

POWER OR SURVIVAL
- the interrelations among humans, cyborgs and androids -

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ABSTRACT: the human relations are portrayed in “Star Trek – First Contact”, an episode of the worldwide known sci-fiction series. In this movie, human species searches in future centuries other civilizations in other galaxies in the Universe. Men and women interrelate themselves and now with cyborgs and androids, two of human-like mechanic inventions. Surrounded by the imminent danger of disappearing caused by the cyborgs, both men and women try to understand one another to fight against the enemies. In this scenario, old and traditional patriarchal and male-centred values that have lasted for centuries in human history come up showing gender views as human species’ survival is at risk. Differently from our expectations, the movie shows that the structures of our civilizations will keep bringing unresolved questions that permeate gender relations even in the future.

Key words: movie, gender, human relations.

RESUMO: as relações humanas são exibidas em “Star-Trek – First Contact”, um episódio da série de ficção-científica mundialmente conhecida. Neste filme, a espécie humana busca, em séculos futuros, outras civilizações em outras galáxias no Universo. Homens e mulheres se inter-relacionam e agora com cyborgs e andróides, duas das invenções mecânicas semelhantes ao ser humano. Circundados pelo iminente perigo de desaparecimento causado pelos cyborgs, tanto homens quanto mulheres tentam compreender-se para lutar contra os inimigos. Neste cenário, velhos valores patriarcais e centrados no homem, que duram por séculos na história humana, surgem mostrando as visões de gênero à medida que a sobrevivência da espécie humana está em risco. Diferentemente de nossas expectativas, o filme mostra que as estruturas de nossa civilização se manterão, trazendo questões não resolvidas que permeiam as relações de gênero mesmo no futuro.

Palavras-chave: cinema, gênero, relações humanas.

In 1996, the issue on cyber was put forth in the motion picture “Star Trek – First Contact”. This episode was directed by Jonathan Frakes and starred by Patrick Stewart as Captain Picard, Alice Krige as the Queen Borg, Alfre Woodard as Lily and Burt Spinner as Data. The relationships between Picard and Lily (two human beings), Picard and the Queen Borg (a human being and a cyborg), the Queen Borg and Data (a cyborg and an android) are focused here. In my point of view, gender relations in a futuresque world comes out on the structure wherein man is

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the one who holds power and woman is the one who obeys. In this film, this model is problematised with human-like machines such as androids and cyborgs interrelating with humans.

The story starts in the 24th century when the Borgs are hauntingly destroying human species, so that the crew of the Enterprise spaceship under the command of Captain Picard is called to stop them. The Borgs escape in a time fold and are followed to the 21st century by the Enterprise. Whereas the human's leader and some of his officers come down to Earth to check the possible invasion of the Borgs, their spaceship is left in orbit. The humans on earth meet 21st Century people and interrelate with them so the future events that permit the upcoming of the Borgs can be changed. When some humans return to their ship, they realise that the shuttle is dominated and invaded by the Borgs who had been 'assimilating' those humans who stayed in orbit. At this moment, two teams of humans conduct the story: one on Earth and the other on the spaceship. The captain commands the team in orbit now with the participation of Lily, a 21st century woman who was teletransported up into the spaceship totally unaware of the events around. She interacts with Captain Picard who tries to make her understand the situation and convince her of the credibility of the facts around in order to count on her help.

As Picard and Lily go around the vessel trying to prevent the cyborgs from assimilating more humans, the only man-like android of the crew is captured and taken to the presence of a woman-like figure who commands the Borgs known as the Queen Borg. She tries to convince the android known by the name Data to be an ally in the battle against humans. To establish the setting to acquire the android, the Queen Borg uses language to persuade him by holding a dialogue between a woman and a man on the XXI Western culture models.

As such, their conversation is problematic. Like Picard (a man) trying to convince Lily (a woman) to have her as an ally in the battle against the Borgs, the Queen Borg (woman-like) is before a machine whose man-like appearance shows out insufficient to grant her any help. For Picard's relationship with Lily some constraints are on his side as far as leadership is concerned since he commands the crew, and has to have everything under control. On her side, it is in the fact that she is a 21st Century woman who, as film tries to show, questions her interlocutor. Picard is a man, captain, whose relation with his subordinate men and woman is presumably evolved in his 24th Century society, on a level of equality in gender terms. On this ground, we see Picard, a man whose final word determines the destiny of his whole crew, and on the other we have Lily, a

woman who is displaced into a totally different reality. Picard's position and post to Lily are as foreign as he is to her. At their first contact on the ship, afraid of something that she does not know, everything is new to her; she points a gun to him. However, Picard explains her all about the situation she is going through. He finally convinces her by using language to bring her to his side.

The gender relations' barriers are more intricate between the human-like beings, though. As the story shows, in both cases relationship is not simple because there is the hierarchical factor granting their levelling and consequent difference. The Queen Borg, whose command also determines the other Borgs' fate, does not succeed in her dialogue with the android, who pretends being seduced by her. He is hand-coughed on a table from where he cannot escape. Like Lily, he has no control of anything, but of his own 'mind'. The Queen goes beyond depicting humans as imperfect beings, what he already knows. To impress him, she commands a Borg to sew a tiny piece of human skin to Data's arm so he can understand what means to be human. She smoothly blows his now human new piece of skin, and for an uncountable fraction of time, he can feel it, what grants her access to him because she is aware of his greatest desire: to be human. This is like a temptation to him on his very weakest point: his biggest desire. As Michel Foucault says, *the power is where desire is*. What seems to be a contradiction is indeed a clever mind's strategy. Besides alluding to Eve and Adam in Eden, a woman tempting a man, this scene can be seen as a reinforcement of a portrait used in human History to depict what culture uses to classify as women's wicked character, in which the latter are perceived so because they use seduction to get whatever they want from men. The Queen Borg has a man lying on a table (or bed) in a position of total surrender to her. To some extent this encounter differs from Picard's and Lily's, since there is an inversion of roles due to power in the Queen's hands. Data is an android, a machine with no human physical components, being considered inferior to cyborgs. On top of that, he is a man-like machine whose circuits and memory put him on the same level (or superior in coherence) of humans.

To analyse this plot, I think it is appropriate to use a definition provided by Sherry Turkle in her article on a psychological perspective of humans and machines. She shows characteristics that differentiate human from machine by putting humans before machines, intelligent machines. According to her, the differences are more and more lessened as machines are improved. However, Turkle says, we still know what humans and what machines are as culture teaches us

since our childhood the difference between them (TURKLE, 1999, p.81). This knowledge takes us to define each as Forest Pyle does in his cultural analysis of films that shows cyborgs and humans interrelating. He defines the former as “hybrid of human and machine” (PYLE, 1999, p.124), or human beings whose constitution is made of biological structures assembled with mechanical parts. Donna Haraway steps ahead in this task as she considers the whole constitution of being that lies beyond the physique. For her, “the cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self” (HARAWAY, 1991, p.163).

In Frakes’ film, Cyborgs are known not only for their assembled self in a collective, but also as beings whose technological components make them superior to humans. The collective self, shared by all the members of the group, creates a strong community so each one is responsible for their progressing in their task to destroy humans. Haraway adds that this aspect in their unity is to make them survive in a situation in which they may be forced to escape (HARAWAY, 1991, p.170) from fragmentation, which would weaken them. By avoiding fragmentation, their power focuses one point until they can achieve it. Moreover, for having high technological components, cyborgs do not fear anything, as humans do due to their fragile biological nature. For the cyborgs, death does not prevent them from doing what they have to. On this basis, we can see the complexity of the relations among humans, cyborgs and androids.

The complexities vary as these beings have their existences at stake. The cyborgs, although they have no fear of death, search to assimilate humans so human imperfection can be swept off the Universe. However, the androids are forever under human control that can turn them off at any time. Humans are in constant danger for cyborgs can assimilate them. This configuration shows a tension in the structure of relations that inevitably leads the characters to hold control as they relate wherever they are. Besides, the story portrays gender relations that oppose and subvert some ideas of power structures typical to human-to-human relationship in History. These relations followed old models where men are superior to women in all senses, what does not innovate anything, even with the presence of androids and cyborgs, who would indicate a probable change.

To reinforce this, Nancy Hartsock in “Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?” puts that “theories of power emerge from and respond to experiences of domination and subjugation” (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.156). This aspect of domination and subjugation trespasses the story in *Star Trek – First Contact*. Men and women, android and cyborg interrelate immersed in

this setting. One of the most intriguing features is the exchange from the traditional frame in which man plays having power and woman as being the submitted. Women represented by Lily and a woman-like character exemplified by the Queen Borg take power and exert it copying the masculine centred models already known in History.

This void-of-novelty set of relations is refreshed by a model that appears more as a suggestion for human relation between genders than any other thing. The suggestion is shown in men and women as equals, like the Borgs are to each other in their collective. But this parallel should not be seen as a simple matter. When we take into account Hartsock's problematisation of the word 'woman', we can see that gender relations are always complex (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.158). Hartsock denotes the specificity that this word 'woman' does not offer, because there are different sorts of women. These sorts are stratifications that categorise women according to gender, class, race, and sexuality. Furthermore, Hartsock also brings up the collective 'we' as she encompasses all types of women together with any marginalised groups, so that they are as an only group due to their political position in society which equalises them (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.159). As we have seen above, this idea of collective is shown in the film as cyborgs' union is perceived.

Whereas the Borgs are collective under the same self and physically constructed (reassembled), humans are not. Human society, although being grouped in one target as instanced in the film, is formed by individuals whose self is not collective, and their physical appearance varies in many aspects. Gender is an issue not only connected to physique but also to power. In human society, being an individual known as a man is different from an individual known as a woman. These two categories are not only biological determined due to their physical particularities, but also culturally constructed. This discussion becomes more considerable as we try to define classifications like man and woman. In other words, it is not clear what a man is or a woman is. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says that man and woman are roles we learn to play in society under a cultural production (*apud* PROSSER, 1998, p.22). Due to this, the film shows us that difference between man and woman goes beyond genital aspects. Moreover, the film story simplifies any discussion concerning gender boundaries, and those who are seen as men are holders of a social position over those who are not. The purpose here is not to discuss this level, but the political implications of gender relations according to the film.

Hartsock delineates gender relation as a coloniser/colonised constitution. She cites Albert Memmi's work wherein women and marginalised groups are in the position of colonised and men shown as the colonisers (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.160). As she mentions Memmi, she points the bond between the coloniser and the colonised existing in a level where the colonised comes out as being everything that the coloniser is not. Moreover, the colonised is imperfect, negative, opposing to the coloniser (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.160). Based on this description, Hartsock writes that the colonised (also known as the Other) is dehumanised (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.161).

This dehumanisation plays an important role here in my analysis, since the events in the relations between men and women (and woman-like and men-like) characters are marked by this configuration. Hartsock shows that the other is "pushed to be an object" (161) and to "exist only as a function of the needs of the coloniser" (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.161). Besides, the colonised is always referred as feminised (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.161). This objectivation and dehumanisation are, on top of that, circumscribed by this feminisation that strengthens the idea of nothingness. In Haraway's words, "to be feminised means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force, subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out place, and reducible to sex (HARAWAY, 1991, p.166).

In the film, we have in short the humans who have created machines that evolved to a high level of intelligence as they were bettered. The betterment meant to come to a human level of communication and the use of information. The assembling human limbs with technological parts denoted more and more the perfection of human species. This assembly also created a new being, not human, not machine, but both at the same time without their limitations. The cyborgs are beings with bigger abilities as compared to the humans'. Moreover, the creation of cyborgs has permitted the outcome of self-conscious beings and hence owners of their own destiny. As it was achieved, human and machine could be seen in a coloniser/colonised intercourse. Paraphrasing Hartsock, machines that were as a function of the needs of humans (*apud* NICHOLSON, 1990, p.160) now in a cyborg form strike back humans to annihilate them for being imperfect beings. Although the similarities and differences between human and machine as presented by Turkle are perceptible nowadays, the film addresses human characteristics as bad to

the cyborgs, who now is seen as the other but who want to be the subject and make the humans the other. To reinforce this, the personal pronoun 'she' is used to refer to machines. Sherry Turkle shows that a software created to communicate with humans was called by the female name 'Julia' (TURKLE, 1999, p.88).

Here we have a complexity in this film that seems to affirm in Picard's and Lily's relation that men and women are equal (except that he exerts a power over his crew that she does not), whereas cyborgs are the other. In this spectre, we have the coloniser/colonised relation pointed to the level of human and machine relation. The dehumanisation of women existent in the relation man and woman is transferred to the machines as the cyborgs incorporate the human wickedness. This negative human characteristic is transferred at last to a being whose constitution denotes only evil, despite being holder of a relative humanity cornered to reason when dealing with each other and the humans.

On the other hand, the film stresses the humanisation of machines and the consequent deep interest and desire of the Borgs to destroy the humans as 'assimilation' of humans was achieved. Assimilation could be understood here as a process of 'making similar'. This process, however, only increases the number of individuals turned into cyborgs. On this level, the dehumanisation is explained by the cyborgs as a form of searching for perfection. So as to say, the transformation of humans into hybrid beings (cyborgs) is the way to perfection. In other words, the creator (man) is imperfect whereas the creation (machine) is perfect. Thus, humans need technology to achieve perfection not as a simple tool but as an essential part in their body constitution. Nevertheless, the story casts a subtle humanisation in the Borgs as they act like humans in their gender relations where power, once in men's hands to control the subjugated now is in a woman-like cyborg.

This humanisation of their acts exposes an intriguing inescapability of the cultural and historical bonds between humans. This humanisation of the Borgs can be seen in the scene when the human part (head and neck) of the Borg Queen descends from somewhere down to be assembled with her machine part to be one individual. The part that comes down is like a living bust of a woman. This part covered with human flesh and skin is put together with the rest of the body, which stood still waiting for the human part to be activated. This assembling can be seen metaphorically as a view of a Woman God coming to meet the inferiors. Lying on a table and having the hands coughed, the android observes the eventful scene performed by the Queen.

Besides her performance as a superior being that turns the android the other, she communicates with him reminding the viewers a woman seducing a man. As I stated before, she uses language to reach out the android. The other in the android is the human-like constitution he appears to have and now because he can sense what to be human means. In his condition, the man-like android tries not to fall into her snare by resisting her rhetoric. Deborah Tannen in the chapter *The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies: Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance* (TANNEN, 1993, p.169) brings up the association of power with asymmetrical relationships wherein power is in the hands of the person in the superior level. Power, she expands, involves at least two individuals and both cannot have the same position (TANNEN, 1993, p.169). The Queen is clearly in the one-up position and Data is inferior due to his condition of arrested and as an android – a total machine.

The Queen Borg shows solidarity towards the android. She wants to make his dream come true: to be human. But this solidarity expressed in her acts and words is questionable. Tannen says that “solidarity in itself can be a form of control” (TANNEN, 1993, p.169). The story shows that her real intention is to make him an ally in her war against humans. Her deliberate present to him shows her power. Her soft blow on his tiny human skin makes him feel a frisson caused by the warmth of the air expired. This act leads us to what Haraway says on woman’s existence as reducible to sex. The closeness of the Queen to the android is, according to Tannen, a signal that reinforces solidarity while power denotes distance (TANNEN, 1993, p.169), even though the proximity implicit in sex comes up in the moment. Brown and Gilman consider solidarity implying sameness (*apud* TANNEN, 1993, p. 170). Thus, the android not only feels her closeness, but mainly her sameness now determined by that small piece of human skin.

These sameness and closeness between these two beings is avoid because they are but a fake. It is likewise in the relationship between human and cyborg. This is perceived as the Borgs have humans as imperfect creatures. Although the machine part is seen as the solution for human imperfection, the android is also incomplete. It seems to be contradictory in the Queen Borg’s words. She seems to be exalting the machine part of her hybrid nature as well as the human part. When she interrelates with the android, it is the human portion that is superior. When she is before humans, it is her technological components that make her a superior being. From this view, there is a distance and difference between the cyborgs and the humans established as the Queen holds power to control humans and/or cyborgs.

Although the cyborgs are a collective, the Queen Borg plays the role of a queen bee. This collective idea is questionable; whereas the other Borgs are mostly man-like (there is just one woman-like cyborg assimilated) and respond to the Queen Borg's and each other's mind, the opposite is not shown. That is, the Queen Borg does not react to any command as if the main acts of her kind are in her hands. There is no collective distribution of power in their society. On this basis, the viewer cannot denote an actual sameness among women and men. But sameness and closeness seem reserved to the single moment when the question "Was it good for you?" is posed by the Queen Borg to the android. After blowing the skin, she takes the android to a level of sameness with her human portion as well as with all other human beings. In this level, androids, cyborgs and humans come to the same position in terms of sameness and closeness: human sensations.

Those sensations shared in a short time among these three sorts of beings are rapidly erased by the implicit target that the Queen wants to achieve through her communication with the android. Her words oppose her acts. Tannen says that "communication is a double bind in the sense that anything we say to honour our difference violates our sameness" (TANNEN, 1993, p.171). The Queen Borg elicits the sameness now shared with a being totally made of technological parts, but at the same time she implicitly denotes the deep difference existing between the cyborgs and the androids. At this very moment, the being human is superior to being mechanic. If before humans cyborgs are superior because carriers of technological accuracy, before androids they are superior because carriers of human parts.

The apparent contradiction is but a strategy used by the Queen Borg that strives to hide her real intentions, although everybody is aware of them according to the film development. The story shows a very strong and determined being heading her existence to an only aim. However, it is knocked down by her unawareness that it is clear to the android that she wants to seduce him. She seems to be naïve at this point, which does not correspond to her complexity as a character in the story. While she invests all her time and strength to assimilate all humans, she seems to miss the probability that her use of language, that becomes a way to dissuade those who appear to be inferior can be somehow flawed. She is so immersed in her task that she forgets that simple likeliness. Her quick involvement with the android, by providing him the realisation of his biggest dream: to feel what humans (and cyborgs) can, is, however, a part of her plan. As a whole, her strategy does not work out, though.

Nevertheless, Tannen says that the “potential ambiguity of linguistic strategies to mark both power and solidarity in face-to-face interaction has made mischief in language and gender, wherein it is tempting to assume that whatever women do results from, or creates, their powerlessness and whatever men do results from, or creates, their dominance” (TANNEN, 1993, p.173). This is so in the Queen Borg’s behalf. She personifies a woman in power who follows a masculine model to dominate the other. She uses a rhetoric based on feminine models wherein there is a strong tone of seduction towards the male character represented here by the android. But she ends up failing and losing her war to Humans and Androids.

The sameness and closeness that the Queen Borg intended to achieve through seductive ways is perceived in Captain Picard’s and Lily’s (two human beings) relationship. Whereas the queen Borg’s strategy was to recur to a linguistic and sexual strategy to get what she wanted from the male, the two humans hide this rhetoric through a communication form that strives to parallel and level them. The character Lily is a complex woman. She holds diverse questions in her being such as: race, she is black; gender: she is a woman; class: she is a famous scientist’s partner. As we put all these characteristics together, we can see another aspect: they make her a representative of female individuals to the human species as the film shows at the end when she and her partner meet the first extra terrestrial beings.

Lily and Picard do not seem to be targeting any submission of each part. Her defensive attitude in the beginning of the story highlights her dignity to be preserved in the strange situation she was inserted. Although Picard’s attitude is to establish a peaceful contact with Lily, the film shows that she sees herself in a position that demands but her surrender to his words and all that his figure means. His power is opposite to the Queen Borg’s because his need to exert it is related to her preservation too. As human beings, both are on the same level and taking the same risks.

Thus, Lily becomes a fundamental part in the survival of human species in the 21st Century and consequently in the following. The scene wherein Picard’s does insist on fighting the cyborgs, Lily comprehends together with some of the crew members that Picard’s decision puts everybody’s lives at risk. Being the only person aboard the ship who is not under his command, she decides to confront him. Her words towards Picard’s at that crucial moment in their lives make him change his obstinate position of a proud man, and the crew’s destiny is changed and they all end up safe. This parallel in their words and their acts are attempts to pose them in the same level. Picard’s leadership demands him to be decisive, but his idea of striking the cyborgs

back shows his wish to revenge rather than being a wise attitude. Lily comes into the scene to show him that his pride is leading them all to destruction. She shows herself as owning wisdom at a hard situation. She invests her words in a way that forces him to listen to her and realise what he is about to do to his kind. Due to his commandership, the final words are his and define his power and their future. The role played by Lily opposes the Queen Borg's. Lily fights for life and confronts the leader of a technological envolved human group to make herself be heard and followed. In a similar way, Data acts.

As an android, Data is conditioned and limited to a programming that is destined to serve humans in rational and mechanical needs. In the film there are two scenes in which his acts are remarkable. First, Data uses his computed intelligence to strike back the Queen Borg's investitures against him and humans. His evolution levels him to self-consciousness, which explains his perception of the Queen Borg's attitudes. He remains silent and his answers are ironic while she tries to conquer him. He hides his real intention to act in the appropriate situation. Second, he does so when he is the only individual who can save the captain's and the other humans' lives. Data's intervention denotes a machine's characteristic whose importance comes up to show his nature: Data is objective. The objectified characteristic seen between coloniser and colonised is absent in his acts. His movement makes him subject of the event in the most relevant moment of the story. He rationally decides to act when the whole human crew's, collective, lives are at stake. He ends up saving them all and destroying the Queen Borg and her collective.

As we can see, the film inverts human known procedures by posing in these four characters attitudes that subvert notions on gender relations as power is considered. The Queen Borg's and Picard's behaviours show us that power can be questioned when other values seen in a woman and an android grant human survival. In this piece, we can also see that categories such as human, machine, man, woman, or a mix of human and machine are uncertain, unstable in terms of boundaries as gender relations are regarded. Besides, power and its instability as characters act in the plot reinforce the impossibility to conclude on who is the holder. Rather, it seems easier to state according to the film that there is something more important than knowing who is the powerful individual, and that is human survival in a time and space where technology plays a more and more important role.

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