, wearing a breathing tube and special contact lenses to see his work constructing a building in the United States. As a manual laborer, Memo Cruz has none of the freedom of hackers who transgress or use technology via cyberspace, gaining power through information, and his penetrated body projects a sense of violation, of powerlessness. Memo is thus caught in a local version of the cyborg, confined to his body, to his side of the border, where his energy can be used without the complications of race and immigration that embodiment signifies.

Mexican science fiction stories written about implants and cyborgs present more disturbing scenarios than that portrayed in the film. The plight of the assembly-plant workers and the breakdown of the family are apparent in Guillermo Lavín's 1994 "Llegar a la orilla" ["Reaching the Shore"]. Here implants are an allegory of addiction and exploitation. While the father's implant allows

⁸ See Share Deckard's (2011) article, "Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and Roberto Bolaño's 2666."

him to work long hours in the “maquiladora,” the pleasure chip in his implant burns out, forcing him to use the family’s Christmas savings in order to buy a new one. With the memory of the abject smell of his father’s burning flesh in mind, the man’s eleven-year-old son steals chips of better quality from the factory. Later, the boy hesitates to give the chip to his father, leaving us with the idea that he will use it himself, starting another cycle of addiction and dependence, even as he dreams of a better future by crossing the Rio Grande River into the U.S.

Another type of implant is featured in Pepe Rojo’s 1996 “Ruido Gris” [“Gray Noise”] in which a journalist with an ocular implant becomes the ultimate eyewitness reporter. After receiving his implant at age 16, he has neither seen nor spoken with his father, again representing the crisis of the penetrated body. Rojo’s journalist, who is constantly filming news stories for the company that “owns” his implant, fantasizes about self-mutilation and suicide, while narrating shocking images of violence and destruction in scenes he has witnessed. He especially fears a syndrome affecting those in his profession that is caused by watching one’s own video-feed on another screen while filming, resulting in permanent brain damage. Here the cyborg body also warns of the addictive need for news by the public and those who are sacrificed to feed it. The fact that the society appears to perpetuate itself through the deaths of human bodies becomes a grotesque image of the abject combining consumption and death. The protagonist himself embodies Baudrillard’s simulacra, whereby modern societies interact only with images and spectacles that can be reproduced and consumed.

The use or consumption of the body and economic exploitation of labor also appear in the story “(e)” (1998) by Bernardo Fernández and Gerardo

Sifuentes. Here, the main character is given implants in order to upload economic data for those who will profit from the information. Though he is also implanted with devices that prevent him from using drugs and alcohol, he discovers the electronic drug “e” that offers both a high and sexual satisfaction, although with strong side effects, resulting in abject bodily emissions, nausea and headaches. Eventually, when his drug use is found out, the company fires him, using this as a pretext since the real problem is that his technology has become obsolete, making it cheaper to implant another worker with new technology than to refurbish him.⁹

The pressure of the job market is also seen in Mauricio José Schwarz’s “Destellos en vidrio azul” [“Glimmerings on Blue Glass”] (1996) in which a police officer tests a handicapped worker to assure the authorities that he is not feigning a disability in order to hold a job. With rampant corruption and widespread unemployment, the officer recounts how companies pay low wages to mildly handicapped workers who do not cause problems. The young man tested is the officer’s brother, whom he pretends not to know in order to assure both their futures. Like all of his co-workers, the officer longs to be like the police hero of the novels he reads, and plans to acquire a pair of reflective blue sunglasses like those used by him. This “Mirrorshades” look recalls Bruce Sterling’s (1991, p. 344) declaration that these glasses are “the symbol of the sun-staring visionary, the biker, the rocker, the police man and similar outlaws”. In Schwarz’s story, however, the glasses can only reflect the protagonist’s desire for power, and they become empty signifiers, attesting only to the character’s opposition to a corrupt system.

Pepe Rojo’s story “Conversaciones con Yoni Rei” [Conversations with Yoni Rei] (1996) offers

⁹ Ignacio Sánchez Prado has noted that Bernardo Fernández’s more recent characters long to become cyborgs, frustrated by the inability to connect to the machine. See “Ending the World with Words”, 125-126

perhaps the most radical critique of the cyborg, since the protagonist Yoni Rei's body is a grotesque pastiche of organic and artificial materials. Having been literally sold to a corporation for testing as a child, Yoni at first resents but later embraces his role as an experiment. While growing up, nursed by a silicone breast, his partly natural and partly artificial body is drugged and fitted with artificial limbs, all supplied by the company. As an adult, his cyborg body undergoes constant modification through self-mutilation, starvation, addiction, abstinence, and surgery. When he finds someone to love, it turns out to be another cyborg, Sari, who has been used so many times for sex change operations that it is difficult to decide which sex s/he is. When Yoni Rei sees a campaign on TV to "mainstream" cyborgs as humans, he cries, "I am not human. I refuse to be. No one is fooling me,"¹⁰ as he throws his television out the window. His final implant replaces the words he thinks with others from a dictionary, which makes his responses to interview questions seem absurd and surreal. When asked how he got over Sari's violent death after a break-in, he answers "By a cellular addiction to polyester," thus questioning the ability of language to capture the absurdity of his experience and identity. In his defiance, his partly natural and partly artificial body, having been torn apart and refurbished, becomes an allegory of Mexico's experience in the form of a Third-World version of Haraway's cyborg.

These cyborgs embody the crisis of the Mexican body politic, and as expressions of technological culture are used for work and then discarded. There is often no true hope of integration of worker and machine in Haraway's sense. Like Fuch's Robocop, these characters live in a masculine world, where, as cyborgs, they become another commodity. Their bodies can be replaced, as technology enters their bodies to restrain and subjugate, re-colonizing them

in ways that remind readers of everyday trauma along the borderlands.

AIs and Embodiment

Anglo-American and Latin American cyberpunk represent distinct positions in their portrayal of the relations between the body and cyberspace. In *Neuromancer*, the hacker Case longs to transcend the body or the "meat" as he calls it, to experience pure cyberspace. Case hopes to break the "ice" or encoding systems, while the powerful AI Wintermute operates behind the scenes help him—and eventually, itself. In Mexican science fiction there is also a longing on the part of the AI for the body to "re-incorporate" in human form, as a way of questioning the concepts of inside and outside in cyberspace.

In "Hielo" [Ice] (1998) by José Luís Ramírez, three teenage hackers have an ambivalent relationship to an AI that they discover while in high school. One of them, Ratón, manages to escape the gang after having a cybernetic sexual experience that almost kills him. The AI eventually manages to manipulate the others to find Ratón because he is the only who has survived the human/cybernetic merging of consciousness, something that is greatly desired. For humans, the embodiment of a cybernetic consciousness is to be feared and fatal. In its obsession to possess Ratón, the AI kills all of his friends, who had threatened to shut down its systems. Thus, what the AI craves is contact with the body, once again showing us the desire for embodiment and sexual possession of the male protagonist, who must put an end to the powerful entity in order to save himself, thus ending his most powerful relationship.

In *Sleep Dealer*, the cybernetic company "Truencode" plays a role similar to that of an AI,

¹⁰ The translations from "Conversaciones con Yoni Rei" are my own

manipulating information for users. Memo meets a different type of cyberworker, a writer named Luz, with whom he becomes involved. Luz (whose name means light, recalling the flickering light of the computer screen) also has nodes that allow her to transform her thoughts into stories and images by downloading her memories. She hopes to bring people together through her stories, but ends up using and selling Memo as story material, without his permission, thus betraying her lover and raising issues of privacy, sexuality and cybernetic interactions. Like Truenode, the cybernetic military information systems are like AIs, and in *Sleep Dealer*, they control surveillance systems, providing information for pilots who act on orders. In the film, Rudy, the drone pilot responsible for killing Memo's father, ends up reading Luz's stories about Memo and later crosses into Mexico to meet him. Eventually, the three re-purpose Rudy's drone to destroy the wall of the dam he was commissioned to protect by jacking into the connections at Memo's factory. Rudy, having left the military and his family, finds himself alone, re-embodied as a Mexican, unable to return to his past life.

In some ways, *Sleep Dealer* mixes both First and Third World cinematic premises and techniques, but ultimately reconciles Latin American politics with Hollywood science fiction imagery.¹¹ It neatly packages hybridity even in its form, since it combines relatively low production value, as attested by the uneven nature of the film's special effects, with clear allusions to Hollywood blockbusters like *Star Wars* (Calvin 20). However, as a group, each of the Mexican science fiction narratives uses cybernetic technology to invade and transform the body, raising issues related to labor, race and border tensions in a more visceral way.

Despite her endorsement of the posthuman, Katherine Hayles reminds us that "embodiment is always instantiated, local and specific" (*Posthuman* 49), part of a "local interface", according to Joseba Gabilondo (1995, p. 431). While cyborgs from the Southern Cone and Brazil remind readers of past traumas or corporate power, Mexican cyborgs, the deliberately local, embodied version, are inscribed by cultural markers symbolic of economic and political strife, using their bodies to mark resistance. Although part of a technological revolution, these cyborgs recall the crises caused by uneven modernization, border struggles and the drug wars of modern Mexico. Mexican cyborgs illustrate Yezep's ethics of difference, effectively portraying the continued tensions in U.S. and Mexican relations that cannot be erased by assimilation or facile notions of hybridity.

References

- BAUDRILLARD, J. The precession of the simulacra. In: MASRI, H. (Ed.). *Science fiction: stories and contexts*. New York: Bedford, 2009. p. 442-454.
- BROWN, J. A. *Cyborgs in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.
- _____. Hacking the past: Edmundo Paz-Soldán's el delirio de turing and Carlos Gamerro's las islas. *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, Tucson, v. 10, p. 115-129, 2006.
- _____. Identidad poshumana en *Lóbulo* de Eugenia Prado. *Revista Iberoamericana*, Mexico, v. 221, p. 801-812, 2007.
- CALVIN, R. *Sleep dealer* [film]. *SFRA Review*, Barnesville, v. 290, p. 19-20, 2009.

As Ritch Calvin points out, the final heroic action sequence in *Sleep Dealer* recalls Luke Skywalker's flight towards the Death Star in *Star Wars* (1977), even though the computer-generated imagery in the former is far from dazzling by Hollywood standards

- CANCLINI, N. G. *Hybrid cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity*. Minneapolis: University Press of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- CAUSO, R. S. *Vale tudo*. São Paulo: Devir, 2010.
- DECKARD, S. *Peripheral realism, millennial capitalism, and Roberto Bolaño's 2666*. 2011. Available in: <http://www.academia.edu/1019297/_Peripheral_Realism_Millennial_Capitalism_and_Roberto_Bolanos_2666_>. Accessed: 30 May 2013.
- FERNÁNDEZ, B.; GERARDO, S. "(e)". In: FERNÁNDEZ DELGADO, M. Á. (Ed.). *Visiones periféricas*. Buenos Aires: Lumen, 2001. p. 173-186.
- FERNANDEZ, C. Julgamentos. In: DOREA, G. R. (Ed.). *Tríplice universo*. São Paulo: Ed. GRD, 1993. p. 70-152.
- FERNÁNDEZ DELGADO, M. Á. Introducción. In: _____. *Visiones periféricas: antología de la ciencia ficción mexicana*. Mexico: Lumen, 2001. p. 7-17.
- FUCHS, C. Death is irrelevant: cyborgs, reproduction, and the future of male hysteria. In: GRAY, C. H. (Ed.). *The cyborg handbook*. New York: Routledge, 1995. p. 281-300.
- GABILONDO, J. Postcolonial cyborgs. In: GRAY, C. H. (Ed.). *The cyborg handbook*. New York: Routledge, 1995. p. 423-432.
- GAMERRO, C. *Las islas*. Buenos Aires: Simurg, 1998.
- GINWAY, M. E. *Brazilian science fiction: cultural myths and nationhood in the land of the future*. Lewisburg: Bucknell, 2004.
- _____. The body politic in brazilian science fiction: implants and cyborgs. In: HASSLER, D. M.; WILCOX, C. (Ed.). *New boundaries in political science fiction*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008. p. 198-211.
- HARAWAY, D. The cyborg manifesto. In: _____. *Simians, cyborgs and women: the reinvention of nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991. p. 149-181.
- HAYLES, K. The life cycle of cyborgs: writing the posthuman. In: GRAY, C. H. (Ed.). *The cyborg handbook*. New York: Routledge, 1995. p. 321-335.
- _____. *When we became posthuman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- LAVÍN, G. *Llegar a la orilla*. 1994. Available in: <<http://www.angelfire.com/va3/literatura/GUILLERMOL.htm>>. Accessed: 22 May 2013.
- _____. Reaching the shore (Mexico, 1994). In: BELL, A.; MOLINA-GAVILÁN, Y. *Cosmos Latinos: an anthology of science fiction from Latin America and Spain*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. p. 224-34.
- MCCAFFERY, L. Introduction: the desert of the real. In: _____. *Storming the reality studio: a casebook of cyberpunk and postmodern science fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. p. 1-16.
- MONTEZEMOLO, F.; PERALTA, R.; YEPEZ, H. *Here is Tijuana!* London: Black Dog, 2006.
- MUÑOZ ZAPATA, J. I. Narrative and dystopian forms of life in Mexican cyberpunk novel la primera calle de la Soledad. In: HOAGLAND, E.; SARWAL, R. (Ed.). *Science fiction, imperialism and the third world*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2010. p. 188-201.
- PAZ-SOLDÁN, E. *El delirio de turing*. La Paz: Alfaguara, 2003.
- _____. *Turing's delirium*. Houghton: Mifflin, 2007.
- PORCAYO, G. H. *La primera calle de la soledad*. Mexico: Conacult, 1993.
- PRADO, E. *Lóbulo*. Santiago: Ediciones Cuarto Propio, 1998.
- RAMÍREZ, J. L. Hielo. In: FERNÁNDEZ DELGADO, M. Á. (Ed.). *Visiones periféricas*. Buenos Aires: Lumen, 2001. p. 202-219.
- ROJO, P. Conversaciones con yoni rei. In: FERNÁNDEZ DELGADO, M. Á. (Ed.). *Visiones periféricas*. Buenos Aires: Lumen, 2001. p. 188-99.

_____. Gray noise (México, 1996). In: BELL, A.; MOLINA-GAVILÁN, Y. (Ed.). *Cosmos Latinos: an anthology of science fiction from Latin America and Spain*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. p. 244-264.

_____. Ruido gris. In: FERNÁNDEZ, B. (Ed.). *Los viajeros: 25 años de ciencia ficción mexicana*. Mexico: Ed. SM, 2010. p. 98-129.

SÁNCHEZ PRADO, I. Ending the world with words: Bernardo Fernández and the Institutionalization of Science Fiction in Mexico. In: GINWAY, M. E.; BROWN, J. A. *Latin American science fiction: theory and practice*. New York: Palgrave, 2012. p. 111-132.

SCHWARZ, M. J. *Destellos en vidrio azul*. Available in: <<http://listopallevar.blogspot.com/2011/02/destellos-en-vidrio-azul.html>>. Accessed: 30 May 2013.

_____. Glimmerings on blue glass (México, 1996). In: BELL, A.; MOLINA-GAVILÁN, Y. *Cosmos Latinos: an anthology of science fiction from Latin America and Spain*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. p. 265–292.

SLEEP Dealer. Direção: Alex Rivera. Los Angeles: Maya Entertainment, 2008.

STEPHENSON, N. *Snow crash*: 1992. New York: Bantam, 2000.

STERLING, B. Preface to *mirrorshades*. In: MCCAFFERY, L. (Ed.). *Storming the reality studio: a casebook of cyberpunk and postmodern science fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. p. 343-348.

YEPEZ, Heriberto. *Hybrid*. Mexperimental blog. 14 Mar. 2005. Available in: <<http://www.mexperimental.blogspot.com>>. Accessed: 3 Apr. 2010.

Recebido em: 16 nov. 2013.
Aceito em: 23 dez. 2013.

