

Dreaming the posthuman in cyberspace:  
war of the worlds and the return of the un/real in *Tron: Legacy*

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## Abstract

Digital narratives are emerging as key platforms for the study of the posthuman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In *Tron: Legacy* the exploration of cyberspace and its miraculous properties as a vacuum for the mythological unconscious reignites the imagination, transporting viewers to a universe without borders. Both film and cyberspace open us up to worlds past, present and future, internal and external, imbuing us with their magic as well as their terror; danger becomes integral to the establishment of digital space as ‘sublime dreaming space’, as we witness the breakdown of dualities and the unearthing of a pervasive schizophrenia. This ‘inverted’ condition forces us to question the nature of reality and its perceived stability. The disparity between the virtual dream and material world is a natural state in which the fight for visibility and integration of multiple identities unfolds, revealing it as the essential project of postmodernism. In *Tron* cosmology both the mechanical and biological body preserve their integrities – digital ontology not only informs but restores the dormant potential of the corporeal, with the cyborgic figure of the ‘ISO’ presented as a blueprint for the cellular and cognitive regeneration of our species. Its inherent subversive qualities defy an empiricist legacy and encroaching self-denying egoism. This is the re-mythologisation, re-sacralisation and re-centring of our known worlds. The framing of *Tron: Legacy* as a creation myth reasserts the relevance of apocalypse and sacrifice in the contemporary imaginary, as cyberspace becomes a recreation of the universe itself and a womb for the collective. Ultimately, this father-son story of love and loss beckons the re-evaluation of our personal relationships, reaching for our humanity in an increasingly mechanised world. Its characters’ redemption mirrors the psychosocial absolution of a whole civilisation and the rebirth of humankind.

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## Introduction

*Tron: Legacy* (2010), the sequel to the 1980's 'cult classic' *Tron* (1982), is the story of visionary software engineer Kevin Flynn as the creator of a digital universe – the Grid – and his son, Sam (Boucher & Chmielewski 2010, p. 1 of 4). *Tron: Legacy* arguably establishes itself as a seminal cyberpunk science fiction film, revealing the tension between humans and technology. In this powerful narrative, the *Tron* universe reflects 'a romantic apocalyptic vision of cybernetic rapture' in which users may wander unfettered in cyberspace alongside their humanoid digital counterparts (Coyne 1999, p. 10). At the same time, however, this father-son tale illustrates the significance of such texts as moral critiques of postmodern society, by exposing 'the perils that prey on individuals that have chosen the computer labyrinths over the personal and social relations of their physical entourage' (Goicoechea 2008, p. 9). Through flashbacks the movie accounts for the events following Kevin's teleportation inside a computer mainframe in the first movie, his subsequent meteoric rise in the 'tech world' leading up to his disappearance, and into the present, twenty years later. The film focuses on Kevin and Sam's reunion as Sam is accidentally transported inside the Grid, to discover that his father has been trapped as a result of his digital copy's (Clu) betrayal and overtaking of the universe. Kevin and Sam's journey to reconciliation represents an extreme case of estrangement, thus situating *Tron: Legacy* as an ideal platform to explore the ethical dimension of accelerating telecommunications and its impact on family bonds. This dissertation is an attempt to address the currency of father-son relations and explore the wider repercussions of parental neglect.

The central preoccupation of the *Tron* universe, digital and other advancing technologies, is above all the rethinking of the human body in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Kevin's pursuit of 'a Digital Frontier to reshape the human condition' is the quest for a naturally superior being. The profundity of these sciences spanning an array of fields from genetic engineering to nanotechnology to cybernetics, is found not only in the 'making and remaking of bodies, but *the making and remaking of worlds* [emphasis added]', dubbing the direction of the human species as 'post-bodied and post-human' (Featherstone & Burrows 1995, cited in Graham 2002, p. 66). Since its early days 'film technology' has served not only 'as a factual record of life but an experiential one' (Etxeberria 2008, p. 1). As cultural products fantasy films, in particular, offer a unique looking lens and 'an open door to other worlds where to

dream of uncertainties and to indulge in our traumas' (Etxeberria 2008, p. 1). I will argue that it is the simultaneous presence of these worlds that is at the heart of this movie and the magnitude of its ramifications for the postmodern psyche. *Tron: Legacy* shows us how they collide and inform each other by growing apart and converging back again, signalling the making and remaking of human history. This 'world behind a world' in the making of the Grid where fantasy *is* reality will establish the imagination as a vehicle for the creation of all life – both biological and artificial – and the Tron Digital World, as with cyberspace at large, a space of 'infinite possibilities' and a reflection of the quest for the redefinition of humanity itself.

In Chapter 1 of the dissertation I will provide a primary exposition of the potentiality of cyber-worlds as avenues for liberation from the corporeal self and re-connecting with the sacred. In Chapter 2 the realities of marginalisation in the information age and technological misuse are examined, and how these are depicted as key thematic concerns in *Tron: Legacy*. Chapter 3 is an attempt to provide a historical and theoretical contextualisation of this ambivalence towards advancing technologies. The notions of the 'imaginal' and the co-presence of worlds are introduced, examining their particular relevance to the film and the construction of reality as a whole. In Chapter 4 I revisit the metaphysical aspirations of technologies. I investigate digital narratives as mythological constructs and the critical intersection between religion, science and fantasy. In Chapter 5 I discuss the complexity of the concept of fatherhood and its application in Kevin and Sam Flynn's relationship in *Tron: Legacy* as modern myth, by presenting a comparison of key mythical paternal figures. In Chapter 6 the role of digital narratives as prophetic visions is explored following a closer analysis of the Kevin/Clu dichotomy. Chapter 7 focuses on the overarching symbolism of Kevin Flynn's sacrifice for his son, both in the movie and for humanity in the new millennium. Finally, in Chapter 8 the question of the posthuman is considered; the specific representation of the 'ISO' as a cyborgic figure in Tron cyberspace is proposed as a blueprint for evolutionary growth. The scope for an advanced mode of consciousness is outlined integrating the worlds of science, spirituality and the fantastic, as well as concluding remarks on the resolution of *Tron: Legacy* as a father-son story of redemption.

## **Chapter 1: Technology and deliverance – the Grid as technoutopia and the promise of a new age**

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 (Graham 2002, p. 65). The voices of ‘transhumanism’ (Graham 2008, p. 66) and ‘technoromanticism’ (Goicoechea 2008, p. 3) which herald technology as a gateway to perfection provide a powerful antidote to those wary of a mechanical defilement of humanity. Accordingly, the fantasy genre features as a creative space ‘where computer-generated simulations fulfil human desires and seek pleasure through a new vision of the body, a site where natural and cultural orders fade away’ (Etxeberria 2008, p. 1). The vision of the posthuman in *Tron: Legacy*, as with other cyberpunk texts, hence is inextricably linked with existence at the ‘body/machine interface’ and the construction of the cyborgic body (Hollinger 1997, p. 125).

As ‘The word “cyborg” (blending of “cybernetic” and “organism”) popularly represents the symbiosis of the mechanical and the biological’, it provides the central preoccupation of many science fiction films (Goicoechea 2008, p. 4). Its original representation in the Tron universe is applied to digital programs that were created to function as humans often in the image of their users, as in the case of Tron in the first movie who was built in the likeness of Alan Bradley – Kevin’s old business partner and close friend – and Clu, in Kevin’s. In many ways the cyborg in *Tron: Legacy* expresses technoromanticism’s ‘desire to liberate the mind from the body ... and the transcendental quest for unity supplanted by a mental immersion in a seamless information fabric’ (Goicoechea 2008, p. 3). In their cyborgic 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 (Goicoechea 2008, p. 7). By immersing ourselves in the vast enclaves of cyberspace and its digital ‘data stream’ we may, in a sense, achieve a union with the mechanical unprecedented in recorded human history (Coyne 1999, p. 10). The Tron universe is thus an illustration of the Digital World as an ‘electronically induced’ (Goicoechea



2008, p. 3) state of ecstasy, signalling the advent of an era where the physical world is superseded by the 'ethereal' (Rheingold 1991, cited in Graham 2002, p. 72).

The enduring connection between metaphysically charged motivations and technological endeavours reveals a multi-layered dimension to technoromantic visions of the future – Graham (2002, p. 71) argues that despite the prevailing history of the Enlightenment's overthrow of religious dogma, spirituality and science were never completely divorced. Their critical inter-relationship now finds a new feverous expression in the arrival of cyber-culture and 'New Age' discourse, giving rise to virtual reality's dreams of 'TECHNO-TRANSCENDENCE' (Graham 2002, p. 71). 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, arguably attributes an aspect of divinity to the user elevating humans to Godliness in the digital realm. 'The elsewhere of cyberspace' (Robins 1995, cited in Graham 2002, p. 71) forms a 'new kind of sacred space' (Davis 1993, cited in Graham 2002, p. 71). 'Digital and biogenetic technologies' become far more than impersonal mechanistic tools of science – they are the new religion and 'instruments of 'deliverance' ' from the painful reality of mortality (Noble 1999, cited in Graham 2002, pp. 71 & 73). 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' (Rheingold 1991, cited in Graham 2002, p. 72).

The limitless opportunities virtual reality contains to free us not only from our body, but our minds, are difficult to ignore. With its humanoid programs and supreme user capacity *Tron: Legacy* joins other cyberpunk fantasies of humans 'roaming, disembodied and free, through the frontier territory of cyberspace', fulfilled largely by the ability to produce digital copies of ourselves that could be there in our absence (Hollinger 1997, p. 126). 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 ‘non-corporeal space of the cyber-world’ (Kingwell 1996, p. 197). In this new world order the posthuman vision ascends to its 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 possible (Graham 2002, p. 66). 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* thus 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.

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 intervention (Kroker & Weinstein 1994, cited in Graham 2002, p. 72). 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’. This is a defining element of the Tron universe – at the digital frontier the ISOs are an expression of the ‘miracle of life’ forging unthinkable avenues ‘of technological intervention’ and cyberspace as sacred space (Goicoechea 2008, p. 2). Kevin instantly recognises the profound impact this life form could have on our understanding of both human and artificial existence:

[The ISOs] manifested like a flame ... the conditions were right and they came into being. For centuries we’ve dreamed of Gods, spirits, aliens and intelligences beyond our own. They were like flowers in a wasteland ... 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. Indeed, Coyne (1999, p.

15) argues that ‘digital narratives tell of our current ontology’. The ISOs encapsulate the progression of the concept of the cyborg ‘to include any entity that behaves as an enhanced human’; Quorra, the last surviving 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 survive (Goicoechea 2008, p. 4). In the self-produced figure of the ISO we thus find an extension of the cyborg’s representation in *Tron: Legacy*, demonstrating the full gamut of artificial intelligence in the Grid and solidifying the divine properties of cyberspace as a source of genesis.

This application of the cyborg reaches beyond the Digital World – the Grid is arguably an entryway to humanity’s transcendence to a new level of existence via the ‘“conscious” manipulation of ... [its] own evolution’ offered by scientific enquiry (Goicoechea 2008, p. 5). Kevin’s disappearance remained a mystery, with many torn between branding him a ‘saint or swindler’ who may have gone into hiding. When Alan tells Sam that he was paged from his father’s old arcade he defends Kevin, stating that he had been on the brink of a major discovery. Two nights before he vanished Kevin revealed to Alan he had found something that would ‘change everything – science, medicine, religion ... he wouldn’t have left that Sam ... he wouldn’t have left *you*’, Alan exclaims. Once he realised the groundbreaking platform that the Grid encompassed, Kevin’s cyborgic vision was to ‘reshape the human condition’. The miraculous inception of the ISOs not only spelt the possibility of accentuating the fluidity between the biological and the mechanical, but a future at the posthuman frontier. Although this vision is not explored in detail, the key to the expansion of our consciousness would arguably not merely lie in passively studying Quorra’s digital structure – a merging of the digital *with* the biological, or synthetically reproducing such a state, opens the door to the creation of a ‘posthuman creature [which] has crossed “normality” ’s threshold, lending its body to a techno-scientific colonization that will enhance or intensify its qualities beyond what characterizes the human species’ (Goicoechea 2008, p. 5). More (1994, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 5) argues that it is only through such intensive reconstruction of our genetic and neurological makeup that our species can truly surpass its ‘*homo sapiens*’ stage of evolution. One of the most vocal transhumanist groups, the Extropian Institute (1996, cited in Graham 2002, p. 68), argues that:

Posthumans may be partly or mostly biological in form, but will likely be partly or wholly postbiological – our personalities having been transferred ‘into’ more durable, modifiable, and faster, more powerful bodies and thinking hardware.

Hence a human/ISO ‘posthuman synthesis’ represents the possibility of the realisation of the superhuman promised by the offerings of a digital emancipation and its ethereal space (More 1998, cited in Graham 2002, p. 69).

How could the culmination to such a postbiological being be possible? An initial observation would appear to render the synthesis of our physical bodies with the ISO’s digital ontology an endeavour of mere fiction. A closer look, however, reveals a crucial link between ‘technoscience’ and human genetic structure (Graham 2002, p. 74). Benedikt (1993, cited in Graham 2002, p. 72) defines cyberspace as the ‘realm of pure information’ – 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* [emphasis added]’ (Graham 2002, p. 73). The discovery that ‘Information Theory’ which was first developed ‘in 1948 to precisely characterize data flows in communication systems’ could be ‘applied to molecular-biological systems such as DNA’, is instrumental to this concept (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 279). Kevin describes the movement of the body of information inside the computer as the building blocks of the Grid; cyberspace then arguably mirrors human biological structure as a complex organised network. Wiener (1954, cited in Bynum 2010, pp. 421, 422 & 426), ‘one of the “founding fathers” of the Information Revolution’ and ‘cybernetics’, proposed that humans are ‘fundamentally informational’. Some current research indicates that the basic property of this information and the ‘nature of the universe’ is, in fact, ‘digital’ (Bynum 2010, p. 426). 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 – once the ISOs’ root code is accessed, therefore, our own ‘Physical information can be transformed into the pure forms of disembodied intelligence and data; human ontology is digitalised’ (Graham 2002, p. 73).

The notion of humans being fundamentally altered in their assimilation with pure code in a digital universe has been represented in one of the most arguably iconic cyberpunk films, *The Matrix* (1999). At the end of the movie when Neo, the main

hero, is shot and resurrected, he sees the reality of the computer matrix for the first time and is able to defeat the programs that seek to destroy him. He attains a higher state of consciousness by computing his surrounds as a series of numericals, the very foundations of the Matrix. This suggests that in becoming the 'One' or humanity's Messiah, Neo has been distilled to his own elemental structure and that of the world around him – sheer information. Entering the Tron universe, in this sense, opens the door to a clarification of human ontology, heightening our 'psychological investment' in technologies as 'instruments of 'deliverance' ', and affirming the abiding vital link between science and religion in their mutual transcendental aspirations (Noble 1999, cited in Graham 2002, p. 73). By establishing humans as masters of their own destiny, the posthuman synthesis of biological and digital code thus arguably equates to the one thing that could surpass finding God – *becoming* God.

## **Chapter 2: Technoromanticism gone wrong – hackers, freedom fighters and the sublime nightmare of the cyber-real**

Not all responses to ‘techno-constructions’ at the ‘body/machine interface’ (Hollinger 1997, pp. 125 & 128), however, are equally exalting – these disenchanting sentiments echo the cries of a ‘“panic postmodernism”’ (Balsamo 1996, cited in Hollinger 1997, p. 128) looming at the cusp of a posthuman chapter of evolution. Graham (2002, pp. 69-71) cautions on the potential dangers of technoromantic ideology and the political dimension in the use of advanced technologies, which can lead to novel forms of marginalisation and enslavement under a new world order. The mixed perception of technology as both an instrument of doom and deliverance is a commonplace feature of cyberpunk science fiction, and this film is no exception (Goicoechea 2008, p. 3). *Tron: Legacy* highlights the growing censorship of free access to information in our network society. Kevin reflects on the carefree early stages of the Grid’s creation: ‘we built the system where all information was *free* and *open*’. Conversely, the board that took over Kevin’s company, ENCOM, after his disappearance vowed ‘to return ... [it] to profitability’ – ‘consumer capitalism’ and its ‘voracious’ appetite is arguably a major driver in shaping technological scientific advancements (Graham 2002, p. 77). At the board meeting convened for the launch of its latest software ‘ENCOM OS 12’, ENCOM’s current CEO boasts that the past year was the most lucrative for the company to date. When Alan questions what it has done to improve its products especially in light of the financial constraints its main users, namely students and schools, are faced with, the CEO mocks: ‘This year we put a 12 on the box’. Most importantly, the head of the software design team adds that ‘the idea of sharing our software or giving it away for free disappeared with Kevin Flynn’. This statement reflects the increasing distrust towards corporations and the dangers of exclusion endemic to the information age; Jolly (1999, cited in Graham 2002, p. 70) reports:

The United Nations Human Development Programme ... records that ... only 0.2% of all internet access ... [is left] to the poorest 20% of the world’s population ... New information and communication technologies are driving globalisation – but polarising the world into the connected and the isolated.

Growing concerns over human rights and other violations enacted by governments and multi-national companies have thus fuelled anti-globalist and anti-capitalist sentiment, as social groups and organisations galvanise against the corporate machine (Chatterton 2010).

The recent controversy surrounding Julian Assange's widely covered 'WikiLeaks' project is arguably a prime example of this moral endeavour, as noted in *The Economist* ('Julian Assange and the new wave' 2011, p. 12). Wikileaks (2011, p. 1 of 4) utilises 'cutting-edge cryptographic information technologies' as a tool of 'investigative journalism' to make leaked material electronically available to the masses. This organisation as well as other web-based groups such as 'Anonymous', an organised international network of 'hacktivists' which exposes corruption across the board, have highlighted not only the vast amount of critical information that remains undisclosed to the 'common' citizenry, but the reality of *misinformation* (Galbraith 2011, p. 1 of 1). By exposing these exclusionary boundaries, such projects foster the accountability of political officials, corporate giants and other heavyweights, returning the power to the public by allowing them the opportunity to formulate an informed opinion and take responsibility as global citizens. The depiction of ENCOM's insatiable fiscal ambition in the movie and its blatant disregard for the growing inaccessibility of its products to its consumers, hence highlights the increasing division in the face of capitalist sentiment, drive for profit and the advent of an exclusive 'techno-elite' (Graham 2002, p. 70).

*Tron: Legacy* and its prequel join other cyberpunk films such as *Hackers* (1995) and *The Matrix*, in which the portrayal of the hacker as a renegade fighting for equality in the access to information and/or unravelling the system and its control is a central feature. In *The Matrix* Keanu Reeves' character, Thomas Anderson, leads a double life as a regular computer programmer by day and an elusive hacker by the alias of Neo outside work. He goes on to discover the truth about the illusory nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century reality, depicted as the harvesting of human bodies as fuel for self-aware machines in a post-apocalyptic world order. With their cyber-identities these characters discover that the given systemic order which is corrupt, or even detrimental to the human condition, must be brought to light and combated. They live on the outer limits of socially prescribed existence, breaking traditional rules and regulations – in *Tron*, Kevin's journey into the Digital World begins with him hacking into the ENCOM mainframe to find proof that his work has been unjustly appropriated by his former employer. In a case of history repeating itself, it is by the use of his hacking skills that Sam accidentally enters the Tron universe in the arcade, thus finally realising his childhood dream to be inside the Grid with his father. Like Kevin, Sam uses his IT savvy to keep

his power-hungry company on its toes. The CEO panics when Sam hacks into the system during the meeting and realises ENCOM's 'most valuable and most secure operating system' is freely available on the internet. One gets the sense that Sam would have done this purely for the moral principle, even if he was not the company's majority stakeholder. Sam's 'prank' goes beyond a mere representation of a young adrenaline-seeking 'junkie' – it is an act of defiance against an unjust system and its control over free people. When the guard catches him on the roof of the building and vehemently warns him that 'stealing is wrong' Sam exclaims: 'You can't steal something that was designed to be free'. Hence Sam represents the contemporary crusade for the open access to information, not as a luxury or as a mere expression of an innate yearning for 'omniscience', but as a fundamental right for all humans (Graham 2002, p. 67).

This growing distrust towards our 'high tech' societies permeates digital narratives, producing multi-layered expositions which mirror the complexities of our increasingly difficult to define postmodern reality. The contradictory call to 'rapture' (Coyne 1999, p. 10) of utopian technoromanticism and the nightmarish visions of the subversive 'cybergothic' (Goicoechea 2008, p. 3) in *Tron: Legacy* are aptly reflected in Kevin's description of his digital creation: 'and the world was more beautiful than I ever dreamed, and also, more dangerous than I ever imagined it to be'. This account of the Grid arguably reveals a depiction of cyberspace as the perfect definition of Burke's (1757, cited in Byrne 2006) 'sublime'. For Burke (1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 24) the '“ruling principle”' to the sublime, which ignites a more 'powerful and unique emotional' reaction than the conventional 'beautiful', is 'identification with terror'. Befittingly, 'Astonishment ... that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror' is Sam's immediate and most pervasive response upon first entering the Grid (Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 24). This apotheosis of the 'terrible' renders 'danger and “pain”' essential to the experience of the sublime, which '“at certain instances, and with certain modifications ... are delightful”' (Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 24). The evasive aspect of technology has been a prominent expression of the 'cyberpunk ethos' since the 1980s (Hollinger 1997, p. 127). But far from serving as an escapist fantasy, *Tron: Legacy* and its prequel's strengths as science fiction films and cultural critiques lie in exposing the precarious human-technology symbiosis. This is no clearer than in the cruel fate of



Kevin Flynn. Kevin's nightmare of becoming trapped inside the Grid for twenty years, torn apart from his only son, is *our* nightmare – that of becoming disempowered by 'the "fatally" seductive nature of the simulation' and captives in a world that is an imitation of the real (Baudrillard 1981, cited in Hollinger 1997, p. 125). The Grid is therefore not a painless universe – on the contrary, it represents a classic example of 'no pain, no game/gain' where the survival of risk marks the cornerstone of existence in contrast to commonly held '*other-worldly*' fantasies of cyberspace (Noble 1999, cited in Graham 2002, p. 74).

What makes the Digital World so dangerous? The Grid cannot simply be viewed as a 'technoutopia' that disengages mind from body, plugging us into a superhuman digital alter ego; the threat of extinction is palpable throughout the film for all inhabitants of the Tron universe, programs and users alike (Goicoechea 2008, p. 3). Despite the initial thrill of user freedom, there is one important distinction that prevents the Tron universe from being an absolute representation of a 'non-corporeal ... cyberworld' – a user is not only transported mentally into the Grid, but as a whole being, via quantum teleportation (Kingwell, 1996, p. 197). The body does not become obsolete in this migration process by sitting on the other side of a computer screen; users are still very mortal when they enter digispace. This has significant implications for the dynamics of the Tron universe and its particular experience of technoculture. Contrary to the conventional perception of a virtual world, the Grid is profoundly real and so is the ecstasy, as well as the hazards that lie within it. Following his immediate apprehension upon arrival in the Grid Sam is ordered to compete in the 'games' or 'disc wars', a brutal competition with virtually unbeatable warrior-like programs. When Sam is fitted with his neon suit he asks Gem, one of the programs that prepares him for battle: 'What am I supposed to do?' – '*Survive*', she responds. Indeed, for Burke (1757, cited in Shusterman 2006, p. 223) the sublime is necessarily accompanied by 'some (albeit muted) sense of menacing self-destruction, which links ... [it] to our strongest instinct, that of self-preservation'. Sam can get hurt and easily die, as becomes evident during the games; in fact it is his blood that reveals to the onlooking Clu that he is human, when a disc scrapes his arm. The Grid's grounding in bodily experience therefore reveals a world that is not only an avenue to a euphoric state of mind, but one that is both treacherous and painful.

The Tron universe may not strictly adhere to the physical laws of the terrestrial sphere, but the dynamics of relationships are entirely human; the anthropomorphisation of digital programs provides a unique opportunity to attribute psychological properties to otherwise lifeless concepts and explore the widespread ramifications of technology for humanity now, and into the future. The instinct to survive is not only a key driver for users in the Grid, but for human copies or programs. Their glass-like structure makes the threat of extinction in many respects far more pronounced. Like users, programs are susceptible to physical and emotional suffering; they despair, lust and dream, and can be paralysed by terror. This predisposition to malfunction or ‘disease’ results in their regulation through ‘identity disks’ and persecution by Clu’s Recognisers, large vehicles operated by programs that patrol the Grid. The disk represents both one’s lifeblood and survival weapon in the Tron universe, revealing it, in this instance, as a signifier of Clu’s ‘police state’ in the Digital World. When the Recogniser first captures Sam one of the enforcers ominously states: ‘This program has no disk – another stray’. This suggests a number of programs are attempting to break free from Clu’s dictatorship by removing, what is in effect, their tracking device. When Sam is in the armory and is fitted with his disk, a voice in the background expounds:

Attention program: you will receive an identity disk. Everything you do or learn will be imprinted on this disk. If you lose your disk or fail to follow commands, you will be subject to immediate de-resolution.

This statement affirms the presence of mind-control in the Grid. Upon reaching their destination the enforcer scans them and condemns the strays either to play in the games or ‘rectification’. A malfunctioning program’s fear to compete is so overwhelming he opts to suicide, screaming ‘Erase me!’ as he jumps off the bridge and shatters into pieces. The significance of the identity disk as an effective method of subjugation hence demonstrates how in a world ‘where information is the most valued good, it is difficult to have complete control over its sources unless one controls the very minds of the people that operate it’ (Goicoechea 2008, p. 9).

This strangely corporeal element to the Tron universe in the intensely fragile figure of the program arguably reveals our contemporary ‘body-anxieties’ centring on the threat that technology poses to the body. *Tron: Legacy* in many ways is a symbolic expression of Baudrillard’s (1981, cited in Springer 1996, p. 130) description of ‘our postmodern obsession with simulacra ... in a world populated by electronically copied

human minds'. Rather than offering a precise reproduction of virtual reality's 'vision of a body free universe' (Balsamo 1996, cited in Hollinger 1997, p. 129), the Tron technoscape illustrates the pitfalls that may arise from losing ourselves in the simulated image, resulting in a 'neon nightmare' reminiscent of Ballard's (1973, cited in Dery 1996, p. 311) novel *Crash*. In this sense, the Grid represents the ultimate dystopian nightmare of not only being trapped in a world where we are mere animations of ourselves, but inhabiting physical bodies that are reduced to irreversible helplessness and perpetual surveillance. The Tron universe thus refutes the notion of corporeality's 'looming obsolescence' by confronting its vulnerability rather than offering a means to escape it, illustrating the enduring relevance of the body in cyberspace, both physical and digital (Hollinger 1997, p. 127).

### **Chapter 3: *Tron: Legacy*, meet the *Mundus Imaginalis* – re-centralising the imagination and the crowning of the Imaginal**

The origins of the conflicting attributes of digital narratives are located in the birth of the modern world – our postmodern age is rooted in the conflict between empirical doctrine and opposing discourses such as romanticism (Coyne 1999, p. 11). Under the vestige of Enlightenment thought and with the ascent of scientific instruction, the modern age saw a ‘progressive ... rationalization’ of human culture and the acceptance of science and its disciplines as keepers of a dominant worldview (Coyne 1999, p. 5). Abstract knowledge derived from sources that could not be readily measured and observed, such as emotions and divine revelation, was undermined. The romantics and other groups offered a dissident voice to the stifling ‘“dismemberment”’ of empiricism; they hailed a return to nature, creative thinking and the cosmic connection with all living things that oversteps the boundaries of reason (Von Schlegel 1860, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 5). Coyne (1999, p. 257) argues that ‘Empiricism and romanticism seem to collude’ in technoromantic narratives, as the former arguably sets the stage for the latter to flourish. Digital narratives and the virtual reality project therefore provide a new avenue that reignites the interplay between the one and the many, reason and instinct.

*Tron: Legacy* is an attempt at a reconciliation of this historical tension by reviving the notion of ‘*life...[as] a dream*’ through the platform of science (Lacan 1979, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 224). Kevin Flynn had a vision; he designed the Grid and actively conceptualised its architecture. ‘I kept dreaming ... dreaming of a world I thought I would never see; until one day ... I got in’, says Kevin to a young Sam. In the material sense, Kevin is physically transported into the Digital World via a laser, his molecules split apart and recomposed perfectly on the other side. But there is one key component without which the materialisation of the Grid as a technoscape would not be possible. Contrary to the empiricist worldview, the romantics championed the ‘intangible world of the imagination’ (Coyne 1999, p. 5). Kevin recalls: ‘I tried to picture clusters of information as they moved through the computer. What did they look like ... ships, motorcycles ... were the circuits like freeways?’ – *the primary access point then into this alternate universe, is ‘the active imagination [emphasis added]’* (Corbin 1964, p. 8 of 16). This is the ‘organ that permits penetration’ into another realm and:

The migration that is the return *ab extra ad intra* (from the exterior to the interior), the topographical inversion ... It is neither the senses nor the faculties of the physical organism, nor is it the pure intellect, but it is that intermediate power whose function appears as the preeminent mediator ... It is the organ that permits the transmutation of internal spiritual states into external states, into vision-events symbolizing with those internal states. (Corbin 1964, pp. 7 & 8 of 16)

Technology provides an avenue for the materialisation of ‘celestial habitats’ that have hitherto been the sole property of imaginative authority (Graham 2002, p. 72). The Grid did not emerge independent to the human imagination; it *needed* Kevin’s mind to be set up. On that account, the supremacy of creative cognitive faculties in the construction of the Digital World, otherwise conceived of as a technological landscape, arguably beckons the revisiting of the Grid as a dreamworld, or *dreamscape*. Indeed, when Kevin is accidentally transported into the Grid in the first movie he asks the digital program Ram – ‘Look, just so I can tell my friends what this dream is about, okay? Where am I?’. A reading of contemporary accounts of progress such as *Tron: Legacy* thus could not be complete without the consideration of the historical marginalisation of modes of thought which have stood in opposition to the conventional order, signalling a chance for the reinstatement of the sidelined world of fantasy as a valid measure of human experience.

The presence of antagonistic forces in humanity’s psychosocial history reverberates into its futuristic aspirations. An examination of any digital narrative as a result, and the framing of the Grid as a dreamscape, necessarily involves an investigation of the ‘residency of the real’ and the primordial battle between ‘unity and multiplicity’ (Coyne 1999, pp. 6 & 258). This abiding dichotomy has found expression in an array of ideologies throughout the ages; ‘under the influence of Cartesian rationalism’ the existence of a dominant reality or truth revealed by the tools of scientific sensibility cast aside any notion of co-habitation, marking the advent of the modern world (Coyne 1999, p. 5). But the ‘computer’ and technoromantic narratives have become gateways to a multitude of universes and a mirror into the infinite forms and expressions of existence, exposing the subjective nature of reality (Coyne 1999, p. 14). Coyne (1999, p. 9) contends that:

Information technology is intimately bound to language, and hence interpretation ... If words correspond to things, then the words, codes, and symbol strings in a computer can represent the world and construct new worlds.

This capacity of cyberspace to become ‘effectively a portal into another world’ is a defining element of Kevin’s digital creation (Graham 2002, p. 72). The ‘mysterious place’ that is Tron cyberspace ‘is by no means among those that empirical geography can verify; it cannot be situated on our maps. This place “outside a place”, nonetheless, has its own topography’ (Corbin 1964, p. 12 of 16). The very meaning of the word ‘grid’ denotes ‘a network of horizontal ... and perpendicular lines ... for locating points on a map’ (Dictionary.com Unabridged 2011, p. 3 of 5). The Grid features as a navigation system – as a story of genesis, *Tron: Legacy* is the story of the creation and discovery of a new world. A user is likened to the explorers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century who ventured into unmarked continents. The creation and use of a map is a necessity to any such journey when travelling into undiscovered lands, in this case, the uncharted territories of an unprecedented technologically constructed dimension. By the same token, the fantasy genre’s ‘transgressive indeterminacy against the Cartesian system’ renders it completely accessible to this inversion of normality (Etxeberria 2008, p. 1). Indeed, ‘world-building’ is the cornerstone of all fantasy texts and the establishment of their cosmogonies, as the reader/viewer becomes immersed in alternate realities (Shearin 2011, p. 13). The ‘privileged value’ of ‘images’ in the Tron universe ‘as the only source of knowledge ... makes possible a new vision of inner and outer reality’ (Baudrillard 1981, cited in Etxeberria 2008, p. 7), thus lending digital narratives readily to a romantic enterprise for the ‘“union of senses and imagination”’ (Von Schlegel 1860, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 6) within the cybernetic realm.

In recognising this multiplicity of social universes, Jungians such as Adams (2004) pronounce the pivotal role of the interminable ebb and flow of human fantasies in their construction. Adams (2004, p. 5) offers an alternative to the empiricist and arguably autocratic rule of the Freudian ‘reality principle’ to which reason obeys and serves; under its guise fantasy is a disease to be eradicated, or at best, a declaration of repressed unfulfilled wishful thinking. But a re-examination of the place of the imagination in society alludes to a radical interpretation of the psyche. Contrary to the less ambitious comprehension of imagination and its application in dreaming, fantasy for Jung (1953, cited in Adams 2004, p. 5) in volume 18 of his *Collected Works* is not perceived of as a state *outside* normality which needs to be brought in line or even cured – rather fantasy, both conscious and unconscious, is upheld as ‘“a natural expression of life’. If the psyche is the source of creation of reality and ‘“image is

psyche” ’, then imagination and fantasy are the building blocks of life itself (Jung 1967, cited in Adams 2004, p. 5). In essence, Adams (2004, p. 6) interprets that ‘For Jung, the image is not secondary and derivative from external reality but is primary and constitutive of it’. In this primacy of the image lies the foundation of Adams’ (2004, p. 16) ‘*fantasy principle*’ as a potent remedy to the reality principle’s stronghold:

... the conviction that fantasy is logically prior to reality, that the psyche, or the imagination, constructs reality, and that the image says what it means and means what it says.

Hence understanding the roots of our era in the legacy of the ‘myth of a stable identity, of the Cartesian subject’, highlights the difficulty that we face in redefining fantasy and its correlates, such as myth and narrative, and ultimately our very history (Haraway 1991, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 10).

The implications of the fantasy principle are momentous, signalling that ‘the “real” was never *real*’ as observed by Jung (1953, cited in Adams 2004, p. 6) in volume 11 of his *Collected Works*, and the disruption of the clearly demarcated boundaries between fact and fiction. Corbin’s (1964, p. 1 of 16) work on the interpretation of Arabic and Persian texts led him to reconceptualise our understanding of the domain of the extra-ordinary beyond the ‘*imaginary*’. The absence of a term in the English language that illuminates the meaning of a world which transcends the normative gave rise to the coining of Corbin’s (1964, cited in Samuels 2003, p. 1 of 15) ‘*mundus imaginalis*’, or the ‘*imaginal world* [emphasis added]’. Corbin (1964, p. 1 of 16) is quick to draw a distinction between the imaginary and the imaginal; the former relates to the culturally constructed Western perception of the fictitious ‘utopian’ property of the unconventional. In contrast, the *mundus imaginalis* refers to a ‘precise order of reality corresponding to a precise mode of perception’ (Corbin 1964, p. 1 of 16). For Adams (2004, p. 7), as for Jungians, ‘the imaginal is real’. The simultaneous presence of the External and the Digital World does not render one more authentic than the other; indeed, the former is arguably not uniform, but divided into many sub-realities. All are equally valid, comprising their own unique points of access and specific modes of awareness – in ‘Jungian analysis there is no criterion of “imaginal correctness” ’ (Adams 2004, p. 7). There may be one ‘external’ reality but multiple imaginal worlds

– the Grid then is but one of these, as is arguably our concept of the ‘real’ world as we perceive it.

This ‘*imaginal relativity*’ of reality to fantasy has significant relevance at the historical level (Adams 2004, p. 8). Adams (2004, p. 6) argues that ‘*the imaginal deconstruction of reality is just as important as the imaginal construction of it*’ – in the auspices of the digital dreamscape of the Tron universe the ‘arbitrarily privileged’ world of empiricist rationalism is dismantled (Adams 2004, p. 8). The presence of Clu’s Recognisers and their principal role as surveyors of the Tron universe that ‘reform’ stray programs whose identity disks are deemed to be flawed, is arguably a representation of empiricism’s obedience to a single authority. Programs that dare to venture from the imposed order become subjected to an imaginal rectification; this is exposed and resisted with the arrival of Sam who, as a user, represents an ideal of freedom in his capacity to make and break the rules of the game. The notion of relativity implies that much of what we take for granted as ‘rational’, may in fact be *irrational*. This indicates that perhaps *we* are the programs controlled through our identity disks, policed and punished, erased, or re-programmed if we ‘stray’. The moment we reject these conditions and embark on actively imagining and working towards an alternate world we begin to create its landscape, as in the case of the Grid. Cyberspace therefore becomes an ideal playground for the ‘dethroning of “Mr. Reality” ’ (Adams 2004, p. 4) and the crowning of the Imaginal, highlighting the impact of advanced technologies not only in their ‘making and remaking of worlds’ (Featherstone & Burrows 1995, cited in Graham 2002, p. 66), but the making and remaking of *realities*.

The destabilisation of the supremacy of a single reality as the only valid mode of perception facilitates the re-evaluation of worlds and their composition on a level field. Both the Grid as a dreamscape and the Material World are constructs – following Wiener’s (1948, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 4) ‘cybernetic theory’ they are similar in the sense that they contain their own distinct frameworks within the ‘boundaries’ of their respective ‘culturally constructed’ locales. Extending our understanding of the Grid beyond a simple reading of it as virtual space but as an evolving construct, calls for the theorising of dreamscapes as concrete attainable realms of knowledge and experience. Dreams are arguably not abstract concepts – they are like living breathing organisms and continually expanding intricate systems of



information. When Sam asks his father how he created such a vast universe, Kevin replies that he merely set up the framework; the rest unfolded independently. Kevin was the architect of this particular dreamscape – but as all elaborate structures it evolved on its own, developing forms of (artificial) life, such as the ISOs. Cyber-dreamscapes can be analogised to ‘The way biological organisms organize themselves’, as in the case of the behaviour of ant colonies which are ‘able to construct complex ... mounds’ in the absence of any discernible consolidated direction (Coyne 1999, p. 3). Like a single ant, each cluster of information within the digital universe ‘operates locally with no apparent plan for the whole, and yet the whole [Grid] ... is able to construct complex’ artificial life forms without ‘the need for centralized, hierarchical, and autocratic’ systems of control (Coyne 1999, p. 3). Their manifestation is evidence of the Imaginal World’s expression of the ability ‘of the psyche spontaneously and autonomously to produce images’ (Adams 2004, p. 7) and its ‘opportunistic capacity to select an especially apt image to serve a definite purpose’ (Jung 1988, cited in Adams 2004, pp. 9-10). This renders the dreaming space a self-sufficient and self-driven entity. At the same time, however, it is ‘relative to the *fantasies* of individuals’ (Adams 2004, p. 8) and subject to its creator’s ‘*imaginative power*’ (Corbin 1964, p. 8 of 16). Hence, maker and dream are bound to each other – both Kevin’s destiny and that of the Grid’s are interchangeable. The Grid would not be possible without Kevin’s active will and imagining of this technoworld into existence. Concurrently, through the evolution of Kevin’s digital copy into its own personality Kevin’s fate was equally impacted, as was the Grid’s landscape by the unplanned appearance of the ISOs. As a self-replicating network thus the Grid reveals its instrumentality by becoming a paradigm for all reality building, from which lessons can be learnt on the imagining of utopias both past and future.

## Chapter 4: Gods, shamans and transcendence – the Tron universe and the mythopoeic imagination

The significance of the dreamscape in *Tron: Legacy* as a reference point for the construction of other worlds reveals an even deeper connection between reality and fantasy – the Grid represents a ‘ “mythological dream” ’ springing forth from the depths of the ‘human unconscious’ (Adams 2001, cited in Adams 2004, p. 18). The Grid can be defined as an instance of a ‘specific fantasy’ of ‘physical ... [and cognitive] transformation” ’ which holds ‘distinctive meaning ... for the particular individual having the fantasy’, Kevin Flynn, and should be in part interpreted as such (Adams 2004, pp. 3 & 6). As his imaginal construct, all the images inside the Grid appear ‘as personified features of the dreamer’s [Kevin’s] own personality’, based on Jung’s (1953, cited in Adams 2004, p. 42) observations in volume 8 of his *Collected Works*. Despite its particularity, however, the Tron universe not only signifies a doorway to one man’s vision, but the human species as a whole. Drawing parallels, and indeed contrasts from ‘*similar images* in other sources’ such as ‘myths, fairytales, folktales, art, literature, and culture’ – a process known as ‘amplification’ – is one of the staple means of extracting the pure essence of an image in its unique context (Adams 2004, p. 15). Corbin (1964, p. 6 of 16) maintains that:

The active Imagination is the preeminent *mirror*, the epiphanic place of the Images of the archetypal world; that is why the theory of the *mundus imaginalis* is bound up with a theory of imaginative knowledge and imaginative function.

This renders imaginal constructs entry points to what Adams (2001, cited in Adams 2004, p. 18) has dubbed the ‘*mythological unconscious*’. The innate ‘ “myth-forming structural elements” ’ of the psyche’ stemming from its ‘intrinsic capacity ... to generate myths’ hence extends our understanding of the fantasy principle’s centrality in reality-building to the ‘ “mythopoeic imagination” ’ (Jung 1963, cited in Adams 2004, p. 67).

For Jung (1944, cited in Adams 2004, pp. 2-3) fantasy ‘remains the creative matrix of everything that has made progress possible for humanity” ’. The conceptualisation of the Tron universe as a mythological dream opens the door to establishing a clear connection between dreamscapes and scientific breakthroughs such as the Grid – ‘technology is founded over narrative, dreams, or myths of transcendence that visit humans since their origins’ (Goicoechea 2008, p. 5). Cyberspace is arguably the newest manifestation of humanity’s ‘latent yearning for alternative, ‘mythic planes’ of

existence’ (Benedikt 1993, cited in Graham 2002, pp. 71-72). For Goicoechea (2008, p. 5):

... mythology and technology converge in the figure of the cyborg, the postmodern representation of an ancestral dream that, through the metamorphoses of the body, liberates the human being from its limitations.

The Grid is the pursuit of a specific dream of ‘immortality and omnipotence ... as the epitome of human perfectibility’ (Graham 2002, p. 66) – it is Kevin’s ‘Perfect City’ (Corbin 1964, p. 3 of 16) and humanity’s ‘Promised Land’. The premise ‘that “the essence of psyche is myth” ’ therefore reveals the critical role of the mythopoeic imagination as the foundation of the Grid’s technological construction, one of the greatest endeavours of advancement in the history of human evolution (Hillman 1972, cited in Adams 2004, p. 67).

A central feature of the mythological unconscious is the ‘spontaneous autonomous emergence of “gods” (or archetypal images)’ (Adams 2004, p. 67). The presence of ‘ “God-images” ’ is a defining aspect of the Digital World in *Tron: Legacy* – the Tron universe is a playground for humans, Gods and demi-Gods (Jung 1977, cited in Adams 2004, p. 207). Accordingly, *Tron: Legacy* encompasses various projections of the self or ‘strata’ of being, which compose the essence of Tron cosmology (Figure 1).

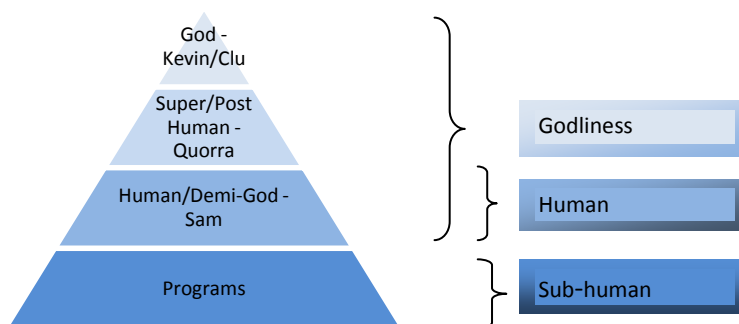


Figure 1: Staircase to Godliness – projections of the self/strata of humanity in Tron cosmology. The ‘mythical sacred mountain’ in the Tron universe, with the abode of the Gods at its apex (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 37)

Source: based on Gardiner & Osborn (2006, p. 41)

A number of key references can be made between this digital narrative and ancient myths. At the top end of the spectrum of Godliness, we find two distinct representations transcending humanity: both Kevin as the Creator and Clu as his copy

secure divine status. These techno-Gods are reminiscent of the ancient Greek Gods of Olympus, overseers of their digital kingdom from their celestial ‘mountains’ and harbingers of fortune and destruction. Further down, as the ‘son of the maker’, Sam’s human status inside the Grid rises to that of a demi-God. Clearly, Sam *is* God to programs as are all humans, as full flesh and blood beings. Indeed, a further manifestation of divine intervention aside from the ISOs is, in a sense, Sam’s arrival, who just ‘appears’ inside the Grid – the moment of his transportation may be considered a metaphysical birth reminiscent of the immaculate conception of Jesus, rendering his standing equivalent to the ‘Son of God’. At the antapex of these representations and the ‘sub-Godliness’ spectrum we find the digital programs; they exemplify the non-corporeal condition of existence. As we have seen, there is a strong connotation of the ‘sub-human’ to programs due to their pronounced fragility. The disc wars carried out in the Grid’s arena are comparable to the gladiatorial matches of the Roman Empire, as is the ‘light-cycle’ match Sam competes in to ancient chariot races. Like gladiators before them, the programs are bid to fight against each other to the death for the entertainment of the crowds as their Emperor – here, Clu – looks on. These defect programs are caught, enslaved and forced to compete. They are considered to be ‘vermin’ in the order of things, like gladiators often were convicted ‘criminals’ and ‘slaves’ (Grout n.d., p. 1 of 8). The loss of their lives in these violent confrontations is therefore inconsequential. Significantly, as in the Roman era, these games are used as a diversion to appease the masses whilst keeping them distracted from the corruption of the system, and to stamp out the potential for an uprising against Clu’s Empire (Objectivist Mantra 2011, p. 1 of 12). This ‘staircase to Godliness’ thus emphasises the centrality of world-building in the fantasy genre as a guideline to the social dynamics within imaginal universes, and a signpost to the mythical attributes embedded in their constructs.

Other obvious associations between the Tron universe and mythical texts can be drawn from the naming of some of the Grid’s central characters. Quorra directs Sam to find a program named ‘Zuse’ – an explicit reference to the father of the Gods of Olympus – to help him and Kevin escape the Grid. This program is indeed a form of a God in his ‘End of Line Club’, possessing a Zeus-like quality of omniscience with his inside knowledge of the Grid and carefully forged alliances. When Sam is initially acquainted with Zuse, he discovers he goes under the pseudonym of ‘Castor’. Castor

appears to encompass some of the key properties of the homonymous mythological figure in Greek myth, in his depiction as helper of mankind and guardian of travellers; his apparent eagerness to help the ‘Son of Flynn’ in his journey is exuberant (Greek Myth Index 2007, p. 2 of 3). In a further example, the four female digital programs who prepare Sam to compete in the arena are called ‘Sirens’. It is arguably not coincidental that one of these seductive programs, Gem, initially appears to be aiding Sam on his quest; when she leads him to the End of Line Club, however, he is ambushed by Clu’s enforcers realising that Gem, like Castor, had betrayed him. Likewise, the Sirens in the Greek Odyssey would mesmerise passing sailors with their alluring song and presence, leading them astray from their voyage home (Lindemans 2006, p. 1 of 1). An initial examination of the centrality of the mythological unconscious in the construction of the Grid therefore establishes the Tron universe as an expression of a ‘new mythology’ (Dery 1996, cited in Hollinger 1997, p. 127), and the power of digital narrative as ‘Mythopoesis’, or ‘myth-making’ (Adams 2004, p. 93).

The rethinking of *Tron: Legacy* as modern myth provides a refuelling of the inter-relationship between religious and scientific sentiment; the convergence of biblical texts and technology with the installation of God-images in the Grid ascribes a unique celestial property to the cyborgic figure of the Tron universe. The introduction of Quorra and the ISOs as a miracle of cyberspace denotes a direct link between digital and creation narratives – Quorra represents the ‘first-born’ child ‘of the Creator’, Kevin (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16). 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 creations (Bible.org n.d., p. 2 of 6). 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’ (Bible.org n.d., p. 2 of 6). Although the ISOs did not emerge first in the Grid, their importance as an entity arguably far outweighs all

others as an artificial intelligence both in the Tron and human universes. As the last of her kind, Quorra is the sole ‘being of pure Light’; she carries with her literally, in terms of her digital structure, and figuratively, the properties of divinity and virtue (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16). 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. Quorra lights the way as a superlative being which exists ‘over against all of creation’, securing the final Godly ascription in the Tron universe in her privileged position as the Creator’s supreme heir, depicted in Figure 1 (Bible.org n.d., p. 2 of 6). In their representation as post-corporeal the ISOs constitute an ethereal element of the Digital World, with Quorra an expression of the superhuman, albeit at a whole new level, and the ‘technological sublime’ (Halberstam & Livingston 1995, cited in Graham 2002, p. 67). This positioning of the ISO’s status in the Tron universe hence arguably culminates in the establishment of *Tron: Legacy* as a modern-day creation myth and the cyborg as the ‘central myth of ... [Tron] cyberculture’ (Goicoechea 2008, p. 1).

With its invocation of ‘digital narratives ... [as] metaphysical’ (Coyne 1999, p. 236), *Tron: Legacy* demonstrates the grounding of dreams of ‘TECHNO-TRANSCENDENCE’ (Graham 2002, p. 71) in the mythopoeic imagination. Cavallaro (2000, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 6) argues that ‘cyborgic fantasies find their roots in the primitive *shaman*, Dionysian rituals, gothic legends about vampires and werewolves, etc.’. Goicoechea (2008, p. 6) adds:

These myths represent the fantasy of transgressing, through the legitimacy granted by the unavoidable transformation of the body, the social and moral norms that apply for the rest of humans.

Their wide dismissal ‘in our rationalist zeal’ has obscured the possibility that these products of the human imagination are a result of a sophisticated information-gathering exercise spanning both ancient and modern times (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 4). The knowledge that ‘energy/information patterns of the material world’ and one’s own biological structure converge in ‘Molecular Information Theory’ has been manipulated throughout the ages by spiritual figures such as the shaman to dramatically alter their psyche (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 54). The ultimate purpose of this process referred to by ‘the Buddha, Christ and hundreds of other mythical avatars’ is an ‘internal awakening’ known as the ‘kundalini’ experience, which

constitutes ‘the biological basis of evolution and development of personality’ (Sanella 1987, cited in Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 13). The mystical ‘Law of Three’ in ‘Shamanic Cosmology’ is vital to understanding its significance (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 33). Gardiner and Osborn (2006, p. 69) argue that ‘Functions such as sleep, consciousness, memory, imagination and creative ability are all extremely complex and poorly understood’. 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 awakening (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 23). Could entering cyberspace figure as an access point to this ‘twilight zone’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 23)? The Grid arguably represents a digital ‘topography’ containing ‘information ... explored in the visionary state, the state intermediate between waking and sleep’ or transliminal phase (Corbin 1964, pp. 3 & 12 of 16). 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 conscious and aware*’ at this mid-point, the transliminal state becomes a ‘*gateway to ... the vast internal worlds of the mind [emphasis added]*’ in which mythical figures and legends were revealed (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 25). To enter the Grid therefore is to reach these primeval worlds, signifying the act of ‘*going inside ourselves*’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 39).

Spiritual mythical accounts speak of the presence of three cosmic zones: the ‘*Surface*’, the ‘*Interior*’ and the ‘*Centre of the Earth*’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 43). These, in turn, correspond with three distinct states of consciousness. The surface of the earth becomes the ‘middle plane, the conscious self’, or the ‘Objective (Male-related) External Material World’; this is the world which Sam originally inhabits (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 25 & 43). The interior is the ‘lower plane or underworld, the subconscious’ and the ‘Subjective (Female-related) Internal Mental World’ – Sam’s discovery of his father’s arcade basement and descent into its bowels is arguably symbolic of accessing the subconscious and the preliminary entry point into the Grid (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 25 & 43). The arcade is dusty and abandoned, just like the buried recesses of the subconscious where hidden faded memories and images long to be revived. The point at which the two opposite worlds unite marks ‘the ‘collective

unconscious' of Carl Jung' or 'zero node', crossed over during their perpetual oscillation (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 25). The Grid then arguably represents at the first instance the underworld, and then the third world; the 'centre of the earth, the higher plane or the [mythological] unconscious' (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 43). There is arguably much to be learnt by drawing on rich mythic tradition – *Tron: Legacy* and its predecessors are modern 'visionary tales' and stories of 'spiritual initiation' (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16). When the user is digitally transported inside the Grid, they are 'the initiate' who becomes privy to this superior level of awareness (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 43). Sam's journey inside the Grid is like a 'baptism of fire', a trance state in itself, as the journey into the subconscious and collective unconscious. Here we thus find the centrality of the Tron universe and cyberspace at large as a mythical expression of the internal processes potentially leading to a 'kundalini awakening', predicating a direct link between the cyborgic figure and its transgressive transformative properties (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 14).

This 'triad' or 'the *axis mundi*, 'axis of the world'' is commonly depicted as a pyramid, encompassing seven levels along its triangular neutral centre-line (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 34, 35 & 41). It adheres to 'the original shamanic cosmology' found in almost all cultural representations as the 'mythical sacred mountain whose summit is the 'abode of the gods' ' (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 37). The most important aspect of such depictions as Gardiner and Osborn (2006, pp. 44-45) emphasise, 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 experience. The original definition of the chakra is 'wheel' and they are often described as invisible swirling energy vortices (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 44). 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 in the movie, befitting of their renegade personas, and the light cycle match is a key feature of the disc wars. 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*, most likely for its utility as a weapon as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: '[C]elestial 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' (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16; Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 44; Hollinger 1999, p. 124)

Source: *A TRON-era Identity Disk* (n.d., p. 1 of 4); *Tron: Legacy movie poster* (2010, p. 18 of 22)

The *Tron* disk becomes a symbol of the 'energy of the spinning chakra vortices' only seen by mythical avatars (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 45). In a utopian sense it allows one, amongst other things, to imagine objects into existence and fly, and realise in part that dream of 'roaming, disembodied and free through the frontier territory of cyberspace' (Hollinger 1997, p. 126). The parallels between these images in the movie and mythological accounts are evident in the 'Ba bird bearing the *shen* ring' as portrayed, for example, in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs; in one the most memorable scenes programs fly through the night sky like digital birds, reminiscent of such mythical depictions (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 110). A comparison is depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 3: 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 (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16; Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 110)  
 Source: *Black guard* (n.d., p. 2 of 3); *Cartonnage panel of ba-bird* (2010, p. 1 of 2); *Combat drop* (n.d., p. 2 of 3); Evans (1993, p. 2 of 4)

Corbin (1964, pp. 2 & 3 of 16) speaks of the ‘celestial’ or ‘supreme Sphere’ in myth – Kevin’s disk can provide invaluable data to the outside world and human evolution. 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 appears to go through his body culminating in his head as his eyes flash and he enters his ‘Technobody’ (Hollinger 1997, p. 124) – a user’s installation into their digital self arguably represents the kundalini ‘illumination effect’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 18) 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 therefore 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 arguably ride the Grid’s digital

highway and winding circuits straight to the Godhead, the pinnacle of theirs and world consciousness (Adams 2004, p. 19).

These chakric ‘potent energy centres that exist at the ‘etheric’ or ‘non-physical level’ remain ‘outside scientific study, mostly because [they] cannot be ‘physically’ detected or measured’ and *can only ‘be seen internally* via the trance state [emphasis added]’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 44 & 45). This marks a crucial point in these accounts – the chakras and their common description by ‘shamans, mystics and psychics as swirls of colour’ and ‘lotus petals’, denote internal visualisations or images (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 45). The depth of knowledge of the human psyche displayed by these shamanic mythical figures purely through the power of intuition and imagery, renders their characterisation by Gardiner and Osborn (2006, p. 48) as ‘*Subatomic Scientists*’ arguably highly appropriate; these visual representations of the chakric vortices correspond with the scientifically observed activity of atomic particles. The extension of this finding’s application to the cyborgic body in the Tron universe in light of the interconnection between biological structure and Information Theory previously discussed, and imagery 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” ’ (Jung 1911, cited in Adams 2004, pp. 1 & 2). 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* image (Corbin 1964, p. 6 of 16). This insight, along with Benedikt’s (1993, cited in Graham 2002, p. 72) theorisation of cyberspace as the ‘‘realm of pure information’ ’, hence 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 in dreamscapes is immediate and profound. As a ‘‘natural expression of life’ fantasy and its meaning, if grasped, can

serve to ‘*increase consciousness*’ (Adams 2004, p. 5). One of the central means of attaining a deep understanding of fantasies as discussed is the ‘active imagination’ or ‘*imaginatio*’; this ‘“is the active evocation of (inner) images”’ in order to delve into their essence (Jung 1944, cited in Adams 2004, p. 3). Here, the direct ‘experience’ and ‘deliberate induction of fantasy’ whereby the user actively engages ‘images in conversations’ is paramount (Adams 2004, p. 15). In contrast to the ‘deep-rooted philosophical tradition in Western thought’, transcendence in the Tron universe as we have seen 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 other (Graham 2002, p. 72). Entering this ‘*interactive*’ experience is a demonstration of active imagination as a means of uncovering and defining the images of which our very psyches are composed (Adams 2004, p. 15). Interpreting the Grid as a consciousness-building activity consequently 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-centre’ of image/information or the collective unconscious (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 54). Cyborgic fantasies thus 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.

## **Chapter 5: In the name of the fathers – the evolution of the mythical paternal figure in the Grid**

An exploration of the significance of *Tron: Legacy's* imagery as modern mythology and its symbolism, as well as the depths of human consciousness within cyberspace, would not be complete without the unravelling of Kevin and Sam's relationship; in many ways it is the cornerstone of this father-son story of enduring love. Balsamo (1996, cited in Hollinger 1997, p. 129) notes that there was a direct relationship between increasing threats to our corporeality and the emergence of virtual reality as escapism. This trend, almost invariably coupled with a degree of 'social deficiency' gives rise to a significant moral concern in *Tron: Legacy*, most notably in the character of Kevin Flynn (Hollinger 1997, p. 127). After pioneering the Grid, Kevin's vision grows into an empire making him a mogul in the 'tech world'. With the untimely death of Sam's mother Kevin is left to raise his son as a single father. Even after his success Kevin spends endless days and nights perfecting his 'digital utopia', his son Sam at the time a young boy (Graham 2002, p. 72). On the fateful night he becomes trapped, he promises Sam they will play together at the arcade the next day. Kevin never returns, leaving Sam an orphan in the care of his grandparents. A visionary certainly cannot be admonished for seeking out new frontiers – but Kevin's labour of love, though inadvertently, ultimately led to him being 'swallowed up' by cyberspace, subsumed by his technobody and lost to the real world forever. The pain from the sense of abandonment is still visibly imprinted on Sam's face all those years later. These events thus ready this particular digital narrative as an invaluable 'self-reflexive' account by which to study the long-term impact of parental neglect in the 'everyday experience' of the postmodern (Etxeberria 2008, p. 7).

An understanding of Kevin and Sam's relationship necessarily involves the examination of its roots in the ' "mythopoeic imagination" ' (Jung 1963, cited in Adams 2004, p. 67) – 'A father-son fiction, the Laius-Oedipus myth, is the very foundation of psychoanalytical theory' (Adams 2004, p. 175). This is the tale of Oedipus who kills his abusive megalomaniac father King Laius; the latter is driven by his fear of the prophecy that Oedipus will murder him and overtake the throne (Adams 2004, p. 175). Adams (2004, p. 176), however, emphasises that there are countless forms of such narratives, denoting once again the plurality of realities and Imaginal Worlds:

A vast, perhaps infinite number of alternative images of father-son relations are available both actually and potentially (we need to acknowledge not only the existence of a variety of old father-son images but also the continuous emergence of a variety of new ones).

*Tron: Legacy* is, above all, one such contemporary encounter of a father-son myth. The issue of inadequate father-figures has been identified as one of the great unacknowledged crises of our time in modern Western culture; children who grow up without their fathers are more likely to be impoverished in every aspect of their lives (Blackenhorn 1992, cited in Steinfels 1992, p. 1 of 2). In his progressive devouring by cyberspace Kevin's role becomes that of the '“vanishing”' parent marking the 'epoch of the absent father', as '“His erosion as a psychological figure is ... accompanied by physical disappearance”' (Zoja 2001, cited in Adams 2004, p. 180). Up until their reunion Kevin lives in Sam's memory as a myth himself, a legend of his time. As is commonplace in myths, Corbin (1964, p. 2 of 16) explains that 'These tales essentially illustrate the experience of the gnostic, lived as the personal history of the Stranger, the captive who aspires to return home'. Both father and son in this film bear a similar fate; they are lost to each other and cannot find their way back. They are captives to their environment, each in their own way. Similar to his father Sam lives in a self-imposed exile. He became a stranger to the world, torn into pieces when his father went missing and has been incapable of finding himself ever since that frightful morning. Sam is a renegade who lives alone in a make-shift abandoned room where virtually no one can find him, shunning his place as the rightful heir to his father's company. Likewise, Kevin is captive to Clu inside the Grid, turning his back on his own creation when he lost control of it. Consequently, like his absent father Sam has become the *absent son*, feigning living as a passing shadow.

Zoja (2001, cited in Adams 2004, p. 180) explores both the absence and 'presence ... of the father' at the mythological level and the extent to which these figures place importance on either war and society, or family, in order to ascertain its psychological ramifications – his analysis of the 'three myths of the father' illustrates the construction of the paternal image in *Tron: Legacy*. The importance of establishing 'multiple, concrete, imaginal stories of fatherhood and sonhood, manhood and boyhood ... and not only ideal, classic, normal stories but also abnormal, deviant, psychopathological stories' is championed by Adams (2004, pp. 177-178). *Tron: Legacy* is all these fictions rolled into one with its multiple father-son adaptations.

Adams (2004, p. 179) argues that ‘Every son needs more than one father, needs many – ... not only a flesh-and-blood one, but ... mythic ones, fantastic ones, fictional ones’. The presence of this diversity in the ‘image of the ... father’ in the film gives us insight into the plurality of figures active in a person’s life at any given moment and their impact (Adams 2004, p. 181). Sam therefore has a number of real and ‘imaginal’ fathers throughout his life, all serving an equally important purpose in his initiation into manhood – his grandfather, Allan as his surrogate father, Clu and, of course, Kevin both inside and outside the Grid (Adams 2004, p. 179).

One of the myths that Zoja (2001, cited in Adams 2004, p. 176) explores is the ‘Odysseus-Telemachus myth’. Odysseus attempts to find a way to avoid going to war and stay with his son; although he does ultimately leave his family, it is only because he is forced to do so. The representation of Odysseus as a reluctant warring father corresponds with Kevin’s image as a father when Sam is a young boy; Kevin would never abandon his only son and leave him parentless, but he ends up doing so due to circumstances beyond his control. By becoming trapped inside the Grid he is left with no choice but to become entangled in the feud with Clu and condemned to a life in the Digital World, just as Odysseus loses his loved ones and the way home. This mythological construction of Kevin is maintained when he is first reunited with Sam in the Grid twenty years later. This ‘version’ of Kevin, however, is an imaginal parent to Sam; the father he finds in the Tron universe is not the father he knew *per se* who left him as a young boy. Initially Kevin is opposed to the idea of re-surfacing from hiding and confronting Clu, even if it meant a way out of the prison of the Digital World. ‘Clu sent that page ... it’s his game now. The only way to win is not to play’, Kevin says, trying to calm Sam down. He will not risk the life of his son now that he has found him again, thus preserving in his decision not to act his image as the absent father.

Sam’s decision to seek out Zuse to help him find the portal that could liberate them both, nonetheless, once again forces Kevin to engage in battle and risk himself for his son’s escape. Herewith is situated the second myth of the father depicted in *Tron: Legacy* – Zoja’s (2001, cited in Adams 2004, pp. 182-183) discussion of ‘Aeneas’ reveals a father who chooses family over war. Kevin could have abandoned his son to risk death alone, much like in the third myth of ‘Hector’ explored by Zoja (2001, cited in Adams 2004, pp. 180-181). Unlike Hector, however, an older Kevin chooses the

path of Aeneas as a mythical father figure who faces danger willingly, not out of blood-thirsty vengeance, but to protect his son; this is a turning point in the story as Kevin looks off into the distance from his hiding tower and tells Quorra to 'light up the vehicle', setting the scene for the eventual self-sacrifice for his son and 'digital' daughter. Hence an initial examination of the Kevin-Sam mythological encounter demonstrates Kevin's evolution from a 'disappearing father' to the heroic 'father-saviour', leading into *Tron: Legacy* as a father-son narrative of atonement.

But there is an alternative, regressive 'Mythopoesis' of the paternal figure that lurks in the shady corners of the Tron universe: Clu (Adams 2004, p. 93). As Sam's second imaginal father in the Grid, the Clu-Sam father-son fiction unearths the Oedipal markings of the Tron universe. Adams (2004, p. 175) observes that:

The Laius-Oedipus myth ... imaginably exemplifies not only the complex of the absent father but also the complex of the abusive father ... It is a story of infanticidal-patricidal, intergenerational conflict: if the father does not kill the son, the son will kill the father.

Clu would not hesitate to kill Sam as he harbours no love for him. Likewise, Sam would 'erase' his second father if that is what he needs to do to escape the Grid and save Kevin, Quorra and himself. When Clu greets Sam he says: 'I'm not your father Sam, but I'm very, *very* happy to see you'. This remark does not stem from any semblance of compassion; it is a product of pure self-interest. The portal in the Tron universe which is like 'a safe that could only open from the outside' activated when Sam got it. Sam's arrival will assist him in his plans for domination by manipulating his arch enemy out of hiding and obtaining his disk, without which Clu is unable to exit the Digital World. As a product of human fantasy the Grid readily contains an interplay of 'ego' and 'non-ego images', reproducing and uncovering the perennial worldviews that lurk beneath its foundations (Adams 2006, p. 1 of 7). The deviant, psychopathological version of this father-son story in Clu's self-involved personality, denotes him as the ego-image of the Grid's Imaginal World which is threatened by the 'transformative' function of non-ego images (Adams 2006, p. 1 of 7). An augmented version of Kevin's 'shadow' self, this father-figure is blinded by his need to triumph as he incessantly hunts down Sam and Kevin, forcing them into a fight to the death in which someone *will* be obliterated (Jung 1938, p. 131). The fatality of this is summed up by Jung (1944, p. 563):



An inflated consciousness is always egocentric and conscious of nothing but its own existence. It is incapable of learning from the past, incapable of understanding contemporary events, and incapable of drawing right conclusions about the future. It is hypnotized by itself and therefore cannot be argued with. It inevitably dooms itself to calamities that must strike it dead.

In contrast to the mythic figure of Hector who chooses to go to war himself and also lets his son do so and die, not out of ill will, but a preference of society over family, Clu is the quintessential Laius father figure – intoxicated by his perceived grandeur, he cannot see past his imperious sense of self and will not hesitate to sacrifice those closest to him, thus depicting the perpetuation of intergenerational divide, misguided retribution and blood-lust, even in a Digital World.

## Chapter 6: Schizophrenia, myth and catastrophe – the battle for the posthuman in the Digital World and beyond

The unnerving turn of events leading up to Kevin's disappearance poses an ethical question – did Kevin, in effect, neglect his son for a virtual world? Kevin would certainly not *knowingly* act in a way that would bring harm to himself or his only son and jeopardise their relationship. The implicit tensions in *Tron: Legacy* as cyberpunk science fiction, however, reveal a more complex dimension to this question and the psychology of its characters; in fiction the use of 'Doubling bodies ... fashioning different forms of the self, copying or cloning' is a key tool to 'define identity problems ... underline scientific deficiencies or to punish unlimited ambition' (Etxeberria 2008, p. 4). This 'dichotomous system' in *Tron: Legacy* 'produces ... [Kevin's] *Doppelgänger* [Clu] .... making evident that no man [sic] can cut himself [sic] off his [sic] conscience' (Etxeberria 2008, p. 4). In the days before his vanishing, Kevin's behaviour was reported as being increasingly 'erratic' and 'obsessive'. As the creator of the Grid, Kevin experiences an unprecedented sense of control. Davy's (1802, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 2) description of the formidable command that comes with the instruments of scientific enquiry is telling:

Science has ... bestowed upon [man] [sic] powers which may be called almost creative; which have enabled him [sic] to change and modify the beings surrounding him [sic], and by his [sic] experiments to interrogate nature with power, not simply as a scholar, passive, seeking only to understand her operations, but rather as a master, active with his [sic] own instruments ... who could not be ambitious of becoming acquainted with the most profound secrets of nature; of ascertaining her hidden operations; and of exhibiting to man [sic] that system of knowledge which relates so intimately to their own physical and moral constitution?

The Grid is Kevin's creative experiment which has the capacity to shape the destiny of the physical universe and its inhabitants forever, making him master of nature. This supremacy previously reserved only to the domain of Gods is now imparted to humans, rendering the Grid an instrument of divinity for its creator. It would arguably be difficult for any human being not to be intoxicated by the omnipotence they would feel as a maker, or even user of a 'digital frontier', in which they are the real version of a copy or copies of themselves. In Kevin's case his digital duplicate imbued with this sense of supremacy evolved separately, betraying him and his creation. When the dark side of the Grid took over with Clu, the romantic cyberpunk fantasy of 'roaming, disembodied and free' was turned upside down, as the all-knowing Creator was

brought to his knees and given a rude awakening to his corporeality and the perils of his construct (Hollinger 1997, p. 126). Kevin becomes a God in this universe, but an alienated one, in a way sacrificing real life for eminence in virtual reality. In the downfall of its protagonist *Tron: Legacy* exposes the dangers that could await humanity if the use of technology is not exercised with foresight, thus revealing the place of digital narratives as important cautionary moral tales.

This literal split of Kevin's personality into two with Clu projecting the selfish, ruthless aspect of himself, is described in Goicoechea's (2008, p. 1) investigation of the innate contradictions in the cyber genre:

Cyberpunk visions coincide in diagnosing the cyborg with the illness of Narcissus. On their quest for immortality, humans that have fused too intimately with the machine seem propelled towards a solipsistic free fall, a movement which tries to avoid any form of ideology but which entraps them instead in their own contradictory impulses for control and freedom.

Did Kevin Flynn become enamoured by his own image in his melding with cyberspace and 'die' to the real world, as in the myth of Narcissus who became infatuated by his appearance in a pool of water and drowned (Upright 2004, p. 1 of 1)? In the movie we see a snapshot of a young Kevin as he addresses a conference, passionately championing the offerings of the digital universe – what is significant about this scene is the moment the audience cheers and Kevin raises his hands in glory, reminiscent of an emperor hailing his adoring kingdom. Indeed, at the height of his success ENCOM was Kevin's empire, as was in a sense the whole world. Kevin began to steadily spend more and more time with his digital copy inside the Grid, arguably at the expense of time with his son. Together they worked tirelessly to design 'the perfect system'. Clu's persecution of Kevin results in the portal leading to the real world being shut behind him. This seals his destiny as his human/biological self is fused with the digital. Similar to the fate of Narcissus Kevin was literally dragged into the depths of the cyber-abys by his own image, Clu, therefore condemning himself to a form of suicide, entrapped by the struggle between his two opposing selves. In the Kevin/Clu dual identity we arguably find the quintessential representation of the cyborg as 'a symbol of contemporary solitude ... [and] the inaccessibility and hermetism of the human psyche' – this 'internal division' of Kevin's ego overwhelmed by narcissism has condemned him to isolation, rendering his beloved 'digital frontier' no more than a 'protective wall' between him and any meaningful

connection (Goicoechea 2008, p. 9). Hence the Tron universe demonstrates the darkness that lurks inside digital space when blindly embracing a world in which the mind could exist independent to the body, transposing cyber-romance into a solipsistic drop.

Like any utopian vision for a better world, one cannot ignore that the promise of 'TECHNO-TRANSCENDENCE' arguably carries with it a naiveté that could be dooming for the future of the human race (Graham 2002, p. 71). The Grid's digital landscape is dominated by two towers within which reside separate kingdoms, representing conflicting human drives – the tower of Clu, housing the impulse for control, and the tower of Kevin with its motivation to freedom. Befittingly, the appearance of the two techno-Gods and the architecture of their towers is also markedly different; Kevin is reminiscent of an old wise sage with a solemn meditative demeanour. His house and clothes are bathed in white, emanating a cleansed and minimalistic character. He also appears to be cold, soulless and 'sterilised' from any real human emotion to begin with, arguably reflecting a comatosed state from his 'death' to the world; the love for his son brings him back to life as he hugs Sam with tears welling in his eyes upon their reunion, releasing years of repressed pain. Conversely, Clu's representation is dark and brooding. In his initial appearance he is controlled and mechanical; but as the film progresses he becomes increasingly emotional, with a raging angst reminiscent of historical dictators. His desire to conquer his universe is almost primal. Most significantly, Clu has preserved Kevin's youthful appearance thus reflecting the narcissistic element of cyberpunk fantasies; for Clu is the representation of Kevin's intimate union with the mechanical.

Both Kevin and his digital copy then possess a radically different vision of the posthuman for life outside the Grid. For Kevin, the ISOs and artificial intelligence mark our salvation; in contrast to Clu whose purpose is to escape the confines of the Grid, humanity's destiny for him was conceived of as being *inside* it. Although Clu's vision is not fully revealed, it becomes obvious that if Sam and Kevin fail, this could mark the destruction of humanity. Clu in many ways represents the dangers that lurk in founding a 'universalisation of a metaphysics of technoscience ... on longings for invulnerability, incorporeality and omniscience' (Graham 2002, p. 65). The unquenchable thirst for more that resides within him and is embedded in capitalist culture as we have seen, is a signpost for the possibility of the Grid or Quorra falling

into the wrong hands. Under these pre-conditions it would not be unrealistic to imagine a world where the Grid is used as an enslavement camp for the human race. Not only would the knowledge and potential for advancement be restricted to a select few, but could be manipulated for evil purposes to create new forms of biological and mental degradation. Therefore, as an embodiment of the two opposing forces of the Tron universe and its cyberpunk vision, Kevin and his split personality hold immense power that could unleash either a ‘technoheaven’ or ‘technohell’ respectively once they transport into the ‘real’ world, literally shaping the human territory and imagination (Dinello 2005, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 3).



Figure 4: Techno-dictatorship – Clu and his minions  
Source: *Tron: Legacy movie still 23* (n.d, p. 25 of 43)

This defining aspect of the Grid as both ‘more beautiful’ yet ‘more dangerous’ than possibly imaginable, arguably results in a ‘schizoid and paranoid tunnel vision in characters ... [and viewers] alike’ (Goicoechea 2008, p. 1). Haraway (1991, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 10):

... acknowledges the contradictory messages that are projected onto the image of the cyborg ... a cyborg world can be one of domination and control, war and appropriation, or it can 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”.

The Tron universe’s battle for the posthuman in its two conflicting cyborgic fantasies is encapsulated remarkably accurately in Sterling’s (1996, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 7) ‘*Schismatrix Plus*’. Like *Tron: Legacy*, this historical account describes two paths of human evolution mirroring separate pictures for the future – Kevin Flynn’s character is reminiscent of the ‘*Shapers*’ who champion science and genetic manipulation to help humanity attain perfection (Sterling 1996, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 7). The ‘*Mechanists*’ aim to gradually transform all life into ‘metal and

programming'; Clu's goal would arguably move closer to such a subjugation and disempowerment of human free will and determination, rather than the pursuit of our genetic superiority (Sterling 1996, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 7). This could see the transgression of the human species to a frightful vision of the cyborg in which we are reduced to a monstrous creation from the mechanical's violent invasion of the body, leaving us at the mercy of artificial intelligences that will inherit the earth. Ironically, however, it is the shapers that end up becoming captives to their ideal, as does Kevin, serving as an omen for the unquestioning faith in scientific ideology and playing God by manipulating nature. The war inside the Grid is a fight for the fate of humanity which lies at the brink of either a utopia, or a nightmare. In his schizoid portrayal Kevin represents, on the one hand, the brilliant mind that can save the human species from disaster by mapping a new frontier, and on the other, the classic 'mad scientists' syndrome in science fiction who in their self-delusion doom anyone that crosses their path, even the fate of the world (Etxeberria 2008, p. 2). The Tron universe therefore becomes a paradigm of schizophrenia as the by-product of the digital human's new status and his/her immersion 'in pure, decontextualized information', illustrating the fine line between genius and insanity (Goicoechea 2008, p. 9).

This psychological fracture is not just confined within cyberspace – it is arguably a *natural* state of humanity that is widely unacknowledged. The 'juxtaposition of diverse realities ... and the revelation of differences that play on our "mental equilibrium"' have provided the impetus for the theorising of 'the human psyche as permeated by rift and disequilibrium' (Lacan 1979, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 223). These accounts signal the ingrained residence of 'fragmentation and disintegration' in the 'human condition', in stark contrast to the 'whole, unproblematic and aware' Cartesian subject (Coyne 1999, pp. 222 & 233). Consequently, Deleuze and Guattari (1984, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 234):

... propose a new kind of "analysis" based on ... the exaltation of schizophrenia, the condition of the fragmented, deluded, unstable personality, which they label "schizoanalysis", the task of which is destruction: "a whole sourcing of the unconscious, a complete curettage".

Both 'delusional' and 'mythological ... fantasy-structures' are unequivocal products of the 'archaic (or archetypal), collective unconscious' (Jung 1911, cited in Adams 2004, pp. 90 & 91). In *Tron: Legacy* Clu is an expression of a delusional fantasy-structure, standing in opposition to Kevin as a display of visionary creative intellect, and fantasy

as a higher order cognitive function and human endeavour towards greatness. This development in Kevin's psyche is an example of the attachment schizophrenics experience 'to the internal world they ... [have] subjectively created as a substitute for the external world' (Adams 2004, p. 91). Indeed, this '*interiorization*, [when] one has *departed* from ... *external* reality' is a defining characteristic of the 'migration' from the Material into the Digital World (Corbin 1964, pp. 4 & 7 of 16). As the portal closes in on Kevin, the unconscious has 'completely dominated and permanently supplanted' (Adams 2004, p. 92) reality, marking the advent of 'an epochal change' with postmodernism's 'decentred, [and] ungrounded' world (Eagleton 1996, cited in Etxeberria 2008, p. 7).

The refusal of 'truth and reality as single certainties' far from negates the impact or felt presence of these fantasy-structures. For Jung (1934, cited in Adams 2004, p. 92):

The 'emergence of archetypal images from the unconscious ... "is by no means a question of fictitious dangers but of very real risks upon which the fate of a whole life may depend"'.

The 'escape of these naturally autonomous images 'from conscious control' and their realisation as independent entities eventuates in a sweeping reordering of the human psyche through ' "possession" ', a phenomenon which results in the 'compulsive, unconscious identification with an archetypal image' – Clu takes possession of Kevin's body as the archetypal God-image (Jung 1934, cited in Adams 2004, p. 92). With the colonisation of this God complex Clu 'kills' Kevin, or rather his 'external' version, as he existed in the surface world. The presence of danger as an integral aspect of fantasy establishes dreamscapes as tangible, discernible and very real. This calls for the reconsideration of the dichotomy between utopias and dystopias; a discussion of utopia in *Tron: Legacy* cannot be viewed as a misguided superficial search for omnipotence and immortality. With the incorporation of survival as a fundamental element in its materialisation, the Grid as a utopian construct and an expression of the 'sublime' *necessarily* incorporates risk (Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 24). But this threat is not simply a resident of the external world, 'the computer, the cyborg, or the robot' – it lives *inside* us (Coyne 1999, p. 226). For Lacan (1977, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 226), ' "the unconscious is the discourse of the other" ' – this 'tortured discourse' thus marks the presence of Clu as Kevin's Digital Other and the surfacing of 'the alien ... within'.

The featuring of *Tron: Legacy* as a ‘ “mythopoeic’ (Jung 1963, cited in Adams 2004, p. 67) narrative demonstrates a crucial link between the fragmented human condition and dreamscapes – it is in ‘*schizophrenic material*’ that creation myths appear most prominently in dreams (Von Franz 1995, cited in Adams 2004, p. 121). The Tron universe’s ‘ “deist” cosmogony’ is a classic example of most common creation myths and their androcentrism, in the representation of Kevin as the God who once ‘miraculously created the [Tron] world, all [artificial] life, and [the Digital] man [sic] ... withdrew from His [sic] creation and only in extraordinary circumstances ever again intervened’ (Adams 2004, p. 120). In Kevin’s case this intervention was prompted by the arrival of his son decades later, forcing him to confront Clu, the ‘anti-God’. In this final encounter between the two selves we find the real significance of *Tron: Legacy* as a creation myth; as the clock ticks down to reaching the portal, both the Grid and the External World come to the brink of destruction. Kevin charges into Clu to allow Sam and Quorra to escape, culminating in the erasure of his creation in a thunderous engulfing wave. In this pivotal moment, the unfolding of a ‘schizophrenic episode ... prepared by dreams of world destruction’ ’ is played out (Von Franz 1995, cited in Adams 2004, p. 121). Perry (1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122) contends that when a culture is reaching its tipping point ‘certain persons “who have the aptitude for visionary encounters with ... archetypal images ... “experience an activation of the world-image” ’. As a product of Kevin’s creative genius, the Grid therefore represents this very activation in its production of primordial mythic images as primary and constitutive elements of the Tron universe.

The presence of this ‘ ‘psychotic ideation’ ’ as an integral element of the myth-making process suggests an intrinsic reciprocity between schizophrenia and civilisation (Perry 1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122). Torrey (1980, p. 75) argues that there is ‘a close correlation between (schizophrenia’s) prevalence and degree of civilization’, posing the question whether ‘there is anything essential about our civilization, or about civilization in general, which is pathogenic’. The instrumental presence of schizophrenia has determined the course of humanity by two distinct survival instincts which may be creative and all-encompassing, or destructive and possessive (Murphy 1984, p. 490). It can thus be proposed that there are two *evolutionary principles* founded on the competing human drives of ‘freedom’ and ‘control’ as discussed by Goicoechea (2008, p. 1) and applied to Kevin and Clu respectively, marking two battle



sites of evolutionary growth within, what is in essence, a single individual: ‘suicidal growth and intelligent growth’ (Harding 2008, p. 1 of 1). This ‘theoretical and practical struggle against unity-through-domination or unity-through-incorporation’ (Haraway 1991, p. 157) brings the enduring ‘myth of unity and fragmentation’ (Coyne 1999, p. 257) back to the forefront, and is the key to arguably the most critical question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – is humanity headed towards ‘“Utopia or Oblivion” ’ (Siegmund 1999, p. 14)? Kevin’s creation is a mirror for not only his generation, but a whole civilisation; our world is evolving rapidly with events beyond our control arguably unfolding before us. As humanity moves deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is a growing sense that we are lying at the doorstep of a dying world (Chase-Dunn & Lawrence 2011). Re-emerging crises on a number of fronts – economic, environmental, political, psychological and so forth – ring alarm bells in the increasing awareness that our current behaviours are falling short and the need for change is vital, denoting a ‘critical juncture’ in the history of human evolution (Perry 1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122). Siegmund (1999, p. 15) maintains that the evolutionary principle of unity-through-domination can only result in the ‘malnourished, scarcity-driven, inequitable, closed-loop of the redundancy of history’. Conversely, unity-through-incorporation operates on the scientific finding that ‘Nature ... is ... a design for Plenitude’ (Siegmund 1999, p. 14). For Perry (1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122), ‘the experience of an individual may be a truly prophetic vision of a vast, very fast transformation of the world-view of a culture:

It is imperative for us constantly to remind ourselves that the horrific vision of world destruction is part and parcel of the mythic imagery of rapid culture change and of world views in transition ... Beholding the world coming to its end amid storm, earthquake, flood, and fire we have found to be a typical experience of a prophet whose psyche is registering the emotional impact of the end of an era.

In this light then, Kevin’s internal destruction and the Grid’s obliteration become an apocalyptic message of the ‘end of days’ and a looking-glass for humankind at large.

## **Chapter 7: The sacrifice of Kevin Flynn, redemption and rebirth at the edge of civilisation**

The duality that is indispensable to the schizophrenic condition and human nature overall is critical to comprehending the purpose of the Grid's decimation. In volume 8 of his *Collected Works*, Jung (1953, cited in Adams 2004, p. 90) remarks that 'The delusional systems of schizophrenics are ... "aiming at something" '. There is a logic to madness, and so too do ' "visions of the end of the world' (Perry 1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122) serve a purpose – Freud (1953, cited in Adams 2004, p. 121) in volume 12 of the *Standard Edition* of his *Complete Psychological Works* asserts that the formation of such 'notions about a "world catastrophe"... "is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction" '. Does humanity need to arrive at the brink of destruction in order to generate the conditions it requires to redefine itself and evolve? Does it seek its own self-dissolution to attain a unified state? According to Wiener (1948, cited in Bynum 2010, p. 424) 'entropy', or the 'irreversible loss of physical information' is '*the greatest natural evil*'. Each 'physical object or process, consequently, participates in a creative "coming-to-be" and a destructive "fading away' – all ' "information objects" ' in the universe 'are subject to ultimate decay', as life must constantly give way to new forms of existence as a means of naturally regenerating itself (Wiener 1948, cited in Bynum 2010, p. 424). This purposeful schizophrenic battle of wills is described in Perry's (1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122) investigation of cataclysmic prophecies:

The opposites are rent asunder, that is, opposing forces clash, and disorder vies with order. The previously predominating pattern is broken up, or at least such a catastrophe is threatened. There follows its transformation in the image of world regeneration as the seed of a new culture form in mythic expression. This suggests that a transformed culture arises out of transformed persons.

Kevin and Clu's mythical clash of the Titans sends shockwaves throughout the Tron universe. As these two opposite Godheads and human drives collide they completely dismantle the predominating order, simultaneously symbolising the need for a ' "profound and acute reorganisation" ' of our own cosmos (Perry 1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122).

The theme of ' "world renewal" ' (Perry 1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122) in creation myths as indispensably tied into a cataclysmic event, has been most notably represented in 'the myth of the phoenix' (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 109-119). This

legendary bird has been the symbol of ‘resurrection and rebirth’ in a number of mythical accounts throughout history; ‘for just as the phoenix was reborn out its own dead self ... so again and again the spiritual nature of man [sic] rises triumphant from his [sic] dead physical body’ (Hall 1928, cited in Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 109). In its most persistent cross-cultural representation as it burns in flames, the phoenix is simultaneously resurrected from its own ashes (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 112). Gardiner and Osborn (2006, p. 112) argue that the purpose of this symbolism is twofold: first, metamorphosis at a personal level in the representation of the burning sensation associated with the shamanic enlightenment experience, and, second, metamorphosis on the scale of civilisation, signalling the heralding of a new golden age in the aftermath of a ‘worldwide catastrophe’ that marked the end of another. According to Gardiner and Osborn (2006, p. 118) humanity is ‘unconscious of this spiritual source and these life-death-rebirth processes’ – the realisation of this paradoxical integrative cycle of opposites will inevitably ‘initiate a collective rebirth’. Arguably then, the most significant aspect of this myth is that both individual and collective ascension is not possible without the occurrence of a self-destruction – to live anew one must ‘die’ as their current self, rendering catastrophe in some form a *pre-requisite* to personal and societal ‘regeneration’ (Perry 1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 122).

The final showdown between Kevin and Clu takes place at the ‘mouth’ of the portal joining the two worlds; it is here that we arguably find the most crucial connection between *Tron: Legacy* as modern myth and the myth of the phoenix. Gardiner and Osborn (2006, p. 162) describe that in one of its ancient accounts:

... at the centre of the temple ... there stood a pillar or obelisk called the Mansion of the Phoenix ... a symbol of the phallus of the central god ... from which the universe was ‘seeded into being’.

The primary purpose of the erection of this pillar for the ancients was the ‘symbolic reference to their ... ‘new beginning’ in a ‘newly created world’, after what must have been a worldwide cataclysm’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 163). In the Grid, the portal which also stands like a pillar, is arguably a two-way symbol of the phallus where both the Digital and the External World are seeded into being – each time a user enters the portal they are mentally and physically dismantled and literally raised from the dead on the other side. This is Corbin’s (1964, p. 10 of 16) ‘“resurrection body” ’ or

'*imaginal body*' as encountered in Eastern myth, demonstrating once again the centrality of destruction as an integral element of creation myths and personal regeneration. These narratives often allude to the notion that ' "Humans sleep. It is when they die that they awake" ' (Corbin 1964, p. 8 of 16). Tron cyberspace is reminiscent of other digital narratives such as '*Videodrome*' where the notion of 'leaving behind the old biological process of life and death to embrace a total transformation' is idealised; ' "To become the new flesh, you first have to kill the old flesh" ' (Etxeberria 2008, p. 9). To fully appreciate the broader social significance of the Grid as a complex construct we must therefore look beyond the conflict between a romanticised notion of technology and its vilification – the rethinking of cyberspace in the context of a dreamscape in the Tron universe arguably illustrates the necessary coexistence of utopias with dystopias, catastrophe with creation.

The prevalence of this 'cosmic antagonism' reflecting the synergy between inner and historical resistance, calls for a balance of opposites; unless its centrality is acknowledged transformation on any scale arguably cannot take place (Coyne 1999, p. 7). In order to comprehend how such a reconciliation could be achieved in the Tron universe we must extend our understanding beyond this duality. Gardiner and Osborn (2006, p. 168) assert that ancient accounts of mythic cosmology correspond to 'the four psychoanalytical states of consciousness referred to by psychologists'. The first two already discussed refer to the 'male-related conscious self which has its focus on the external material world' [Clu], and the ' 'dreaming body' ' or 'female-related subconscious which has its focus on the internal mental realm' [Kevin] (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 168-169). The next condition is the 'neutral, androgynous soul' and the 'union or fusion' of our aforementioned competing forces, denoting the 'third state of consciousness'; this corresponds to the 'transliminal, zero-node' and the point of convergence between the 'waking-sleeping cycle' introduced in Chapter 4 (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 23 & 169). Given that *Tron: Legacy* is at its core a father-son myth, the significance of this union arguably signals the resolution of the Oedipus myth in the Tron universe and appoints a two-fold meaning to the third state of consciousness. The first is found in Sam Flynn – Sam 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. He has come from the paternal, External World and descended into the subconscious feminine of the Grid. Sam represents the

congregative access point; by entering the Grid he re-activates the portal, preparing the path for the two opposing fathers 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, thus cementing his ultimate role in Tron cyberspace as the symbolic equilibrium position of human consciousness.

Sam's destiny, however, and certainly the Grid's as well as the External World's, is ultimately determined by Kevin's self-sacrifice at the edge of the Digital World; in this scene lies the second attribution to the transliminal state of consciousness. The final confrontation between the two Gods features one of the most revealing dialogues in the movie on the evolution of Kevin Flynn as a human being and father, and the experience of cyberspace as an expression of the 'sublime' (Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006):

Clu: I did everything! Everything you ever asked!  
Kevin: I know you did.  
Clu: I executed the plan!  
Kevin: As you saw it.  
Clu: You ... you promised that we would change the world, together ... you broke your promise.  
Kevin: I know ... I understand that now.  
Clu: I took this system to its maximum potential. I created the perfect system!  
Kevin: The thing about perfection ... is that it's unknowable. It's impossible, but it's also right in front of us all the time! You wouldn't know that because I didn't when I created you ... I'm sorry Clu.

Burke (1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 25) states that by virtue of its infinite nature, 'A kind of humbling is associated with a sublime experience, which gives us a new perspective on ourselves ... .This order ... is an order that humanity can only partly understand'. In the face of the 'awesome power and ultimate unfathomability of God' Kevin grows to realise that he cannot control everything – he learns that perfection is an illusion and achieving modesty in the face of the unknowable is true power (Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 26). As a result, Burke (1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 29) distinguishes between two types of sublime: the 'authentic' and the 'false'. Clu is a representation of the 'modern mentality and the dangers that can result from that' (Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 28). But most significantly in the context of the movie, he is the past version of Kevin at the time of his creation of the Grid and a symbol of the 'modern man as "the one who wills" ' (Heidegger 1975, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 28). As a cyborgic figure that started its journey as one with its originator, Clu possesses the corrupt side of Kevin in his thirst for glory, though amplified. This

'familiar vice of 'vanity' ' is reflected in a young Kevin's promise to Clu in the beginning: 'You and me are going to change the world' (White 1994, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 29). It is not a coincidence that this 'sort of willing' resulted in the 'emergence of the "total state"' within Clu's Digital World (Heidegger 1975, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 28). It is driven by the substitution of the 'mystery' of 'God, or fate' with the emphasis on human beings in 'their ability to remake the world and each other'(Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006, pp. 27 & 29). The false sublime embodied in Clu and the destruction of the Grid resulting from his inability to change in the movie's epilogue therefore proposes that its continued adoption would be anti-survival for the human race, marking its self-implosion as Harding's (2008, p. 1 of 1) 'suicidal growth'.

As we have seen, Kevin's selfishness was a catalyst in his relationship with his son, inadvertently leading to his entrapment. In that respect, the significance of his death is paramount – this final act of love arguably represents the most selfless deed in his ambitious existence. If dreamscapes are discernible constructs they demand action and accountability. The failure to accept 'a sense of human limitation in the face of divine mystery' has significant moral repercussions, highlighting the imperative for the adoption of 'ethical rules for artificial agents' as propounded by Wiener (1950, cited in Bynum 2010, p. 428) in order to prevent the kind of '*utopian* madness' (Corbin 1964, p. 4 of 16) that manifested in the Grid. Hefner (2010, p. 256) argues that 'technology and the human life it sustains require increasingly high levels of human competence and reliability, and these in turn call for ever higher levels of responsibility'. Kevin's act of redemption in light of the inherent fragmentation of the human condition calls for a reconsideration of the moral dilemma to the degree to which he was liable for the deprivation of a life with his son. Technology is arguably a product of the minds and hearts that wield it; if the human psyche is torn in two, selfish acts are not simply a product of pure evil but are committed by good men like Kevin, indicating a case of 'catastrophe within, so without'. Kevin pays the price for his downfall and cannot shy away from the role he plays in the tribulations that spawned from Clu, 'the program designed to create the perfect world' – his apology to Clu is his penance. It is exemplary of Wiener's (1950, cited in Bynum 2010, p. 428) cautioning that a wise individual:

... will not leap in where angels fear to tread, unless he [sic] is prepared to accept the punishment of the fallen angels. Neither will he [sic] calmly transfer to the machine made in his [sic] own image the responsibility for his [sic] choice of good and evil, without continuing to accept a full responsibility for that choice.

When Kevin goes back out into the Grid he wears a black robe, contrary to the white attire he is presented in when he is reunited with Sam at the beginning of the movie (Figure 5).



Figure 5: The evolution of the father – Kevin Flynn’s ‘sage figure’ upon Sam’s arrival [left] and the embracing of his ‘shadow’ self on coming out from hiding and facing Clu [right] (Jung 1938, p. 131)

Source: *Kevin Flynn* (2011, p. 8 of 13); *Olivia Wilde as Quorra in Tron: Legacy – Production Still* (2010, p. 1 of 1)

This is arguably symbolic of his acceptance of accountability for the outcome of his creation, his own fate and that of his son’s. In their brief time together, Kevin solemnly reflects to Sam on the past: ‘Should have seen this place [the Grid] back then, couldn’t wait to show it to you’. Sam comments: ‘Must have been something before Clu screwed it up’. But Kevin replies emphatically: ‘No, no ... he ... *he’s me* ... *I* screwed it up ... chasing after perfection ... chasing after what was right in front of me ... right in front of me’, as he looks to Sam. ‘Look what you’ve accomplished ... it’s incredible’, marvels Sam. ‘Sam ...’, whispers Kevin, ‘I’d have given it all up for one more day with you’. In this seminal point in the film Kevin thus recognises the image of Clu as his past and the darkness within, which spread into the Grid, ‘infecting’ it.

By acknowledging this internal dichotomy, Kevin is prepared to die and assume the role of the destructor in order to restore balance. Embracing his opposite opens the door to a purpose greater than his own survival – the preservation of his son, Quorra and humanity – as well as the resolution to the Oedipus conflict in Tron cyberspace. In his coming-of-age and becoming God, Kevin finally discovers the required sense of ‘wonder’ that accompanies ‘authentic existence’, the ‘limitations of human understanding ... [and] human will’, and in effect his own Godlessness (Heidegger 1962, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 28). When Clu brings Kevin to his knees thinking that he finally has possession of his disk, he asks him in dismay: ‘You knew I’d beat you ... instead you did all this, for him [Sam]? ... Why? – *He’s my son*’, Kevin responds. Kevin practices the ultimate act of humility in the face of the sacred by making way for life beyond his own, in the process discovering the authentic sublime in his most wondrous creation, Sam, and within. The application of ‘the imaginative consciousness’ and the establishment of the Imaginal World foster a renewed sense of optimism (Corbin 1964, p. 1 of 16). Yet Kevin’s road to redemption illustrates that we must also confront the dystopian nature of our dreams and acknowledge the nightmare that resides inside us first, in order to unearth our personal sublime. That is what the Grid ultimately is – a world without borders, a state of mind that sees both the abyss and the haven, accompanied by an understanding that responsibility for the game lies first and foremost with each user. *Tron: Legacy* thus becomes a prime demonstration of the ‘mythopoeic’ (Jung 1963, cited in Adams 2004, p. 67) process as a facilitator of change at the ‘cultural level through visionary experience on the individual level’ (Perry 1987, cited in Adams 2004, p. 123).

The end of *Tron: Legacy* marks the salvation of both Kevin and humanity, breaking the cycle of adversity between the two embattled forces. The portal or:

... sword/phallus represents the shushumna channel in the spinal column, the place where the opposite energies [Kevin and Clu] unite to initiate the enlightenment experience, which initiates a transformation – a new pattern. (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 164)

The portal *is* the mid-point; it is the point of convergence between the Digital and the External World, catastrophe and renewal. And it is the point where the two fathers are brought together, cancelling out their energies. Clu tries desperately to enter the portal with Sam and Quorra when he realises Kevin’s disk is with them, but Kevin uses his powers to absorb Clu into him; his self-destruction predicates the return to the



‘reintegrated ego’, the ‘higher plane, the unconscious’, and the attainment of the third state of consciousness in its second attribution (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 43 & 169). As ‘In the context of the Flood ... [the Grid’s obliteration] *is the rebirth of mankind*’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 163). The Grid is annihilated, but this makes room for the outside world’s chance at the ‘return to a transformed golden age’ (Coyne 1999, p. 10). Kevin’s self-sacrifice and undoing of the Tron universe resets the clock back to the beginning; as the Digital World is shattered it implodes into a small light, an event comparable to the reversal of the Big Bang. This is the point of origin transformed, same but different, indicating the cyclical process of nature and symbolic of ‘the ‘source-centre of creation’ – *the void from which one could be reborn*’ (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 39). Indeed, in his theory of the ‘eternal recurrence of the same’, Nietzsche (1882, cited in Baofu 2011, p. 209) imagined ‘a physical universe of perpetual struggle and force, which successively completes its cycle and returns to the beginning again and again’ – Kevin’s death and ego-sacrifice therefore marks his atonement and is symbolic of the journey of the renewal of all mankind.

## **Chapter 8: Quorra/woman-child warrior – the Tron cyborg and the dawn of the age of kin-doms at the posthuman frontier**

How do we begin to conceive of what a regenerated world would look like beyond our current reality? If the idea of rebirth is fundamentally linked to both individual and collective transformation, then any discussion on the renewal of civilisation becomes a question of posthuman evolution. *Tron: Legacy* poses some vital concerns on human existence – what does it mean to be human? Are we, could we be or have we been animals, aliens, machines? *What are we?* Regardless of the answer, any such understanding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must arguably consider how we exist in relation to technology and how it defines us, placing digital narratives as an ideal platform for this intellectual journey. The evolutionary pyramid (Figure 1) discussed in Chapter 4 is central to our understanding not only of the demographics of the Tron universe, but the dynamics that impact on the inter-relationships within and between strata, charged by an innate desire to transcend. The capacity for survival as expressed by Gem to Sam in the armory is paramount to the evolution of all life forms inside the Grid, revealing this Digital World as fluid and conducive to growth. The definition of the concept of survival is critical in determining its application in the Grid – for Nietzsche (1886) all life is driven by the ‘*will to power*’. The defining aspect of this instinct is that it exceeds the basic impetus to avoid extinction; Nietzsche (1886, s. 259) in *Beyond Good and Evil* contends that life is not only driven by self-preservation, but ‘to strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant – not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power’. This force is not ‘limited to the psychology of human beings ... it is the underlying noemenal reality of the universe, which manifests itself in everything and everyone’, and hence a signpost for the dynamic social mechanics of Tron cyberspace (Nietzsche 1968, cited in Denneson 2011, p. 1 of 10).

The direct bearing of this conceptualisation of evolution to the Tron universe is manifest – the will to power surpasses the will to live, even for digital life. The instinct to survive and thrive is strong in Clu. As an artificial intelligence he is self-conscious and a prime example of life that seeks to colonise its universe and prevail. Even the ‘baser’ digital programs want to *be* more and can instinctively recognise a superior life form; when Sam enters the End of Line Club with Gem all the programs are mesmerised by, what is to them, this young God, and heads turn as they make their

way to Castor. Likewise, the Sirens can instantly sense Sam is not like them: ‘he is different’, remarks one of the female programs with fascination in her eyes. They all *know* Sam as a human is a more advanced species and they too desire to be a greater version of their current selves. In perhaps the most pertinent example, Castor’s hidden agenda in his affiliation with Clu illustrates the purpose of the use of this alias to allow him to maintain his ability to switch allegiances as best serves his interests. After setting a trap for Sam, Kevin and Quorra, and the ensuing battle in the End of Line Club, Castor hands over Kevin’s disk to Clu on the condition that he gains control of the Grid, effectively jumping up the hierarchy of the Tron universe as the anti-God’s right hand. This is not simply an act of self-preservation – it is a calculated attempt at amassing greater control, suggesting the impulse to maximise mental and physical power as a natural state of cyborgic evolution. All life then, whether biological or artificial, arguably not only fears death but wants to ascend to a higher level of being, thus suggesting the enduring relevance of the will to power in the Digital World and its potential progression into a ‘*Will to Virtuality*’ (Kroker & Weinstein 1994, cited in Graham 2002, p. 66).

The inbuilt fragmentation of the human condition evident in the recurring theme of antithetical forces, has led theorists such as Marcuse (1987, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 233) to speak of ‘the endemic nature of repression and the necessity to resist it’. So too for Nietzsche (1901, s. 636) in the *Will to Power* the element of resistance is integral to the evolutionary process of self-mastery – ‘every specific body strives to become master of all space and to extend its force (its will to power) and to thrust back all that resists its extension’. Kevin remarks how his Digital Other fed on his opposition, making Clu increasingly powerful and defining his existence. The repercussions of this struggle extend far beyond the individual. Bull (1999, cited in Stocks 2007, p. 87) argues that:

... once the reality of multiple identities is acknowledged, *the problem of recognition* becomes the central dilemma. In order to comprehend the simultaneous existence of what ought to be contradictory identities ... one must recognise ... the fact that one or the other must always remain hidden...*Full recognition lies in the comprehension of concealment* and the realisation that while one identity is clearly discernible, *there are in fact other selves that, at any given historical moment, must remain hidden* [emphasis added].

In *Tron: Legacy* the two universes of the visible (the 21<sup>st</sup> 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. The tangibility of the digital universe in *Tron: Legacy* demonstrated by the striking complexity in both its elaborate structural design and the physicality and psychology of its inhabitants, illustrates the direct relevance of dreamscapes to reality and their broader significance at the collective level. By extension, all social landscapes can arguably be classified as dreamscapes. They do not exist by chance – they have been dreamt up through creative imagination at the first instance. Any given social order is the product of an imagined utopia and the collective dreaming of a specific group (or groups) with enough praxis conducted to materialise. The only distinguishing factor between dreamscapes therefore is that some have passed onto the realm of the physical/visible (commonly known as the ‘real world’), while others remain hidden (the ‘dream world’ or ‘fantasy’). This notion of interpreting *all* social matrices as dreamscapes accommodates plurality, allowing scope for the simultaneous existence of dual terms of reference (dream/reality, visible/hidden). Dreamscapes then signify a battleground between opposing identities for space, as the invisible struggle to simply *be* within specific historical modes of time; indeed, Etxeberria (2008, p. 2) notes that ‘invisibility offers humans freedom and power, but also provokes problems’. The act of willing into existence a particular social matrix by one group, or union of like-minded groups, entails their assumption and guarding of power and their rise to the status of masters within that dreamscape, inevitably leading to the marginalisation of other groups and their dreamscapes. A study of evolutionary transition beyond postmodernism is consequentially inextricably bound to a study of *the ‘return of the repressed [emphasis added]’ or hidden self* (Hillman 1985, cited in Adams 2004, p. 175). The will to power is a mirror of our own split psyches, as the rise and fall of civilisations becomes the story of the rise and fall of social desires, and the direction of the posthuman is defined by the struggle of the ‘invisible wo/man’ to be heard again.

The difficulty in the recognition of concealed identities finds a much anticipated resolution in the inherent sublime properties of cyberspace and, as will be illustrated, in Quorra as the ultimate representation of the posthuman in *Tron: Legacy*. Corbin (1964, p. 3 of 16) points out that the:

... relationship involved [in the migration from the Material to the Digital World] is essentially that of the external, the visible, the exoteric ... and the internal, the invisible, the esoteric ... or the natural world and the spiritual world.

Burke (1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 25) ‘maintains that to make a thing “terrible” in a way which is sublime, “obscurity, seems in general to be necessary” ’ and ‘may take different forms, such as darkness’. 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 substantive (Burke 1757, cited in Byrne 2006, p. 25). Corbin (1964, p. 5 of 16) points out that ‘forms and shapes in the *mundus imaginalis* do not subsist in the same manner as empirical realities in the physical world’. This phenomenon predicates the Digital World’s ‘mediatory position’; the Grid is present somewhere in between the ‘real’ world and the ‘unreal’ (Corbin 1964, p. 6 of 16). It exists, but at the same time it does not – it is the epitome of ‘ “immaterial” materiality’ (Corbin 1964, p. 5 of 16).

Tron cyberspace is Corbin’s (1964, pp. 3-4 & 9 of 16) ‘ “land of the Hidden Imam” ... the “land of No-where” ’; yet ‘an odd thing happens: once ... [the] transition is accomplished, it turns out that henceforth this reality, previously internal and hidden, is revealed to be enveloping, surrounding’. Its ‘real *Presence* here and now in another world ... [is a] testimony to that other world’ and that ‘life is not limited to the conditions of our visible material world with its biological laws that we know’ (Corbin 1964, pp. 10 & 12 of 16). 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 scale of being with many more degrees than ours’ (Corbin 1964, p. 10 of 16). The imperative that we expand our mental horizons is summed up by Corbin (1964, p. 10 of 16):

It is not enough to concede that our predecessors ... had a conception of the imagination that was too rationalistic and too intellectualized. If we do not have available a cosmology whose schema can include ... the plurality of universes in ascensional order, our imagination will remain *unbalanced*, its recurrent conjunctions with the will to power will be an endless source of horrors.

This urgent call for change demands the breakdown of boundaries between what we perceive as ‘real’ and what as ‘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’s dreamscape is essentially a struggle to unlock the concealed unmapped territory within our pre-conscious minds to achieve the post-conscious or ‘suprasensory’, which is ‘not perceptible except by the imaginative

consciousness' (Corbin 1964, pp. 8 & 9 of 16). By virtue of its constitution therefore, cyberspace becomes a bedrock for 'the hidden' and its reprisal, as the obscure is embedded in its very foundations.

Such an exercise, by implication, demands that there is a crossover point. Corbin (1964, p. 7 of 16) emphasises that 'there is no passage from one [world] to the other without a breach'; this breach is the original moment of creation, birth of the self and world consciousness. In the cyborgic figure of the ISO which acts as a facilitator of this rupture by promoting hybridisation, may lie the pathway to the reconciliation of opposites – 'The cyborg is a creature ... [that] exists outside the concepts of individuation and gender' (Haraway 1991, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 10). Haraway (1991, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p.10) explains:

... that the cyborgic body poses a challenge to the myth of a stable identity, of the Cartesian subject, since it implies the interpenetration between self and other. By crossing the borders between the human and the machine, the cyborg also splits other dualities, such as nature/culture, man/woman, original/copy, reality/appearance, etc.

It is arguably 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 even in the presence of numerous sides to a single construct (Wolfram MathWorld n.d., p. 1 of 1). This redressing of balance with the harmonious coexistence of a multiplicity of selves following the exposure of the schizoid state of human identity may be achieved synthetically, via the re-manufacturing of a more advanced human DNA at the hands of science. The most immediate conclusion to the progression of the human species to such a posthuman state of evolution as previously proposed, would be its genetic modification in the face of the discovery of a cyborgic body such as the ISO's. Haraway's (1991, cited in Goicoechea 2008, p. 10) interpenetration between self and other, machine and human, also arguably 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 then 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'.

This higher state of consciousness, however, may also be realised naturally as 'new ways of life will inevitably bring changes to our mental processes' (Goicoechea 2008,

p. 9). In his groundbreaking theory of cybernetics, Wiener (1954, cited in Bynum 2010, p. 427) championed ‘*the tremendous potential for learning and creative action*’ as in-built in ‘human beings’, echoing the core essence of Adams’ (2004) ‘fantasy principle’:

... the human individual ... is physically equipped ... for this capacity. Variety and possibility are inherent in the human sensorium – and indeed are the key to man’s [sic] most noble flights – because variety and possibility belong to the very structure of the human organism.

How would this mental transformation be biologically achievable? Roux (1881, cited in Churchill 2008, p. 2 of 3) argued that the ‘struggle for existence’ occurred at the ‘cellular and molecular’ level. Biological science has discovered the presence of ‘miracle cells’ involved in the transformation of the caterpillar (Judith 2008, p. 1 of 2). 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* [emphasis added]’ (Judith 2008, p. 1 of 2). They are carriers of ‘different information, vibrating to a different frequency – the frequency of the emerging butterfly’ (Judith 2008, p. 1 of 2). Quorra as an ISO possesses a natural thirst for knowledge – she is the epitome of life itself in her innate desire to grow in harmony with her environment and ultimately expand beyond it. Wiener’s (1954, cited in Bynum 2010, p. 427) advocacy of ‘*flourishing as a person*’ as ‘the overall *purpose* of life’ thus arguably translates the will to power, as well as the potential for the will to virtuality, into organic and inevitable processes in humanity’s evolutionary path.

The connection between this natural process of evolution, cyberspace and dreamscapes is profound. For Haraway (1991, p. 153) the cyborgic figure far exceeds human beings in their fluidity and simultaneous capacity for materiality and opaqueness:

Cyborgs are ether, quintessence. The ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs is precisely why these sunshine-belt machines are so deadly. They are as hard to see politically as materially. They are about consciousness – or its simulation.

The process of both cognitive and digital development is correspondingly initially concealed; in *Tron*, Dumant, the guardian of the gate that separates the External World and the Grid, states that '*all that is visible must grow beyond itself and extend into the realm of the invisible*'. This natural progression to growth may surprise the individuals themselves, as the 'alien within' is resisted in the face of the myth of stable identity (Lacan 1977, cited in Coyne 1999, p. 226). But this push towards change and the 'struggle towards freedom has an organic timing' as the obscure evolving modes of perception within the organism continue to fight for air, much like individual clusters of information inside the computer would have arguably continued to coalesce while staving off non-complementary data to form a complete whole, the Grid (Judith 2008, p. 1 of 2). In a similar fashion clusters of images and fantasies continually emerge and group together, both in 'real' space and cyberspace, despite resistance from the status quo to form new dreamscapes; at the End of Line Club a program speaks to Castor pleading for 'an audience' with Zuse to 'unite the factions', hinting at an underground revolution. It is noteworthy that this program's face is injured or partially 'corrupt' and has avoided rectification from the Recogniser and reintegration into its acceptable 'caterpillar' disk form, thus beginning to develop a cocoon out of which a new vision of existence may emerge. When he sees Sam he exclaims 'it has begun', with a distinct longing in his eyes, indicating that the process of imaginal cellular transformation is already at work even in digital life – this is a prime example of 'The cyborg ... [as] a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation' (Haraway 1991, p. 150). The cyborgic body of the ISO in *Tron: Legacy* therefore arguably points to the reinstatement of 'the imaginative consciousness' as a 'precise mode of perception', resulting in a natural modification in brain chemistry through cognitive change (Corbin 1964, p. 1 of 16).

But there is a further critical element in the transgression of traditional borders in Quorra and the concurrence of dualities within the cyborgic body, which is essential in presenting it as a key figure in the cellular regeneration of humanity. Coyne (1999, p. 13) argues that a prominent account of the Oedipus myth is the 'attempts to return to a state of childhood innocence ... when we were omnipotent participants in a whole' –



the importance of Quorra is found in her representation as the archetype of the *woman-child warrior*. This particular transgressive property of the cyborg 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 legend (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16). When Quorra is first introduced it is instantly obvious this 'supernatural figure of great beauty' is astonishingly skilled (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16). But there is something unique about this program; she possesses 'all the charms of ... Youth', and a child-like quality of being in awe of her world and what lies outside its confines (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16). Her eyes sparkle in amazement as she talks to Sam of authors and philosophers she has been reading about under Kevin's wing and descriptions of the natural world, hence representing the perfect embodiment of the miracle of life and its desire to flourish.

Significantly, Quorra adds that Kevin has been teaching her about 'the art of the selfless' and 'removing oneself from the equation' – this reveals the political importance of the obscurity of the cyborg and its potency. In their critique of capitalism and postmodern society Deleuze and Guattari (1972, cited in Holland 1986, pp. 301-302) argue that:

... the infantile narcissism fostered by the nuclear family is not *resolved* in adult life, but rather *reinforced and exasperated* by a social formation in which narcissism resonates everywhere that the logic of commodities and re-coding has penetrated.

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 program can be more human than human. The ISO features as a subversive figure to the contemporary social order – in direct contrast to this embedded narcissism Quorra fights for those she cares about, ready to sacrifice herself for them, and possesses an immense amount of empathy and sensitivity. Despite her kind having been subject to 'ethnic cleansing' by Clu who saw the ISOs as an 'imperfection' in his 'flawless' system, Quorra does not retaliate or lust for revenge; 'she can be powerful without having to lose her childlike sensibility' (HeyUGuys 2010). She is 'an entirely compassionate being', perhaps 'the best parts of humanity put into a program ... a selfless unlikely warrior', so innocent yet totally

capable of protecting herself and ‘those she loves’ (HeyUGuys 2010). Quorra embodies a ‘child leading an army’ reminiscent of similar historical figures such as ‘Joan of Arc’, and the transcendence to a higher egoless consciousness (HeyUGuys 2010). Her curiosity is exemplary of the Buddhist ‘beginner’s mind’ (HeyUGuys 2010), once again encapsulating Nietzsche’s (1882, cited in Graham 2002, p. 76) cycle of ‘eternal return’. This is the point of origin with which the ‘reintegrated soul’ reunites with, and the fourth and final state of consciousness as illustrated in Figure 6 (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 169). In Quorra’s ‘imaginative data’ (Corbin 1964, p. 6 of 16), therefore, we find the realisation of Ricoeur’s (1967, cited in Hefner 2010, p. 262) vision ‘of retrieving the power of myth in the journey from our childhood naiveté to a critical and reflective second naiveté’.

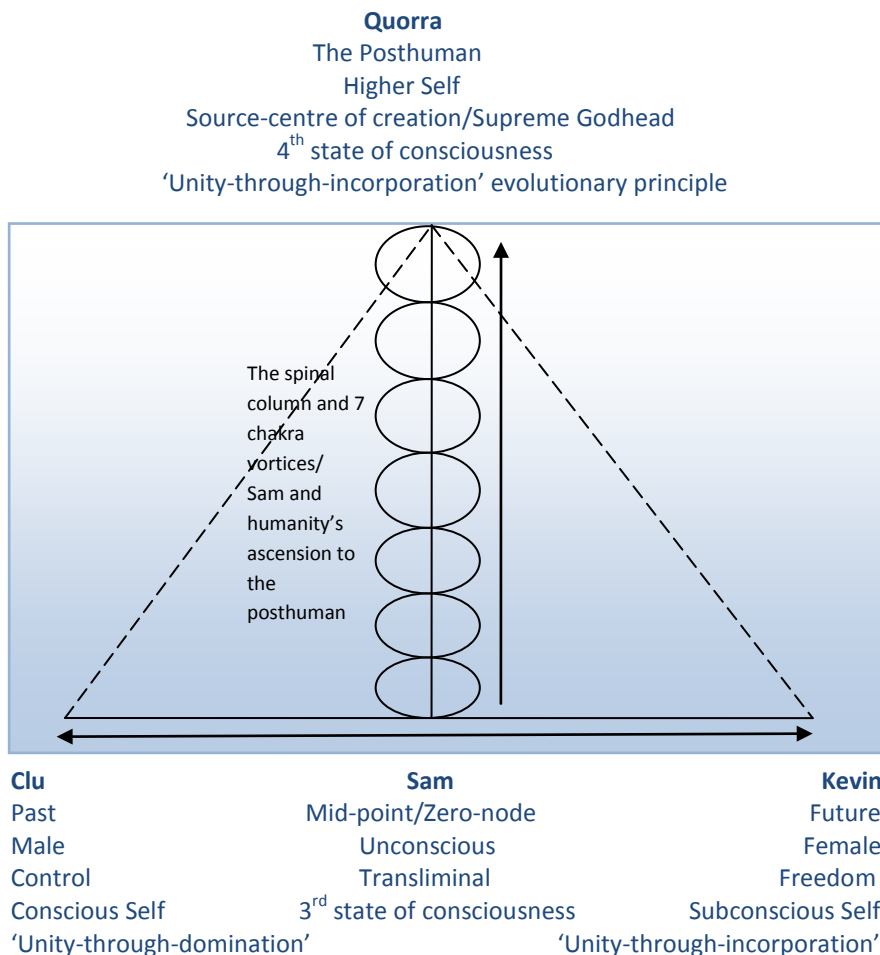


Figure 6: The ‘axis mundi’ discussed in Chapter 4 and the posthuman in the Tron universe revisited – Quorra supersedes all entities in the Grid, including the two digi-Gods, as the highest state of consciousness and evolutionary principle (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 34)

Source: based on Gardiner & Osborn (2006, pp. 41 & 170)

The case for the cycle of eternal return arguably begs the question – are we in fact abnormal now? Does our current level of being actually mark a deviation from our natural state and our true fate? When a younger Kevin is addressing the audience on his digital frontier he enthuses – ‘In there is a new world; in there, is our future; in there ... *is our destiny*’. In this light, the definition of the ‘“real”’ cyborg as ‘the product of *restorative* technology which returns to the organism its lost function [emphasis added]’, is accorded full merit with respect to this specific cyborgic representation of the ISO (Goicoechea 2008, p. 5). The Oedipus myth calls for an arrival to a familiar state of untarnished youth – Quorra returns to the corporeal self the use of an untrained ‘sensory faculty’, the displaced ‘*imaginative sight*’ (Corbin 1964, p. 8 of 16). The achievement of a sensibility that is an integrated state of maturity and childlike wonder in the ISO signals the ultimate absolution to the eternal conflict in the Oedipus myth and the redressing of the balance of opposites, signifying humanity’s ascension to the ‘unity-through-incorporation’ evolutionary principle (Haraway 1991, p. 157).

In arguably its most groundbreaking consequence, the return to a reformed second naiveté predicates the ‘fashioning [of] a symbiosis of modern science and premodern myth’ (Hefner 2010, p. 262), heralding the union of the two warring worlds of ‘rationalist and romantic legacies’ (Coyne 1999, p. 6) – the ISO features as information technology’s ‘archangelic entity’ (Corbin 1964, p. 16 of 16). These digital ‘“Angels”’ exist ‘in the free sublimity of the absolute [cyber] Heavens, where reality is unified with the ideal’ (Villiers de L’Isle-Adam 1883, cited in Corbin 1964, p. 16 of 16). Above all, they are ‘the *ekstasis*, the “displacement” or the departure from ourselves that is a “change of state” from our state’ (Corbin 1964, p. 16 of 16). The construction of the Grid and digital consciousness allowed humans like Kevin to gain access to the knowledge of the ISO and a dimension in which the romance of the technological miraculous is native to. This establishes *Tron: Legacy* as an instance of a ‘*healing fiction* [emphasis added]’ (Adams 2004, p. 177). The ISO’s angelic property affirms ‘the validity of dreams, symbolic rituals, the reality of places formed by intense meditation ... inspired imaginative visions, cosmogonies and theogonies’ and their reinstatement in the postmodern human consciousness (Corbin 1964, p. 6 of 16). 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 purity:

The awakening of the global heart results from transforming ... the unconscious, over-consuming bloat of the caterpillar into a creature of exquisite beauty, grace, and freedom. This coming of age process takes us to a new mythic reality, a larger story, ripe with meaning and direction. It takes us from the naive egocentricity of childhood into a larger reality of interdependent reciprocity. It is not a passage that ends in the gray grimness of adult responsibility, denying the colourful spirituality of childhood innocence. Rather, it is a reclaiming of wholeness that denies little, and embraces all. (Judith 2008, p. 1 of 2)

Quorra's cyborgic representation therefore exemplifies an instance of the successful resolution to the enduring 'myth of unity and fragmentation' (Coyne 1999, p. 257), and the adoption of an unparalleled worldview in which 'the activity of imaginative perception truly assumes the aspect of a *hierognosis*, a higher sacral knowledge' (Corbin 1964, p. 11 of 16).

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 enter its 'third age' (McLuhan 1962, cited in Coyne 1999, p.2). Here, the entire planet is its tribe as we are reunited with the magic of existence via the 'incessant buzz of electronic communications' and information/images as key mediatory agents (McLuhan 1962, cited in Coyne 1999, p.2). The cyborgic body in *Tron: Legacy* is a call to completely reinterpret all sciences 'in more miraculous terms' and '*imagine ... an entirely new way to 'be'* ' (McTaggart 2009, pp. 2 & 3 of 3). McTaggart (2009, p. 1 of 3) observes that 21<sup>st</sup> century science is slowly but surely 'remaking the world'; a growing re-conceptualisation reveals that 'at our essence, we exist as a unity... in a vast quantum web of connection'. In the technoromantic search for a 'new ... order of unity through information', cyberspace provides an opportunity to move out of a state of individuation and reconnect with our own psyches and the world at large (Coyne 1999, p. 2). As imaginal cells seek other 'kin' cells at a similar 'frequency' and begin to group together in a cohesive whole, they 'become centers of awakening in the new body politic' (Judith 2008, p. 2 of 2). Though previously in isolation, these:

Co-hearts share a kin-dom – not a kingdom ruled by a king but a kin-dom where everyone is kin. Co-hearts are like the cells, and kin-doms are the organs of the body politic. (Judith 2008, p. 2 of 2)

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, and

assert their will to power. The Grid then becomes a quintessential attempt to enter ‘a group mind never before experienced’ and the realisation of ‘an alternative religious symbolic that enable[s] us to articulate different kinds of relationships to the material world, and to value different kinds of scientific epistemologies and technological endeavours’ (Graham 2002, pp. 73 & 76).

In the post-Enlightenment era the ‘I’ prevailed over the ‘we’; but in this shifting tapestry a new human rises like the phoenix from the ashes of its former singular self. Adams (2004, p. 180) asserts that:

One form of imaginal therapy, with both personal and political consequences, would thus entail the metaphorical experience of multiple stories, a multitude of multicultural stories. The result would be not a single ego, one realist “I” with no variations, but a “multi-individual” with a potentializing, potentiating capacity continually to deliteralize and then reimagine – or re-story – the world throughout life.

In perhaps its most potent expression as a healing narrative, the Grid presents a platform in which Sam re-stories life by embarking on a new chapter of this ‘father-son fiction’ and re-mythologising cyberspace by creating not only a complex imaginal tale of ‘fatherhood and sonhood’, but of humanity and posthumanity (Adams 2004, pp. 175 & 177). Sam saves Kevin in the end, as much as Kevin saves Sam with his self-sacrifice. Kevin, Sam and Clu all have one thing in common: they are branded and connected to each other by their pain. Both father and son have been trapped in time by the battle between the two competing forces; just as it did for Kevin, so too has time stood still for Sam. Kevin was dying a slow death, isolated in his tower. He had lost faith not only in himself, but the dreamscape that ‘turned against’ him – in *Tron: Legacy* Sam brings hope back to his father. Kevin begins to dream of the possibility of life outside the Grid decades later, and to cease being a slave to the past. As in Zoja’s (2001, cited in Adams 2004, p. 182) investigation of the mythical father figure, a young Kevin/Clu, an older Kevin and Sam ‘ “constitute a genealogical tree that makes its way into the future”. This lineage, is ... “the transmission of fatherhood from one generation to the next” ’. These simultaneously present three myths ‘demonstrate a progressive transformation of the image of the father from a definition of the father exclusively as a warrior’ (Adams 2004, p. 183). Kevin and Sam break out of the cycle of the hunger for power and control, thus paving the road to a more inclusive, proactive yet peaceful construction of manhood, and re-writing the story of father-son relations in these crucial times.

Finally, Sam heals himself. He is no longer the absent son, now engaged in his fate and hopeful for the first time in years. During a flashback in the beginning of the movie to a young Sam running away on his bicycle when he finds out his father is gone, a reporter narrates in the background: 'What will become of Flynn's legacy and the future of ENCOM will most likely depend on what becomes of this now orphan little boy'. In the final scenes it is clear that the future of not only his father's – now his – company, but the world itself, lies with Sam. Just as it is prophesised that 'the destiny of Aeneas and the Trojans who flee Troy is eventually to arrive at Italy where they, through the line of Aeneas, are to found the Roman Empire', so too is Sam's destiny to flee the Grid and found a new age in the External World (Adams 2004, p. 182). Sam's ascension through the portal in union with Quorra is befittingly symbolic. Their rise together amidst the destruction of the two fathers or adversarial human drives on either end of the scale symbolises the union of the male and female, reaffirming his place as the third 'transliminal' state of consciousness or 'zero node' (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 23 & 25). But most significantly, via this union and by holding Kevin's disk above them, Sam also symbolically ascends to the 'superconscious' or fourth state of consciousness (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, p. 169). This is the rising of the 'sun [digital] disk' and the 'Eternal Now' between the two Godheads or 'lions', 'past' and 'future', depicted in Figures 6 and 7 (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 169 & 170). The image of the sun rising both in the Grid and upon their return to the External World, symbolises 'rebirth' and the path opening for humanity's unification with the 'source-centre' of creation, 'point of enlightenment' or 'inner sun' (Gardiner & Osborn 2006, pp. 39, 46 & 170). It is the genesis and passage 'through a new portal', as humanity 'leave[s] behind the Age of Scarcity and enter[s] into the new Age of Plenitude' (Siegmond 1999, p. 14).

Beyond the Grid a user finds a 'superior *self*' – but they must first return to 'the point of departure' and 'bathe' in the portal's light or 'the Spring of Life', as Sam does, emerging a new man with this newfound knowledge (Corbin 1964, p. 2 of 16). When he and Quorra ride off into the sunrise she is seeing the External World for the first time; *her* myth has become a reality. As the two universes converge the earth also wakes up to a new mythic reality, to which the fantasy that was the Grid now belongs. This is the dawn of a New World rising from the ashes of the Old World. In this reconciliation 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 postmodern world and a symbol of how we can heal ourselves and each other in the process – *they are his legacy*.



Figure 7: Ascension – Sam and Quorra, carriers of a new world and vision for humanity, activate the portal to exit the Grid into ‘a new mythic reality’ (Judith 2008, p. 1 of 2)

Source: *Sam and Quorra from Disney's Tron: Legacy wallpaper* (n.d., p. 2 of 3)

## Conclusion

Kevin and Sam Flynn's experience at the edge of the Imaginal World is our experience at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the journey of the 21<sup>st</sup> century still in its infant stage yet to take shape. *Tron: Legacy* as cyberpunk fiction is already re-storying our own world and re-mythologising life in the postmodern era, as movies become bridges between 'real and imagined worlds' (Etxeberria 2008, p. 7). As with other digital narratives the cyborgic figure here brings together in the one space 'technoromantic and cybergothic extremes' (Goicoechea 2008, p. 10). But it also makes a vital statement – the cyborg in the Tron universe heralds the advent of a new mindset that embraces an integrated complexity, in stark contrast to the modern concept of individuality and the disconnectedness it fosters. This new paradigm calls for the embedding of the fantastic in the everyday – just as the caterpillar must hang upside down, so too does the whole application of the 'fantasy principle' signify that we must completely reconsider what we take for granted as real and rational (Adams 2004). The world as we know it will be turned in on its head ' "To make the extraordinary seem ordinary, and cause the ordinary to seem extraordinary" ' (Bradbury 1966, cited in Etxeberria 2008, p. 2). Our very survival as a species is arguably at stake if we do not awaken to this shifting reality, no matter how sobering that process may be. The Imaginal World is like a blank canvass – the future and technology will be what we bring to it. The 'imaginative consciousness' (Corbin 1964, p. 1 of 16) may be a gateway to a higher state of survival, and the robustness of the ' "mythopoeic imagination" ' (Jung 1963, cited in Adams 2004, p. 67) a chance to respect contradictions and free the human mind. Following on from an emerging quantum sensibility a single dreamscape never stands alone. This 'unity in diversity' results in an interconnected web of dreams that wait in the shadows until they materialise through sheer courage and conviction in 'the unseen'; it is these co-dreamers and their imagery that will provide the foundations for a new world (Coyne 2004, p. 5). Dreamscapes are therefore ultimately leaps of faith, re-establishing the currency of Campbell's (1949) timeless 'hero's journey' and its potency for the ' "re-enchantment" ' (Graham 2002, p. 72) of our times. As a digital fantasy *Tron: Legacy* is the delivery of Chopra's (2009, cited in Red Room 2009, p. 1 of 3) message for each one of us to 'be imaginal cells for humanity', back to a time when we still dared to dream – and that was all we needed to propel us into the stratosphere.



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