

# Human-Nature-Technology interfaces within the *Avatar* cinema-scape

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## ABSTRACT

Traditional relational models prefer Humanity as colonising the eco- and technolandsapes, distinguishing Humanity as Self, and Nature and Technology as Other. However, this essentialist view is challenged through regarding them as an open network of collaborative potential. Posthumanist works, such as Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto', have promoted this potential, and popular filmmakers such as James Cameron have followed suit in integrating posthumanist philosophy into their work. Cameron's hypothesis regarding the potential of Human-Nature-Technology interfacing is offered in his film, *Avatar* (Cameron 2009).

Where Cameron's previous films tend towards an essentialist view of the feminine being more connected with Nature and Humanity, and the masculine with Technology, in *Avatar*, he is conflicted. He wants to promote bio-conservatorship through perpetual Human-Nature-Technology interfacing, but also wants to honour a common storytelling imperative to favour a single, masculine protagonist as saviour and relegating the feminine, Nature and Technology as serving a masculine agenda. Though Cameron does, upon closer scrutiny, present a masculine protagonist that does not subscribe to Self-Other, active-passive binaries, he does default towards an essentialist stance in resolving his story. However, the film does act as a catalyst for debate between essentialist and posthumanist views, where Cameron offers Humanity, Nature and Technology as symbiotic potentials alongside antonymous absolutes.

**Keywords:** Science-fiction; fantasy; James Cameron; *Avatar* (Cameron 2009); ecocriticism; ecofeminism; film study; liminality; feminine; feminism; Other; ecology; technology, nature.

# Introduction

Orson Scott Card (1990:4) simplistically distinguished fantasy from science fiction by noting the inclusion of forests in the former and rivets in the latter. This distinction is inherently flawed because the boundaries that distinguish science fiction from fantasy are not as exclusively defined. Technology and Nature, once regarded as antonymous in general, have the potential within, for example, the emerging science-fantasy genre to exist in symbiosis with each other because the Human imagination has the potential to perpetually engage or interface with both Nature and Technology simultaneously. The influence of Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' on such popular science-fantasy filmmakers as James Cameron suggests that what is being engaged with is a more complex worldview of the collaborative potential between Nature, Technology and Humanity<sup>1</sup> – one that dissolves distinctive boundaries between each.

Using Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) as an example, I unpack the complexities of this human ecological and technological interfacing to determine to what degree Cameron challenges the boundaries between Humanity, Nature and Technology through specific relational paradigms. I also show how he extends this relationship to the audience's experience of Pandora as a cinematic eco-scape, mediated by the technology of cinema screen and space. Ecocritical, phenomenological, film and liminal theory inform my approach to the current debate regarding the call to bio-conservatorship. These theoretical approaches are also used to show how the exploitation of the environment and technology for human socio-political and economic purposes results in an unmaking of a potentially beneficial Human-Nature-Technology symbiosis.

## Relational In-between-ness and the Human-Human Paradigm of the Cinema Experience

Humans simultaneously occupy a mediatory position in relation to Nature and Technology, while also having unique and separate modes of engagement with each. Though such a statement is infused with anthropocentric tendencies because it places Humans as a relational common denominator – thereby prioritising Humans as central or hierarchically superior – conversely, what is also proposed by Humanity's relational location is a responsibility towards maintaining a less hierarchical dynamic between itself, Nature and Technology. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in their work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), characterise this more collaborative model as rhizomatic, describing it as 'open and connectable in all of its dimensions' (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:13). The call to destabilise traditional notions

of Human superiority suspends hierarchy, and draws this triadic relational paradigm towards a state that can be best described as liminal.

To explore how theories of liminality may be transcribed within this analysis, we must first consider the contributions of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner in defining the characteristics of this state. Their anthropological studies concerning the rites of passage, and the various phases of transition therein, acknowledges the liminal state as a threshold that synchronises past and future states of being. Van Gennep describes this synchronous space of suspended states as a 'neutral zone [that] shrinks progressively till it ceases to exist except as a simple stone, a beam or a threshold' (Van Gennep 1960:19). While Van Gennep focalises the synchronicity, Turner (1991:95) distinguishes the liminal state as 'necessarily ambiguous'.

In applying these characteristics to the relational dynamic between Humanity, Nature and Technology, the expectation of a hierarchical ordering, based on anthropocentric precedence, needs to be reconsidered. To approach inter-relationships from a liminal perspective not only aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model, but also with a decolonising paradigm: where each aspect of the social organisation is included in a perpetual, ahistorical dialogue. The application of this approach to ahistorical interactions is not restricted to anthropological considerations, but has also been applied in, for example, postcolonial considerations of cultural hybridity as a 'Third Space' (Bhabha 1994:208) that destabilises the absolute influence of the coloniser.

I propose, here, that Humanity, Nature and Technology are capable of existing within the 'Third Space' (Bhabha 1994:208), as a hypothetical liminal hybrid construct, which is why the cinematic medium is best suited to propose such an inter-relationship. It is, in itself, a liminal forum for generating the ideological hypotheses. Laura Mulvey (1975) states, in her seminal work 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', that the cinema screen acts as a liminal artefact that mediates the human experience of self-image relating to the projected image. She particularly draws on the work of Jacques Lacan to describe this, but also highlights that human interaction with the projected image destabilises Humanity's hierarchical ordering of Self and Other. The Self experiencing the projected image as Other prompts a reconfiguring of this relationship. This is because the recognition of the Self in the Other may also be considered a misrecognition. The alignment of recognition to misrecognition draws and suspends the binary within a liminal space. She writes:

[I]t is an image that constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the 'I,' of subjectivity... [T]he cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing

the ego. The sense of forgetting the world as the ego has subsequently come to perceive it... is nostalgically reminiscent of that pre-subjective moment of image recognition (Mulvey 1999:836).

This misrecognition and insertion of individual audience members into the science-fantasy worlds that are projected on the screen, relies on establishing an environment that is as familiar as it is strange so that one feels simultaneously at ease because the projected world is *like* the real, and aware that the projected world is an unfamiliar or alien world. A simultaneity of multiple images of Self and Other are therefore engaged in dialogue with each other, and the projected image becomes the self-image. Extending this to the awareness of landscape cues, the projected computer-generated (CGI) landscapes within science-fantasy films are often as familiar as they are strange. And so, the cinema space offers an opportunity to explore the dynamic of both Humanity as surveyors of the projected image, Humanity as the surveyed projected image, and their interactions with Nature and Technology.

However, in order to explore the potential of this within the science-fantasy film genre, three key binary relationships must first be considered in their potential within this genre: the relationship between Humanity and Nature; the relationship between Humanity and Technology; and the relationship between Nature and Technology.

## The Human-Nature Paradigm

Historically, Humanity has positioned itself as hierarchically superior to Nature. Western orthodoxy has certainly perpetuated this myth through, for example, the Biblical imperative to 'fill the earth and subdue it' (NIV 1991 Gen. 1:28).

Within science-fantasy literature and film, Nature has predominantly served as setting for Human or Humanoid journeys: a context for the Campbellian-inspired; 'monomyth' (Campbell 2004:28). Certainly J.R.R. Tolkien was eager to exploit this in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Despite his declaration, in a letter to the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, dated 30 June 1972, that he '[takes] the part of trees as against all their enemies' (Tolkien 2000:419) – identifying these enemies as being both Human and machine – he tends towards preferring anthropocentric dominance. Though the presence of, for example, a Green Man-type figure in the form of Treebeard would seem to affirm his epistolary endorsement of the protection and conservation of Nature, Treebeard is first identified as 'Man-like' (Tolkien 2001:452), and so his anthropomorphised form is preferred in its likeness to the Human through which his mastery of Nature is established.

This Human-over-Nature hierarchical precedent tends to dominate both fantasy and science fiction genres in the twentieth century. However, this preference for Human mastery extends to other fields and disciplines. For example, within the field of environmental ethics, Bourdeau (2003:9) observes the following with regards to the impact of man's [sic] dominance over Nature as creating a more clearly-defined distinction between and isolation from each other:

Nature can be seen as beautiful and harmonious but it also inspires fear in man who has had to fight it in order to survive. Now, nature is threatened by man who has become detached from it. Technology has endowed humans with the power of a major geological agency, which may act on a continental or even planetary scale (e.g. acid rain, photochemical smog, radioactive contamination, stratospheric ozone depletion, climate change).

These man-made environmental problems cannot all be solved by technology alone. Changes in human behaviour are necessary, hence the need for codes of conduct based on the ethics of the environment. The relationship between man and nature must be reconsidered.

The universal hostility with which Humanity encounters and seeks to control Nature is often represented in a heightened form within literary and cinematic fantasy and science fiction worlds. Though, as with Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), Humanity or Humanoid beings are identified as being the cause of environmental crisis or the threat of planetary extinction, there is an equally anthropocentric counter-voice that proposes a solution. In his paper, 'A Folklore of Hope: Storytelling for a Reenchanted World', Craig Chalquist (2018) refers to the sources that seek to provoke change on a profound level as being 'Enchantivists', and describes them as follows:

Enchantivists speak of "transmutation" because "transformation," a popular but vague word, can refer to surface change: putting on a hat to transform our appearance, for example. By contrast, transmutation refers to deep, alchemical, lasting change; for the big problems in life are not worked through, but outgrown.

Cameron adopts the role of 'Enchantivist' as writer and director of *Avatar* (2009), intentionally directing the film's purpose towards transmutation: symbolically representing this call through the transmutation of Jake Sully from paralysed Human to his hybrid Human-N'avi form. This transmutation, though initiated by Technology, is completed by Nature itself. Here, Cameron is drawing on an intrinsic desire within Humanity's 'collective unconscious' (Jung 1964:153) to return to the 'monomyth' (Campbell 2004:28) as a narrative space within which Humanity and Nature function in balance with each other: what Morris Berman (1981:23) identifies as a 'reenchantment'.

He describes the intrinsic historical and mythological Human-Nature relationship, and necessity to revivify it, as follows:

For more than 99 percent of human history, the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche. It has very nearly wrecked the planet as well. The only hope, or so it seems to me, lies in a reenchantment of the world (Berman 1981:23).

Based on this need, as identified by Berman, for Humanity and Nature to reconnect on a profound level in order to restore 'the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche' (Berman 1981:23), the surge in popularity of the fantasy film genre, as predominantly derived from myth, would seem to indicate that a pull towards 'reenchantment' (Berman 1981:23) is being experienced. Therefore, the role of the 'Enchantivist' in the form of highly creative eco-filmmakers, in reawakening their audience's imagination in exploring the possibilities of the Human-Nature relationship, is vital.

The result, as with Jake Sully in *Avatar* (2009), is the embracing of a transmutation, of reenchantment, and the desire for Culture, as Human-derived, to become, what Karen Barad (2006) calls, entangled with Nature. Barad (2006:136) promotes this posthumanist view in stating the following:

Posthumanism does not attribute the source of all change to culture, denying nature any sense of agency or historicity. In fact, it refuses the idea of a natural (or, for that matter, a purely cultural) division between nature and culture, calling for an accounting of how this boundary is actively configured and reconfigured. Posthumanism does not presume that man is the measure of all things.

In *Avatar*, this entanglement between Humanity and Nature is symbolically represented by the N'avi Home Tree and Tree of Souls. These two trees act as arboreal totems that integrate Human or Humanoid experience within Nature as part of, but never dominating, the diversity of experience and influence.

The structure of the N'avi Home Tree proposes an intrinsic relationship between the N'avi as a Culture and the tree as their natural home. Art director and concept artist, Seth Engstrom, developed the look and structure of this tree to reflect this relationship. Though it is equivalent in size and scope to a mythological Tree of Life or Arbor Vitae, it also bears a striking likeness to an African Acacia tree. Nadia Julien (2012) observes that the Acacia tree is symbolically associated with 'rebirth' and 'immortality in Nature'.

The N'avi Home Tree is, therefore, articulated by Cameron as a decolonised Nature-bound home that does not stand as peripheral or Other, but is reclaimed as a vital ecological space.<sup>2</sup> Engstrom further inserts, as intertwined within the tree's structure, a DNA-like interior staircase that winds its way up the internal structure of the trunk. This is a fundamental artistic rendering of a fundamental molecular Human-Nature entanglement. Though Nature is plural in how multiple deviations in genus and phylum are manifest within it, Nature also contains a singular common and synchronising element that is characteristic of all living beings: DNA. The Home Tree is, therefore, a symbol of the manifest nature of life, and the common foundation upon which existence of all living beings is manifest.

The Tree of Souls carries this relationship into the metaphysical considerations of how this connection is maintained beyond mortality. The representation of this tree as a Willow is significant in that this tree, like the Acacia tree, is also symbolically associated with 'immortality' (Julien 2012). With both the Home Tree and the Tree of Souls having equal symbolic value, there is a sense of drawing the Human–Nature relationship promoted within the physical world into the more abstract notions of the afterlife. In fact, Cameron, in the Tree of Souls, proposes that there is no afterlife in its literal sense: that all life is perpetually connecting with itself, with these two trees acting as conduits for this connection. This is most profoundly expressed by the character Neytiri and her explanation of the feminine deity, Eywa:

Neytiri: Our great mother does not take sides, Jake; she protects only the balance of life (Cameron 2009).

This balance, coupled with Neytiri's explanation that Eywa is 'made up of all living things' (Cameron 2009) offers a pantheistic collaboration between Human or Humanoid beings and Nature herself. Though Eywa proffers herself as source, she is also represented in all beings, thereby giving all beings the same sacred fire of divinity that informs various cultural mythologies, most notably the ancient Greeks and their veneration of the Earth Mother, Gaia.

## The Human–Technology Paradigm

While I have spoken of the Human–Nature relationship and how reenchantment would seek to re-establish this relationship, in identifying Cameron's film as science-fantasy, the aspects of science fiction that inform this genre would seek to disengage Humanity from Nature through the intervention of Technology.

Human engagement with Technology is simultaneously motivated by practical and ego needs. The Industrial Revolution disengaged Humanity from the pastoral setting that promoted a more balanced relationship between Humanity and Nature, and directed Human ambition towards mechanised and urbanised settings. These settings required a more concrete assertion of Human authority over their environment and a new definition of purpose in relation to function within a technologically evolving world. As Albert Edward Musson and Eric Robinson (1989:2) assert: 'Human activities are affected by the way in which human beings contemplate their own behaviour'.

Where the reawakening of fantasy literature in the popular imagination of the nineteenth century attempted to counter the corruptive effect of Humanity's technological mastery over their universe, science fiction sought to draw Humanity deeper within the complexities of the circuitry that would eventually become the synapses of a human-forged artificial intelligence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. And so, in relation to Humanity's authority, Nature was no longer the only Other – Technology had been effectively mastered by Human will and represented a new Other. It is no coincidence that Technology as perceived Other is represented by the character Grace, the feminine sociocultural and sociohistorical Human Other.

Moreover, Grace's investment in Technology as an enabling mechanism for her interaction with the N'avi, requires the viewer to accept her relationship with Technology as establishing the Other as hybrid. Within the mythopoeic landscape of Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), the hybrid manifests as cyborg in the most faithful sense of Haraway's description thereof, but less invasive or obvious as Cameron's cybernetic assassin in the *Terminator* franchise (Cameron 1984-2015).<sup>3</sup> Haraway (2016:5-6) writes:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction ... Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.

Haraway points to the conflicting binary that is inherent to the cyborg's existence: being simultaneously free but oppressed; real but illusive. This is also true of the science that forges the relationship between Human and Technology. As physicist Heinrich Rohrer (2013) observes:

Science means constantly walking a tightrope between blind faith and curiosity; between expertise and creativity; between bias and openness; between experience and epiphany; between ambition and passion; and between arrogance and conviction – in short, between an old today and a new tomorrow.

This innate empirical dichotomy that both Haraway and Rohrer refer to in relation to the cyborg and science respectively destabilises patriarchal notions of the material absoluteness of knowledge as promoting an absolute, self-serving action, and pulls it towards a suspended state where knowing and not-knowing are in simultaneous engagement. To have one binary co-exist in perpetuity draws towards it the possibility of other binary co-existences. Therefore, the avatar, the animal that is born of the Human consciousness interfacing with the Technology cocoon, exists in an in-between state: its own physical form interfacing with the Other in such a way as to make the two constituent parts indiscernible from each other. Haraway (2016:11) refers to this as ‘a pleasurable tight coupling’, ‘where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed’, and this description is very much akin to Barad’s (2006) ‘entanglement’. In this way, Human–Technology interfacing, much like Human–Nature interfacing, becomes an organic whole. The viewer experiences this and invests in it as truth when presented with Grace and Jake in both their Human and Avatar forms. However, both Human and Technology initially serve patriarchal capitalist interests. They are, as Haraway (2016:9) intimates, ‘the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism’. And so, the Avatar provides Grace and Jake with a means of liberating themselves from this order.

Though I am cognisant that Jake’s journey constitutes the primary mythological arc of *Avatar* (2009) – his masculinity motivating his ability to save the predominantly feminine-driven N’avi culture – his physical disability initially casts him as Other: an incomplete Human form. For Jake, to engage with Technology as Other does not follow the predictable outcome of doubly Othering him. The effect of technological interfacing has quite the opposite effect. Human–Technology interfacing transforms Jake into a hybrid, cyborg Self, and a mythological hero. Therein lies Cameron’s critical departure from Haraway’s work. Cameron does achieve the distinction between a machine, the Avatar, as ‘disturbingly lively’, and Jake’s Human form as ‘frighteningly inert’, as proposed by Haraway (2016:11), and entangles this active-passive binary within a single protagonist, thereby destabilising it and allowing for a momentary ‘*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction’ (Haraway 2016:7; emphasis in original). However, Cameron is less willing to remain within a hybridised state of double-consciousness, or to relinquish an absolute sense of the masculine within the cyborg. Elevating Jake to the status of hero requires the relinquishing of the label of Other. This

is physically enacted at the end of the film, when he casts of his Human form as bound to Technology – and, therefore, to the label of Other – and completely enacts his integration into his Selfed Avatar. Jake *unbecomes* Human, and *becomes* N’avi. Though this is an essentialist reading that contradicts the posthumanist approach of my analysis, the representation of Jake as always being a masculine cyborg does subscribe to Cameron’s previous essentialist stance in relation to the cyborg: specifically because the actor who plays Jake Sully, Sam Worthington, was previously cast as a Terminator in *Terminator Salvation* (Cameron 2009).

Though Haraway’s essay is considered to be outdated in respect of its scholarship, there appears to be an enduring cult fascination with this work, evident in the nuanced homages in visual culture. Cameron seems to be the most prolific devotee of the cyborg. However, his initial work does point to an essentialist stance in relation to cyborg representation that reinforces binaries rather than seeking to dissolve them. The *Terminator* (Cameron 1984-2015) film franchise promotes his particular hypothesis regarding the consequences of Human–Technology interfacing, and is predominantly driven by Human/Nature as feminine and Technology as masculine within this relationship. So it seems fitting that, in a film where the successful journey of the male protagonist initially relies on Human–Technology interfacing, the character of Grace, played by Sigourney Weaver, assumes a liminal position as scientific/Technology and feminine/Nature/Human intermediary. She is the interfacing Other that facilitates the masculine Human Self knowing himself as a Technological Other, and enabling an understanding of its experienced benefits and its potential threats. Granted, these potential threats are motivated by the greed of a corporate masculine Human Self, and Cameron directs us to Technology as being hard and unyielding under their influence. However, Technology becomes soft and fluid when its interconnectedness with Humans and Nature is facilitated, quite literally, by Grace – her name derived from Old French and Latin, and associated with ‘[divine] mercy, favour’ (Skeat 2013:246). The irony of Grace is that, as a scientist, she is bound to Technology, but as a wise counsel to the central protagonist, Jake, she is connected to a divine Nature. The loss of Grace, and her assimilation into Eywa through death, may be read as a symbolic enactment of the potential for not only Human and Technology to interface, but for Nature to interface with Technology: a divine knowledge encountering a Human one.

## The Nature–Technology Paradigm

As previously discussed, though Jake constitutes the narrative hero, I have highlighted the intrinsic influence of the feminine in Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009). Though more subtle in its influences on filmic audiences, the presence of the feminine manifests in relation

to Human, Technology, and Nature. In discussing how Nature interfaces with Technology here, I wish to include the divine as part of Nature, because Eywa, the central divinity of Pandora, establishes her authority through Nature as her creation. In addition, the planet name, Pandora, plays to the mythological influence of women: Pandora being one of the most prolific in Ancient Greek lore.

As previously discussed, the character Grace facilitates the interfacing of Human and Technology, and destabilises the sense of absolute authority the former once had over the latter through the bioengineered form of the Avatar. However, Grace also facilitates another interfacing: that of herself as scientist, her Technology, and Eywa's divinity and her creation, Nature. Grace is the character who observes the interconnectedness of all beings, and this awareness is facilitated by her empirical gaze. However, as a mentor to Jake, she also demonstrates a maternal instinct. She is mother to those who use her Technology, much like Eywa is the mother to Nature.

The Nature the viewer encounters in the film is both familiar and Other. The biofluorescence of the forest adds to it being perceived as Other, but ethereal in its Otherness. And yet, there is a sense, to draw on Samuel Beckett's (1965:79) *Waiting for Godot* where Vladimir proclaims that 'all mankind is us', that Pandora is *all* Nature, whether we like it or not. The naming of the planet, therefore, seems very appropriate. Hesiod's account of Pandora explains her name as meaning 'she who is given all gifts' (cited in Scott Littleton 2005:1082). This planet is abundant in resources, and is home to all life. However, it is also home to the threat of exploitation of these resources.

The myth of Pandora, aspects of which are very well-known, initiates the exploration of the impact of the threat. The ancient Greek poet Hesiod (2018) describes the incident of Pandora's box as follows:

But [Pandora] took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and scattered, all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men. Only Hope remained therein an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus who gathers the clouds. But the rest, countless plagues, wander amongst men; for earth is full of evils and the sea is full. Of themselves diseases come upon men continually by day and by night, bringing mischief to mortals...

The planet of Pandora, and its exploitation by the Resources Development Administration, seems to contrast the lore concerning its namesake. In Hesiod's account, Pandora, through her curiosity, causes disease and pestilence to be unleashed from the jar. She is the originator of strife and suffering. The Pandora in the film is not the originator of strife, but rather the victim of the exploitation she contains. For

Cameron to deviate from the obvious associations to Pandora suggests that he is purposefully offering a revision to typical assertions of Pandora's absolute complicity in the suffering of Mankind [sic]. There is a colonising aspect to Hesiod's version of the story which Cameron challenges, thereby creating a postcolonial counterpoint. The planet of Pandora is hostile to Humans because, from a Human perspective its poisonous atmosphere is perceived as a threat to the ambitions of capitalism. And yet Pandora is home to other species who thrive in its environment. It is this perception of the hostility of the planet's atmosphere that Technology responds to.

Technology is the means through which Nature, Pandora, is accessed and invaded. However, it is also the means through which it is explored and understood. The anthropocentric estimation of the value of Pandora as a resource to be conquered is dominated by the masculine perspective. The more eco-centric estimation of the value of Pandora, as a means of achieving understanding and integration, is dominated by the feminine perspective. Therefore, the use of Technology, when placed in the hands of the masculine and feminine respectively, functions differently. The war machines of the patriarchal order uproot, excavate and ultimately destroy. Jake seems to initially align with this approach to the environment of Pandora, and his first encounter with a predator called a 'thanator' – its name derived from the Greek *Thanatos* meaning 'death' (Beekes 2009:533) – convinces the viewer to read the environment as threatening. However, this is only a superficial reading, and Jake's true initiation into the environment and the N'avi is enacted through removing him from militarised Technology and exposing him to a Nature-derived truth. As he becomes more entangled (Barad 2006) in the workings of Nature, so too does Jake's relationship to Technology change. The pods that facilitate his consciousness being transferred to his Avatar become an educational tool that facilitates not only a greater awareness of Other, but a greater self-awareness. He defends the planet against the threat of a colonising, militarised Technology.

Grace understands that damaging a part of the ecosystem of Pandora damages the whole, and the destruction of the Home Tree becomes symbolic of the scar left by the war machines and the hostility with which Technology traditionally encounters Nature. And so, the Avatar not only stands as Haraway's posthuman cyborg, attempting to reconcile the two, but as a postcolonial product – being Bhabha's (1994:208) 'Third Space'. The relationship between Nature and Technology therefore relies on the perspective from which it is approached: whether binary or integrative. Haraway (2018:15) points to the significance of this realisation when she states:

From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in

a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war (Sofia 1984). From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.

This is where Nature and Technology find a kinship. They can both be misread as being outside of the Human system – Othered by Human ambition – or they can be embraced through the intervention of the posthuman, postcolonial 'Third Space' (Bhabha 1994:208).

## Conclusion

In formulating this triadic, integrative view of the relationship between Humans, Nature and Technology, we need to acknowledge our anthropocentric complicity in preferring the binary as justification for exploitation of either Technology or Nature. Within the science-fantasy world of *Avatar* (2009), there are rivets and trees, and what Cameron achieves in his allegory to the current climate crisis is to present all three aspects of the triad as equally capable of heroism and part of an interconnected system that possesses the potential to save the whole. As William Howarth (1996:77) observes, in his essay 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism': 'life speaks, communing through encoded streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate the messages with fidelity'. That this epiphany is offered to filmic audiences through Cameron's representation of the feminine Eywa, Neytiri and Grace is also significant. Though I have previously pointed to Cameron's essentialist stance in preferring the masculine hero, I offer a defence of the impact of his storytelling here. He is aware of feminine Other-ness, but does not relegate it. Though offering Jake as a quintessential mythological hero, he does not achieve this through personal will, but through collaboration, integration and understanding of the Other as equally important to the system. Cameron promotes such an interrelationship as anti-hierarchical, and, as Deleuze and Guattari (2004:13) propose, 'open and connectable in all of its dimensions'. The relationship between Humans, Nature and Technology is perpetual: each aspect of the relational paradigm influencing the whole as much as it is influenced by the whole.

# Notes

1. I have capitalised Humanity/Human, Nature and Technology because I regard them as significant contributors to the cinematic narrative that is under scrutiny here.
2. There are further points of interest relating to the connection between Nature and the notion of home, predominantly because the Greek word for home, 'oikos', is also the root word for 'ecology'. German naturalist Ernst Haeckel makes the connection more explicit in his work *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen- Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie* (1866). The most accurate English translation of this may be found in Robert C. Stauffer's article, 'Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology' (1957).
3. Cameron directed the first and second films in the *Terminator* franchise, and so I am referring specifically to these two films as setting a precedent for future films in the franchise.

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