

‘I will not die a monster!’: The Transformation of the Human Body: its Portrayal, Interpretation and Storytelling in Contemporary Mainstream Anglo-American Cinema

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Abstract

The portrayal of the body in the mainstream blockbuster ‘movie’ is one of a duality, with the limitless potential of how it might be audio-visually depicted on the one hand and a more limited structure behind what that presentation might be *designed* to achieve in its expressive meaning on the other. Throughout the course of its argument, the article will concentrate on *how* the body is presented and *why* by focusing on a number of filmic examples where that presentation is at its most excessive and extreme. A discussion shall also be made on how the medium of the human body is pushed to its very representational limits, not only by being defined or epitomised, but more so in its distortion and manipulation, in how it is forcibly altered by being extended, compressed, deconstructed, or, quite literally *reconstructed*.

Hence, the area that will be explored is that of the *transformation* of the body and what it means for the human form to be transformed from one entity into another within the storytelling process of mainstream Anglo-American cinema. Transformative bodies are those that undergo a visual ‘re-construction’ from one original template to another differing model, an effect achieved by means of cinematic technology and special effects (including prosthetics, animatronics, digital animation/Computer Generated Imagery, performance, etc.). By looking at bodily transformations in mainstream films, including those which incorporate elements of ‘fantasy’, the ‘supernatural’, ‘horror’ and ‘science fiction’, several issues might be explored in order to determine fully a spectator’s comprehension of and reaction to such entities.

Keywords: transformation, human body, pro-filmic, mutable, digital technology, special effects, humanness, cyborg, hybrids, monsters, superhero, reconstruction, spectator comprehension, mainstream cinema, Hollywood.