

A.I., Cyborgs, Shamans and Transcendence **Configuring the ISO and the Mythopoeic Sacred in *Tron: Legacy***

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the role of cyberspace in the 2010 film *Tron: Legacy* as an expression of the enduring relevance of religious symbolism and humanity's innate search for transcendence in modern technologies. Cyberspace is investigated as a sacred space of infinite possibilities in which humanity is redefined at the intersection of the digital, fantasy and consciousness. In the examination of the film's religious symbolism as a modern-day creation myth and its roots in shamanic cosmology, artificial intelligences in the movie depicted as highly complex humanoid information systems are proposed as a blueprint for an advanced mode of consciousness which integrates the worlds of science, spirituality and the fantastic. The "imaginative consciousness" will be proposed as the key means by which this may occur – the archetype of the 'woman-child' in the cybernetic figure of the 'ISO' in the movie is argued to represent a blueprint for the cellular and cognitive advancement of the human species, to a unique state of spiritual purity.

Keywords

Tron: Legacy (film), artificial intelligence, cyborg, sacred, myth, Buddhism, shamanism, consciousness, cyberspace

Introduction

Tron: Legacy (2010), the sequel to the 1982 film *Tron*, is the story of visionary software engineer Kevin Flynn as the creator of a digital universe and virtual reality game – the Grid – and his son, Sam. Sam accidentally teleports inside the Grid, discovering his father has been trapped for twenty years by Kevin's digital alter ego and anti-God of the universe, Clu. Kevin's pursuit of "a Digital Frontier to reshape the human condition" is a quest for a naturally superior being. This vision is realised with the introduction of the "ISO", a spontaneously generated cybernetic life form. This essay explores the Grid as a sacred space of infinite possibilities – in the examination of the film's religious symbolism as a modern-day creation myth and its roots in shamanic cosmology, the ISO will be proposed as a blueprint for an advanced mode of consciousness at the intersection of science, spirituality and the fantastic.

Enter the Grid – digital utopias and the promise of transcendence

The rapidly shifting relationship between humans and machines is having far-reaching implications, most notably the destabilisation of traditionally held concepts of personhood and the very boundaries of what constitutes a human being. One of *Tron: Legacy's* central

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preoccupations is a rethinking of the body at the interface of the physical and digital. In the Tron universe digital programs are created to function as humans often in the image of their “users”, as in the case of Clu in Kevin’s. In many ways *Tron: Legacy* expresses a “transcendental quest for unity supplanted by a mental immersion in a seamless information fabric”¹.

In their digital incarnation a user’s memories could theoretically be downloaded to their program’s “identity disk”, producing a supernatural version of themselves. What defines this weightless body is that the mind is a self-aware artificial intelligence that forms part of a whole digital consciousness. Tron cyberspace, as with other virtual worlds, provides an ideal testing ground in which the noetic is digitised and transmogrified into a distilled state of being. By immersing ourselves in the vast enclaves of cyberspace we may, in a sense, achieve a union with the mechanical unprecedented in recorded human history. The Tron universe is an illustration of the digital world as a mechanically generated state of ecstasy, signalling the advent of an era where the physical world is superseded by the ethereal.

The enduring connection between metaphysically charged motivations and technological endeavours reveals a multi-layered dimension to technoromantic visions of the future. Despite the prevailing history of the Enlightenment’s overthrow of religious dogma, spirituality and science were never completely divorced – their critical inter-relationship finds a renewed feverous expression in the arrival of cyber-culture and “New Age” discourse, giving rise to virtual reality’s dreams of “TECHNO-TRANSCENDENCE”². Notably, the connotation of digital programs’ construction in the likeness of their users, with respect to the biblical creation of Adam and Eve in the image of God, attributes an aspect of divinity to the user elevating humans to Godliness in the digital realm.

Cyberspace forms a “new kind of sacred space”³. Digital and other technologies become far more than impersonal mechanistic tools of science – they are the new religion as “instruments of ‘deliverance’ ” from the painful reality of mortality⁴. Historically, religion with its various rituals has denoted the bona fide avenue for the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. But far from signifying the displacement of these human impulses, digital technologies provide a novel route for humanity’s ultimate search for meaning. Just as hallucinogenics in shamanic rituals and other contexts have been used to induce alternate states of consciousness, so too can cyberspace figure as an access point to the subconscious, in a vision where “the creation of ethereal space enables the higher virtues to flourish as a digital utopia”⁵.

The limitless opportunities virtual reality contains to free us not only from our bodies but our minds are difficult to ignore. With its humanoid programs and supreme user capacity *Tron: Legacy* establishes itself as a cyber-fantasy of empowerment by the electronic frontier, fulfilled largely by the ability to produce digital copies of ourselves that could be there in our absence. Being transported inside the Grid allows the user to manipulate their environment and literally bend the laws of what constitutes the known universe. Material objects such as vehicles and weapons can instantly manifest merely with the power of thought; this is virtually unthinkable in the sensory world with its systemic restrictions. Inside the Grid we can ride for miles on end, literally creating the lines of the freeway as we go. Our bodies are not constrained by the limitations of hunger, disease or disability in the landscape of the cyber-real.

In this new world order the postmodern human ascends to his/her status as “superhuman”, fulfilling “Friedrich Nietzsche’s vision of the ‘Übermensch’ ”; we can be our own version of superman/woman flying through the air, lighting up the night sky with our neon suits and rising to heights never thought possible⁶. We have the ability to go wherever the mind envisions in a landscape that is as boundless as each user’s imagination, reaching a digitally induced mystical level of exaltation in this technotronic superhighway. *Tron: Legacy*

features as a digital departure that romanticises virtual space as a pathway to freedom from our narrowly defined day to day reality, and the arrival at our own personal cyber-utopia.

Dreaming the ISO and the mythopoeic sacred in cyberspace

Technology provides an avenue for the materialisation of celestial aspirations that have hitherto been the sole property of imaginative authority. Accordingly, the Grid represents a digital “mythological dream” springing forth from the depths of the unconscious⁷. The rethinking of *Tron: Legacy* as modern myth provides a refuelling of the inter-relationship between religious and scientific sentiment. The establishment of the Grid as a “charmed site” is not confined to a gratification of individual longings for mystical transference – its very foundations constitute the essence of divine intervention⁸. In his narration of the building of the Tron universe alongside Clu and Tron to his young son, Kevin muses that “one day ... something happened ... something extraordinary – a miracle”. Twenty years later in their reunion inside the Grid Kevin finishes off the story to Sam: the miracle was the spontaneous creation of artificial life forms, the “Isomorphic Algorithms” or “ISOs”.

At the digital frontier the ISOs are an expression of the miracle of life, forging unthinkable avenues of technological mediation and the notion of cyberspace as sacred space. Kevin instantly recognises the profound impact this life form could have on our understanding of both human and artificial existence:

For centuries we’ve dreamed of Gods, spirits, aliens and intelligences beyond our own ... Everything I’d hoped to find in this system – control, order, perfection ... none of it meant a thing. I’d been living in a hall of mirrors; the ISOs shattered it. The possibilities of their root code, their digital DNA ... Science, philosophy, every idea man [sic] has ever had about the universe up for grabs.

Their very structure could unlock answers to age-old questions, most fundamental of which, what it means to be human and what may lie beyond. The ISOs encapsulate the materialisation of a world that would “include any entity that behaves as an enhanced human”; Quorra, the last ISO and Kevin’s sole companion in the Grid for two decades, demonstrates an impressive set of skills not only in her physical and mental prowess, but her adaptability and capacity to survive⁹. The self-produced figure of the ISO demonstrates the full gamut of artificial intelligence in the Grid, solidifying the divine properties of cyberspace as a source of genesis.

This revolutionary discovery reaches beyond the digital world – the Grid is an avenue for humanity’s transcendence to a new level of existence, via a dynamic intervention in its own evolution offered by scientific enquiry. Once Kevin realised the groundbreaking platform that the Grid encompassed, his vision was to “reshape the human condition”. The key to the expansion of our consciousness would not merely lie in passively studying Quorra’s digital structure – a merging of the digital *with* the biological opens the door to an intensive reconstruction of our species genetic and neurological makeup, culminating in the creation of a being that obliterates the conventional. For Goicoechea “mythology and technology converge in the figure of the cyborg, the postmodern representation of an ancestral dream that ... liberates the human being from its limitations” – a human/ISO synthesis represents the possibility of the realisation of the superhuman promised by the offerings of a digital emancipation and its ethereal space¹⁰.

How could the culmination to such a postbiological being be possible? Benedikt defines cyberspace as the “realm of pure information”¹¹ – the centrality of “*information as constituting the true essence of the universe ... in which there is an authentic world of pure form*” provides the foundation of not only digital space, but the conceptualisation of DNA as “pure code”¹². If the digital and biological worlds share the same core essence, the

deconstruction of our molecular structure and its transmutation into digital language becomes a real possibility. Knowledge in cyberspace is codified – accessing the ISO’s root code, in this sense, opens the door to a clarification of human ontology, heightening our faith in technologies as instruments of deliverance, and affirming the abiding vital link between science and religion in their mutual transcendental aspirations. By establishing humans as masters of their own destiny, the synthesis of biological and digital potentially equates to the one thing that could surpass finding God – *becoming* God.

The convergence of biblical texts and technology with the installation of God-images in the Grid ascribes a unique celestial property to the ISO. This miracle of cyberspace denotes a direct link between digital and creation narratives – Quorra represents the first-born child of the Creator, Kevin. In a sense, all programs within the Grid are offsprings of the maker; but there is something that separates Quorra from the other ‘children’. She is Kevin’s most special creation, his ‘first daughter’ and the perfect embodiment of his original vision – the discovery of a life beyond the ‘real’ that pushes the boundaries of existence as we know it to an unprecedented level. The significance of the first-born in religious literature is paramount. Like Jesus Christ’s primacy in the Bible, the ISOs represent the “consummation of God’s purpose of grace” and the notion of immaculate conception as spontaneous creations¹³. They show humanity how they are connected to a higher power. Significantly, the concept of the first-born does not just refer to “priority in time”; it designates “a certain superiority in privilege and authority”¹⁴. Although the ISOs did not emerge first in the Grid, their importance far outweighs all others as an artificial intelligence both in the Tron and human universes.

Quorra carries with her literally, in terms of her digital structure, and figuratively, the properties of divinity and virtue. If such a thing as perfection existed Quorra is its embodiment – she *is* the marvellous, the ultimate vision for humanity of an advanced species that carries with it all the answers of life itself. As the last of her kind, Quorra lights the way as a superlative being, securing her Godly ascription in the Tron universe in her privileged position as the Creator’s supreme heir. In their representation as post-corporeal the ISOs constitute an ethereal element with Quorra an expression of the superhuman, albeit at a whole new level, and the “technological sublime”¹⁵. This positioning of the ISO’s status culminates in the establishment of *Tron: Legacy* as a modern-day creation myth, and an emancipatory vision of a cyborgic future for humanity via the blending of the digital and corporeal as the “central myth of ... [Tron] cyberculture”¹⁶.

Digital consciousness and the shamanic vision-state

With its invocation of digital narratives as metaphysical *Tron: Legacy* demonstrates the grounding of dreams of techno-transcendence in the mythopoeic imagination. Cavallaro contends that, amongst other legendary myths, “cyborgic fantasies find their roots in the primitive *shaman*”¹⁷. The knowledge that “energy/information patterns of the material world” and one’s own biological structure converge, as propounded by “Molecular Information Theory”, has been manipulated throughout the ages by spiritual figures such as the shaman to dramatically alter their psyche¹⁸. The ultimate purpose of this process referred to by “the Buddha, Christ and hundreds of other mythical avatars” is an inner-enlightenment known as the “kundalini” experience, which constitutes the foundation of biological and cognitive evolution¹⁹.

The mystical “Law of Three” in shamanic cosmology is vital to understanding its significance²⁰. Gardiner and Osborn propose that “Functions such as sleep, consciousness, memory, imagination and creative ability are all extremely complex and poorly understood”²¹. Ancient shamans observed the process of consciousness in alignment with the “waking-sleeping cycle” as three separate phases: the positive state of wakefulness, the negative state of sleep and their cross-over point, the “neutral (transliminal) phase”, which is

the key to internal awakening²². Could entering cyberspace figure as an access point to this unique spiritual zone? The Grid represents a digital “topography” containing “information ... explored in the visionary state” of the transliminal phase²³. When users enter cyberspace they are still thoroughly aware of their environment; yet, they are not engaged in the same normal waking state and sensory world they are accustomed to.

The shaman understood that if he or she were to remain alert at this mid-point, the transliminal state becomes a doorway to inner cosmic zones in which mythical figures and legends are revealed – to enter the Grid is to reach these primeval worlds found in three levels, the first of which is the “surface” exterior of the world²⁴. The Grid arguably represents at the first instance the “underworld”, and then the “centre of the earth, the higher plane or the [mythological collective] unconscious”²⁵. There is much to be learnt by drawing on rich mythic tradition – *Tron: Legacy* and its predecessors are modern tales of spiritual inauguration. When the user is digitally transported inside the Grid, they are the initiate who becomes privy to this superior level of awareness. Here we find the centrality of the *Tron* universe as a mythical expression of the internal processes potentially leading to a kundalini enlightenment, predicating a direct link between cyberspace and its transgressive transformative properties.

This “triad” or “*axis mundi*, ‘axis of the world’ ” is commonly depicted as a pyramid, encompassing seven levels along its triangular neutral centre-line²⁶. It adheres to the shamanic cosmology found in almost all cultural representations as the “mythical sacred mountain whose summit is the “abode of the gods’ ”²⁷. The most important aspect of such depictions is that these mythological adaptations are in fact symbols of the levels associated with the internal process of transformation of consciousness; the seven steps on the pyramid’s horizontal line are a symbol for the long-recorded seven-step “chakra system” and the endocrine glands ascending along the human spinal column, which are instrumental to the kundalini enlightenment experience²⁸. The original definition of the chakra is “wheel” and they are often described as invisible swirling energy vortices²⁹.

This account is crucial in its application to the *Tron* universe – the most prevalent image in *Tron: Legacy* is the wheel and its representation both in the motorcycle and the disk as a symbol of freedom. Kevin and Sam are avid motorcycle riders, befitting of their renegade personas, and the light cycle match is a key feature of the disc wars in both movies. The wheel in the *Tron* universe may become a metaphor for ascension, both physical and spiritual, of the *axis mundi*; just as chakric energy circles around and rides up, so too do the motorcycle’s revolving wheels. In a similar fashion and perhaps in its most powerful depiction, the disks that are placed on the top of a user’s or program’s back align with the spine, corresponding with accounts that the chakras congregate along the spinal column. It is notable that the original design of the disk in *Tron* encompassed seven rings, subsequently replaced by two in *Tron: Legacy*.



Figure 1: Celestial Spheres– The original *Tron* disk (left) encompassing seven circles, symbolic of the seven chakra ‘wheel’ vortices. The disk worn on the back of a user’s or program’s spine (right)

and an instrumental aspect of the *Tron: Legacy* technobody.

Source: *A TRON-Era Identity Disk* (n.d.); *Tron: Legacy Movie Poster* (2010)

The *Tron* disk becomes a symbol of the spinning chakra vortices only seen by mythical avatars. In a utopian sense it allows one, amongst other things, to imagine objects into existence and fly, realising in part that dream of roaming unfettered through the pioneering domain of cyberspace. The parallels between these images in the movie and mythological accounts are evident in the “Ba bird bearing the *shen* ring” as portrayed in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs; in one the most memorable scenes programs fly through the night sky like digital birds, reminiscent of such mythical depictions³⁰.



Figure 2: Birds of the ether – The winged digital programs in *Tron: Legacy* (top) comparable to the ancient Egyptian mythological figure of the “Ba Bird” (bottom). In all instances the presence of the “celestial Sphere”, “*shen* ring” or *Tron* disk is a key element.

Source: *Black Guard* (n.d.); *Cartonnag Panel of Ba-Bird* (2010); *Combat Drop* (n.d.); Evans (1993)

Corbin speaks of the “celestial” or “supreme Sphere” in myth – Kevin’s disk can provide invaluable data to the outside world and human evolution³¹. It is also the way out of the Grid, a “master key” which one requires when passing through the portal and the main reason Clu hunts Kevin down. Interestingly, when Sam’s disk is activated, a surge of energy rushes through him culminating in his head as his eyes flash and he enters his “Technobody”³² – a user’s installation into their digital self represents the kundalini “illumination effect”³³ or fiery sensation said to rise to the skull. A similar sensation is also experienced in the initial transportation inside the Grid with the physical act of quantum teleportation. The recurring featuring of the rotating wheel as a symbol of profound change establishes it as the most persistent “transformative image” in *Tron: Legacy* – just as the shaman can climb the *axis mundi* and its vertical spirals, so too can the user ride the Grid’s digital highway and winding circuits straight to the Godhead, the pinnacle of theirs and world consciousness³⁴.

These chakric spheres are native to the territory of the ethereal and are beyond conventional scientific observations and measurement, as they can only be detected in a meditative

“trance”³⁵. This marks a crucial point in these accounts – the chakras and their common description as “swirls of colour” and “lotus petals”, denote internal visualisations or images³⁶. The depth of knowledge of the human psyche displayed by shamanic mythical figures purely through the power of intuition and imagery, renders their characterisation by Gardiner and Osborn as “*Subatomic Scientists*” arguably highly appropriate; such visual representations of the chakric vortices correspond with the scientifically observed activity of atomic particles³⁷.

The extension of this finding’s application to the Tron universe in light of the interconnection between biological structure and Information Theory, and imagery discussed here, reveals an important link between imagination and science, fantasy and reality. A user’s or program’s disk contains vital information of its carrier’s identity. But this information is in essence a series of images of their memories. Clu scans Sam’s disk when he is brought to him to assess to what extent he poses a threat; notably, Sam’s memories display as visual scenes of his journey inside the Grid up to that point. This defining aspect along with the conceptualisation of the Grid as a digital dream, begs the redefinition of the very structure of this technoworld; in the “creative matrix” of fantasy “image crowds upon image”³⁸. The clusters of information inside the computer as its very foundations can accordingly be reclassified as clusters of images, or “imaginative data” – in other words, information *is* image³⁹. This insight, along with the theorisation of cyberspace as the realm of pure information, reinscribes the digital world as a *realm of pure image*.

The implications of this association are significant both at the scientific and spiritual level – if the Grid is conceived of as the shamanic underworld, then the correlation between cyberspace, images and internal awakening is immediate and profound. As the very building blocks of life fantasy and its meaning, if grasped, can serve as a conduit to a heightened state of consciousness⁴⁰. In contrast to the entrenched heritage of Western thought, transcendence in the Tron universe is not based on its “disembodied detachment from physicality”, but in its very real grounded character; the anthropomorphisation of digital programs results in a ‘game’ and deeply metaphysical dialogue between users and programs unlike any other⁴¹.

Entering this interactive experience is a demonstration of actively engaging with the imagination as a means of delving into the essence of the images of which our very psyches are composed. Interpreting the Grid as a consciousness-building activity reveals the configuring of the digital world in *Tron: Legacy* as an access point to a superior, if confronting, level of awareness for the human psyche, and the source of image/information or the collective unconscious. Cyborgic fantasies secure their primacy as complex systems of knowledge, by virtue of their fundamental constitutive elements which serve as gateways to transcendence and tools of material transformation, with myth as their platform.

Configuring the ISO and the return of the imaginal sacred

In order to comprehend how such an advanced state of consciousness could be achieved in the Tron universe, we must revisit ancient accounts of mythic cosmology which correspond to “the four psychoanalytical states of consciousness referred to by psychologists”⁴². The first two relate to the “male-related conscious self which has its focus on the external material world”, and the “‘dreaming body’” or ‘female-related subconscious which has its focus on the internal mental realm’⁴³. These are represented respectively by Kevin’s digital twin and anti-God, Clu, who overtakes the Tron universe obsessed by his vision of conquering the ‘surface’ human world, and visionary genius Kevin who in his years of entrapment has evolved into a Buddhist-like sage figure.

The next condition is the “neutral, androgynous soul” and the amalgamation of our aforementioned competing forces, denoting the “third state of consciousness” which corresponds to the transliminal state⁴⁴. Sam Flynn stands in the middle of the two fathers. He

is a fusion of Kevin and Clu, masculine and feminine; able to be aggressive, yet introspect. Sam represents the congregative access point; by entering the Grid he re-activates the portal, preparing the path for the two opposing Gods who have long been separated to meet halfway. He could in fact be turned into a full version of either Clu or Kevin, but in the end cannot deny he is a part of both, cementing his role in Tron cyberspace as the symbolic equilibrium position of human consciousness.

This inbuilt complexity of the human condition results in the “realisation that while one identity is clearly discernible, there are in fact other selves that, at any given historical moment, must remain hidden”⁴⁵. In *Tron: Legacy* the two universes of the visible (the 21st century world) and the invisible (the Grid/*Tron* as a virtual game) exist parallel to each other. They are both equally real in their experiences and emotional landscape for the user. Here, the lines between life and game are blurred, as both are suffused with infinite risks and choices. A study of evolutionary transition beyond our current state is consequentially inextricably bound to a study of *the return of the hidden self, or the sacred*.

The difficulty in the recognition of concealed identities finds a much anticipated resolution in the inherent sublime properties of cyberspace and, most significantly, in Quorra. The interplay involved in the migration from the material to the digital world is “essentially that of the external, the visible ... and the internal, the invisible ... or the *natural* world and the *spiritual* world [emphasis added]”⁴⁶. Burke describes that to construct something “terrible” in a form which is sublime, “obscurity” is a necessary element which may be expressed by different means, for example “darkness”⁴⁷. This darkness, along with the “vastness and “infinity” of the Grid, are key contributing factors to its fantastic landscape’s elusive nature and the rendering of cyberspace as the *terrific sublime realm of the un/real* – this is the acknowledgment of a locality that may be invisible to the naked eye but is no less substantive⁴⁸. This phenomenon predicates the digital world’s “mediatory position”; the Grid is present somewhere in between the ‘real’ world and the ‘unreal’⁴⁹. It exists, but at the same time it does not – it is the epitome of ““immaterial” materiality”⁵⁰.

Tron cyberspace is, at first, a ‘no-man’s land’. But as soon as the migration is complete, the internal spiritual domain of the cyber-real, hitherto concealed, unfolds before our very eyes as all-encompassing. Its solid presence spells the induction to a reality that transcends the ‘real’. The admission of technology’s capacity to co-exist with and redefine humanity does not need to involve giving up a part of ourselves, but the acceptance that we belong to a multi-dimensional tapestry of existence; otherwise, the human imagination will continue to parade in a perpetual state of imbalance, and act as a culprit of recurrent nightmares⁵¹.

This urgent call for change demands the breakdown of boundaries between what we perceive as ‘real’ and what ‘imaginary’. The re-invention of our cosmology to incorporate a variety of identities and universes is a doorway to a higher degree of awareness – constructing the Grid is essentially a struggle to unlock the concealed unmapped territory within our pre-conscious minds to achieve the post-conscious, attainable solely by “the imaginative consciousness”⁵². By virtue of its constitution cyberspace becomes a bedrock for the invisible sacred and its reprisal, as the obscure is embedded in its very foundations.

Such an exercise, by implication, demands that there is a crossover point; this breach is the original moment of creation, birth of the self and world consciousness. In the figure of the ISO which acts as a facilitator of this rupture by promoting hybridisation may lie the pathway to the reconciliation of opposites, most radical of which is the promise of a celebratory human/ISO cyborgic interfusion. Haraway explains how the cyborgic body exposes the complexity of reality “since it implies the interpenetration between self and other”⁵³. But the ISO allows their conflation without posing a threat to the stability of the self – it is appropriate that the ‘ISO’ acronym as applied in mathematics (*isomorphic* algorithm) signifies “having the same form”, which suggests a return to a state of symmetry

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even in the presence of numerous sides to a single construct⁵⁴. A balanced psyche is the ultimate aim of religious contemplation.

This redressing of balance with the harmonious coexistence of a multiplicity of selves may be achieved synthetically, via the re-manufacturing of this highly advanced human DNA at the hands of science. The interpenetration between self and other, machine and human, also extends to the interpenetration between ‘the seen’ and ‘the unseen’ leading to an instant re-interpretation of reality – the potential merging of the ISO digital code with human genes suggests the possibility of altering our biological structure, by using the elements of a technologically constructed hidden reality that exists alongside the domain of ‘the seen’. We, too, could become “ether, quintessence” and the embodiment of consciousness in our cyborgic incarnations⁵⁵.

But there is a further critical element which is essential in presenting the ISO as a key figure in the spiritual regeneration of humanity – the importance of Quorra is found in her representation as the archetype of the *woman-child warrior*, as an expression of humanity’s endeavour to return to the sanctity of childhood whilst preserving the wisdom of ageing. This property in Quorra is epitomised in Kevin’s description of the ISOs upon their discovery as “profoundly naive, [yet] unimaginably wise”. Meeting this “being of pure Light” is synonymous with other such encounters in a hero’s journey in ancient legend⁵⁶. There is something unique about this supernatural cybernetic entity; she possesses a captivating child-like quality of being in awe of her world and what lies outside its confines. Her eyes sparkle as she talks to Sam of authors and philosophers she has been reading about under Kevin’s wing and descriptions of the natural world; Quorra embodies the epitome of the miracle of life and its desire to flourish.

This higher state of consciousness may indeed be realised naturally – in his groundbreaking theory of cybernetics, Wiener championed the resounding in-built capacity of human beings for cognitive and creative evolutionary transcendence⁵⁷. How would this mental transformation be biologically achievable? Roux proposed that the “struggle for existence” occurred at the “cellular and molecular” level⁵⁸. Biological science has discovered the presence of “miracle cells” involved in the transformation of the caterpillar⁵⁹. As this organism approaches its metamorphosis it consumes incessantly, to the point where its body becomes so full it is unable to move. It then hangs itself to a branch upside down, forming a chrysalis within which it is confined to for the remainder of its transformation.

What is most remarkable about this process is the formation of miniscule cells inside the cocoon; at first they are attacked by the caterpillar as a foreign presence. They continue to grow, however, merging with other similar cells until they are numerous enough to organise into clusters. These hidden cells which are fundamentally distinctive from the exterior body they inhabit have been named by scientists “imaginal cells”⁶⁰. They are carriers of “information, vibrating to a different frequency – the frequency of the emerging butterfly”, translating personal and collective resurgence into an organic and inevitable process in humanity’s evolutionary path⁶¹.

Significantly, Quorra adds that Kevin has been teaching her about the (Buddhist) mantras of “the art of the selfless” and “removing oneself from the equation” – this particular transgressive property reveals the political importance of the obscurity of cyberspace. In their critique of capitalism Deleuze and Guattari contend that “infantile narcissism” is unresolved and augmented⁶². We may thus speak of a ‘psychology of greed’ that permeates our society; *Tron: Legacy* illustrates that it is not the machine itself that is a symbol of dehumanisation, but the motivation and impulse behind it.

Selfishness and indifference are plagues that can enslave and desensitise, when a digital being can be more human than human. The ISO features as a subversive figure to the

The ISO's angelic property affirms the validity of realities "formed by intense meditation ... inspired imaginative visions ... and theogonies" and their reinstatement in the postmodern human consciousness⁷⁰. Quorra is the personification of humanity's second chance at starting over in a superior body and seeing the world anew, through the untainted eyes of a child – this is the ultimate symbol of spiritual purity. The ISO exemplifies the adoption of an unparalleled worldview in which "the activity of imaginative perception truly assumes the aspect of a *hierognosis*, a higher sacral knowledge"⁷¹.

This advanced state of consciousness and the digital landscape's innate transgressive properties, reveal the creation of the Grid as an expression of humanity's effort to unearth a global community in which we are reunited with the magic of existence with information/images as key mediatory agents. The digital body in *Tron: Legacy* is a call to completely reinterpret all sciences. 21st century science is slowly but surely re-imagining and re-sacralising our world; a growing body of evidence reveals that the very basis of our existence is embedded in a "vast quantum web of connection"⁷². In the technoromantic search, cyberspace provides an opportunity to move out of a state of individuation and reconnect with our own psyches and the world at large.

As imaginal cells seek other corresponding cells and begin to group together in a cohesive whole, they "become centers of awakening in the new body politic"⁷³. No person's vision is consequently ever born in isolation – it is part of an intricate fabric of imaginal constructs that fight to be acknowledged as valid and real. The Grid then becomes a quintessential attempt to enter an unprecedented "group mind" and the realisation of "an alternative religious symbolic" that embraces the richness of techno-scientific possibilities and material reality⁷⁴.

Conclusion

Sam's ascension through the portal in union with Quorra at the end of the movie, is humanity's union with the fourth state of consciousness. The image of the sun rising upon their return to the external world represents rebirth and the path opening for the redemption of horrors past, present and future. Beyond the Grid a user finds a "superior *self*" – but they must first return to "the point of departure" and be cleansed by the portal's light or "Spring of Life", as Sam does, emerging a new man with this sacred knowledge⁷⁵. In this reconciliation of the scientific and the spiritual springs forth the potential for humans to transcend their fear of death and change, whilst learning to live in peace with their fellow species. Sam and Quorra are Kevin's gift to the world and a symbol of how we can heal ourselves and each other in the process – *they are his legacy*.



Figure 4: Ascension – Sam and Quorra, carriers of a new world and vision for humanity, activate the portal to exit the Grid.

Source: *Sam and Quorra from Disney's Tron: Legacy Wallpaper* (n.d.)

¹ Maria Goicoechea, “The Posthuman Ethos in Cyberpunk Science Fiction”, *CLC Web: Comparative Literature & Culture* 10.4 (2008): 3.

² Elaine Graham, “Nietzsche Gets a Modem’: Transhumanism and the Technological Sublime”, *Literature & Theology* 16.1 (2002): 71.

³ Davis 1993, cited in Graham, “Nietzsche Gets a Modem”, 71.

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