

# Cyberpunk and Transhumanist Ideas in Phillip K. Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?", Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner" and Denis Villeneuve's "Blade Runner 2049"

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

Cyberpunk and Transhumanist Ideas in Phillip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*

(Smjer: Anglistika, književno-kulturološki)

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*Srpak*

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## **Introduction**

Science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick explores the themes of cyberpunk, posthumanism and transhumanism through the portrayal of androids who closely resemble humans. These themes are further explored in the movies *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, which are based on the novel. The films have added new dimensions to the discussion of cyberpunk, posthumanism and transhumanism, including the ethics of creating and controlling artificial life, the blurred lines between what it means to be human or alternatively non-human, and the potential consequences of playing God with technology. This thesis aims to explore the post- and transhumanist aspects present in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and how they are further developed in the Blade Runner films. In order to develop the necessary theoretical framework to explore and analyse cyberpunk and its aspects in the novel and the films, the development of the genre of science fiction, as well as the contextualisation of cyberpunk within it, will be discussed. In addition, this thesis will argue that the exploration of posthumanism and transhumanism in the aforementioned novel and its adaptations reveal a complex interplay of ethical, existential and societal questions. Specifically, it will demonstrate how these works challenge conventional notions of humanity, morality and the consequences of technological advancement. By examining the evolution of these themes from the novel to the films, this thesis aims to shed light on the evolving discourse surrounding the potential ramifications of blurring the lines between human and artificial, ultimately highlighting the need for responsible and thoughtful engagement with emerging technologies.

## From SF Themes to the SF Genre

Before the themes of trans- and posthumanism can be analysed and interpreted in the context of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and its film adaptations, theoretical groundwork in relation to the history of the genre of science fiction and the evolution of cyberpunk within it has to be laid out.

Science fiction, as a literary genre, has captivated readers for over a century with its imaginative and thought-provoking narratives that explore the possibilities and consequences of scientific advancements, technological innovations, and societal transformations. Over time, science fiction has evolved and diversified, keeping in line with and reflecting the evolution of human capabilities and thought, and also the shift in cultural, political and technological landscapes of the societies in which it emerged.

Though the genre of science fiction and its myriad subgenres are ubiquitous and commonplace in today's literary landscape, the topics and ideas that are prominent in sf and in fiction generally have been around for a long time, even as early as Ancient Greece. In *The History of Science Fiction* Adam Roberts argues that "the roots of what we now call science fiction are found in the fantastic voyages of the Ancient Greek novel; and I use the Vernean phrase *voyages extraordinaires*, which I find to be the most supple and useful descriptor for these sorts of texts" (Roberts 7). These narratives involve travel and adventures, often featuring fantastical elements that defy the laws of reality. Given that the Greeks were actively engaged in actual travel and exploration, Roberts finds that the cultural inclination toward travel and exploration is not surprising and goes on to distinguish a new category of *voyage extraordinaire*, namely the journeys into the sky and even to other planets, which represents "a radical departure from the traditional mode of traveller's tales." (Roberts 7) Furthermore, Roberts highlights, amongst others, the classical author Lucian as a "father of science fiction", with two of his most important works being the *Ikaromenippos* and the *True History* (27). These two entries into Lucian's oeuvre stand out as examples of *voyage extraordinaire*, as they describe fantastical and otherworldly journeys to the Moon.

While the journeys could in and of itself be described as aspects of sf, Roberts argues that Lucian's motivation was not tied to the scientific, but to the religious and mythological:

Lucian finds a harmony and imaginative strength in the religious, mythic discourses of the cosmos, where he tends only to ridicule the philosophical or 'scientific' discourses.

(...) It would be more accurate to see Lucian as anti-SF rather than proto-SF: but anti-SF nevertheless involves an engagement in the terms of SF. (Roberts 29)

In other words, although the fiction of the time and its themes had a religious undertone, it is clear that themes that would be prominent in the sf genre later on were already present and that the underlying school of thought was evolving. In fact, as Roberts explains, the traditional belief that Lucian was the first science fiction author carries an ironic twist: he actually marked the end, not the beginning, of a long-standing tradition of fantastical voyages to the skies and planets in the classical world (30).

Even though ancient fiction delved into topics that would go on to become staples of the sf genre, Roberts explains that what followed was an over a millennium long discontinuity until the same themes would rise to prominence again, which was the result of, essentially, the overall collapse of literary culture and literacy itself (30). This 1,100-year hiatus, lasting from around AD 400 up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, also known as the Dark or the Middle Ages, was not so much underscored by a lack of works of fiction, but much more by the religious undertone and inspiration present in them. Roberts recognizes that though there certainly were many fantastical tales, voyages and romances throughout the centuries, they were mostly earthbound, and the ones that did venture away from Earth “inhabited a wholly religious, theological and supernatural idiom” (Roberts 32). Travels to the Moon and explorations of the cosmos again take the centre stage in these otherworldly tales, with Roberts highlighting Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* as key works that exemplified the state of fiction in the Middle Ages (32-34). Furthermore, he goes on to explain that within the constraints of religious authority and before the scientific paradigm shift of the later centuries, writers of that age did not have the required possibilities that would allow for the development of sf aspects: any imaginative effort that would be required for sf was governed by religion and any attempt at the exploration of the cosmos was constrained by the limits of the then known material realm (32-34).

The year that would mark the aforementioned paradigm shift that affected the totality of Western civilization and, consequently, the trajectory of the development of science and science fiction was the year 1600. Adam Roberts emphasizes astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus and speculative thinker Giordano Bruno as key figures of this period and even goes on to attribute the rebirth of science fiction to the latter: “Science fiction was reborn in one year, 1600, the year that the Catholic Inquisition burned Giordano Bruno the Nolan at the stake for arguing in favour of the notion that the universe was infinite and contained innumerable worlds” (Roberts

36). However, as Roberts notes, Bruno's work would not have been possible had it not been for Copernicus' observations and suggestions that Earth and its surrounding planets all orbit the Sun, which led to the re-evaluation, expansion and materialisation of the scale and scope of the cosmos (37). Moreover, Roberts focuses on the growing discrepancy between the cosmological accounts of science and religion, after Giordano Bruno adopted Copernicus' teachings and spread them across Europe, and reflects on the speculative and scientific aspects that Giordano Bruno implemented in his philosophy (37). According to Roberts, the resulting impact was twofold and crucial for aspects of science fiction to develop:

First, it created an imaginative space in which humanity might encounter radically different beings – aliens, the Other, the material embodiments of the alterity that drives the mode. (...) The second thing that the new cosmology reveals is the much grander scale of the universe, which in turn permits and indeed requires a corresponding aesthetic of the sublime. This attachment to the sublime – or, to invoke the common phrase from twentieth-century SF, the 'sense of wonder' – provoked by gigantic scale, enormous devices or very long stretches of time may not define the whole genre of SF, but remains integral to many fans' appreciation of the form. (40)

In essence, Giordano Bruno's and Copernicus' work was crucial not only to the development of sf aspects before the inception of the genre, having widened the scope of thinking and having introduced new spaces and landscapes for potential writers of fiction to make use of, but also to the development of science in general. Though the influence of the Church was still present at the start of the century, the growing discrepancy between its dogmatic teachings and the now developing notion of the scientific method, along with new discoveries being so frequent, allowed for the notion of science to take on a new meaning.

In *The Cambridge Guide to Science Fiction* Brian Stableford connects science to reliable knowledge, which is "rooted in the evidence of the senses, carefully sifted by deductive reasoning and the experimental testing of generalisations" (Stableford 15). In other words, Stableford explains the inception of the scientific method (15), which is based on experiments and the repetition of experiments with modifications to produce a desired result. This approach facilitated the growth and development of knowledge and advances in human understanding. Naturally, such a paradigm shift prompted writers of the time to ponder and imagine the possibilities that this method would eventually make available. Stableford mentions the



speculative aspects of early sf as the byproduct of the writers' imagination and how it found its place in other genres, as the genre of science fiction had not been established yet: "Writers began producing speculative fictions about new discoveries and technologies that the application of scientific method might bring about, the earliest examples being accommodated – rather uncomfortably – within existing genres and narrative frameworks" (Stableford 15). Although existing genres were hardly compatible with the new notion of the scientific method, the genre of utopian fantasy stood out and proved to be the ideal vessel for conveying such ideas, as the primary narrative form, according to Stableford, had been the imaginary voyage (15). Furthermore, Stableford mentions three pioneers of utopian writing, which can be considered early sf: Francis Bacon with his work *New Atlantis*, Johann Valentin Andreae with *Christianopolis* and Tommaso Campanella with *La Città del Sole (The City of the Sun)*. Of these writers, Bacon was the champion of the scientific method and was one of the first to implement it into his traveller's tales, but Andreae's and Campanella's works hinted towards the importance of technological progress to social reform as well (15). However, as the then current zeitgeist was still mostly one of humanism and religiousness, Stableford asserts that the trend of the scientific method and its interpretation in literature did not catch on immediately, but was sidelined and often met with apprehension:

Most subsequent utopian fantasies took scientific and technological advancement into account, but relegated it to a minor role while matters of social, religious and political reform remained centre stage. Nor were those writers who took account of scientific progress always enthusiastic about it; Baconian optimism prompted a backlash of hostility from those who perceived a threat to religious values in the secularizing tendencies of religion and the materialistic encouragements of technology. (15)

Of course, utopian fantasy predates even the aforementioned three pioneers of early science fiction, and was itself pioneered by Thomas More with his seminal 1516 work *Utopia*, where a voyage to an imaginary island is the thematic centrepiece. Although the utopian voyage must be considered a separate literary idea when it comes to analysing its role in the inception and development of science fiction, Adam Roberts in *The History of Science Fiction* argues that

they are an important component of the ongoing developments of SF precisely because they mediate a general cultural fascination with otherness in material terms: lands that might actually be reached by a voyager, strange but *material* new forms of human life

and society and so on. The sub-genre, in other words, runs parallel to the extraterrestrial *voyage extraordinaire* of SF. (54)

As mentioned before, this fascination with otherness and strange new technological possibilities was in stark contrast to the religious tendencies of the time and the restriction levied by the Catholic Church, which impeded the spread of the now developing ideas and kind of thought. Adam Roberts reaffirms the aforementioned writers as pioneers, who introduced sf topics and concepts that would later be explored in the genre, stemming from More's seed and recognizes the importance of utopian writing in overcoming these restrictions and allowing writers to express their new ideas: "A very extensive tradition of utopian writing grew from More's seed. (...) utopias allowed thinkers to exceed the imaginative impedimenta imposed by the Catholic Church, they provided conceptual possibilities that were akin to science fiction proper" (Roberts 54). Moreover, Roberts finds a crucial difference between More's utopia and the works of Francis Bacon and Tommaso Campanella, namely the increased significance of technological and scientific advancements:

... although Campanella's vision is more technologically inventive: land-carts driven by great sails and self-propelling ships and flying machines are mentioned in passing, and elements of science and culture are written on the walls for public edification. (...) Francis Bacon (...) is often credited with advancing the cause of what today we would call 'science'. His fragmentary utopia, *New Atlantis* (...) does contain a certain amount of speculative science, including glancing allusion to submarines and automata. (55)

As mentioned before, through its early development, the imaginary voyage was the preferred literary device of early science fiction. However, Brian Stableford finds a fallacy in the more extreme versions of the fantastic voyage, where it was more akin to the format of religious fantasy or the dream story, as "imaginary voyages found it convenient to cross interplanetary space their devices became phantasmagorical, and dreaming remained the only plausible means of gaining access to the future until the late nineteenth century" (Stableford 16). The lack of actual technological advances at the time made it difficult to imagine any practical means of interplanetary travel, much less implement it into a literary work, so the writers had to settle for dreaming as a narrative device, which did not go in line with the scientific method. Therefore, traditional narrative devices were not suitable for expressing such ideas and Stableford argues that their adaptation to the work of speculative fiction laboured under several handicaps, namely

the chronic frivolity of travels into inaccessible regions and the aforementioned literary dreams, which were just figments of one's imagination and destroyed upon awakening (18). These limitations would not be addressed until the nineteenth century.

Although scholars of early science fiction debate over the issue, most of them are of the opinion that Mary Shelley's seminal 19<sup>th</sup>-century work *Frankenstein* is the starting point of the science fiction genre, Adam Roberts disagrees, but still concedes that "this tale has a good claim to the title of 'most influential nineteenth-century novel', and its presence in subsequent SF cannot be denied" (93). While it is true that the amended version of the novel displays some ideas in relation to the developing technology and science of the time, e.g., the "spark" (electricity) that gave life to the monster and the monster being an automaton constructed from lifeless parts, Adam Roberts argues that the scientific facet of this novel is to be primarily understood as an ideological endeavour, as the monster essentially represents the alienated proletariat of the Industrial Age and that is why it resonated with its 19<sup>th</sup>-century readership (93-95). However, with *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley did create an archetypal figure that transcended the literary genre and with its immense impact pushed the envelope regarding early science fiction (Roberts 95).

Also contrary to the accepted belief, Brian Stableford argues that the first writer to make an attempt at creating a narrative framework suitable for writing science fiction and employing the scientific method was Edgar Allan Poe (18). He names Poe's poem "Sonnet – to Science" and his essay "Eureka" as the most prominent examples of his endeavours to "find literary means of communicating and celebrating the wonders of science". (18) Furthermore, Stableford also adds that Poe's preface to his lunar voyage story *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* "became the first tentative manifesto for modern sf" (18). In the story, the protagonist Hans Pfaall describes his journey to the moon via a strange balloon operated by an alien and recounts the nineteen days it took him to reach the surface. Although the story ends rather abruptly and with a hoax ending, Adam Roberts argues that in it, Poe represents "the dialectic relationship between playfulness and 'scientific' seriousness" (103), a dialectic which "is also the aesthetic underpinning of science fiction: the interplay between the imaginative and the scientific" (103). With his interplay between imagination and science, Poe's idea of a narrative framework for writing science fiction was beginning to take shape. Roberts also notes Poe's deliberation to describe the real world in a satirical tone, while reserving the scientific descriptions for his off-world journey, thereby giving it more credence:

There is a greater imaginative gravity and appeal, a greater literary punch, in this aspect of Poe's conception than in the puffed-up ridiculousness of the 'real' world described. He gives us numerous pseudo-scientific observations, performs experiments upon the birds and cats he has brought with him, and leavens his account with various precise-looking numbers. (103)

Moreover, Roberts claims that Poe's matter-of-fact manner in which he describes the fantastic was his greatest contribution to the genre (103) and that the notion of "intuitive imagination (rather than deductive or inductive reasoning) should be the motor of advancements in science" (103). With his conviction, Poe in essence produced a blueprint for early science fiction works and paved the way for future SF writers.

One of those subsequent SF writers that played an important role in the development of the genre is H. G. Wells. Brian Stableford finds Wells to be a direct successor to Poe in regards to the development of early sf and argues that "it was not until H. G. Wells got involved that anyone replicated Poe's determination to explore the utility of a whole range of narrative frameworks. The sudden surge of new periodicals provided the perfect arena for Wells to conduct his experiments in speculation" (23-24). Consequently, as Stableford notes, and in order to replace the aforementioned use of the obsolete literary device of dreams to travel to a distant future or to a distant planet, Wells used "the idea of time as a 'fourth dimension', to provide an apologetic jargon for a new facilitating device: the time machine" (24). Having been introduced in the novel of the same name *The Time Machine* (1895), the time machine as a literary device "became the first of a series of facilitating devices that opened up the farther reaches of time and space to a kind of rational enquiry that had previously been severely handicapped by its reliance on obsolete narrative frameworks" (24). Not only did Wells produce new literary devices, but, according to Roberts, he also adapted previous sf modes and ideas, such as transforming the already present scientific romance and advancing it to modern science fiction (143). Moreover, Roberts claims that focusing primarily on the scientific and philosophical aspects of his works detracts from Wells' actual goal about narrative and genre: "As against critics who see the premise of the novella (a machine that can travel through time) as a means of examining evolution in action, or as a facilitator for class satire, we can read it as a Suvinian 'novum' for narrative itself, a piece of self-reflexive textuality" (145). Although he made a significant contribution to the paradigm shift of literary devices in scientific and speculative writing with his implementation of the time machine and antigravity technology, Stableford concedes that Wells "never invented or used any significant facilitating device after 1901" (24). Notwithstanding the lack

of innovation after his most significant works, Stableford goes on to highlight Wells as having “single-handedly laid the groundwork for the distinctive methods of modern SF, employing the narrative technique he had developed (...) to reinvigorate the narrative framework of the moral *conte philosophique* far more effectively than anyone had previously contrived” (25). Same as with Poe, Wells’ trailblazing endeavour to find a suitable narrative framework for science fiction was brief but crucial to the further development of the genre, as his work was, as Stableford puts it, “an invitation to writers of action-adventure fiction enthusiastic to work on wider stages in a more spectacular manner than naturalistic fiction would ever permit, as well as to speculative fabulists” (25).

Wells’ invitation would not go unanswered, as many writers felt inspired to add their own take to speculative fiction, which led to the proliferation and diversification of the genre (Stableford 26). Stableford maintains that the genre was expanding and was largely inspired by and published in new scientific periodicals, especially in the USA, as it had not been until 1917 that the USA joined “the Great War”. Furthermore, the diminished impact of the war in conjunction with readily available cheap paper “encouraged the rapid growth of ‘pulp magazines’ specializing in garish melodramas, which inherited the commercial genres identified by the dime novels” (29). Though they were at first a vessel for melodramas, pulp magazines would also become the medium of more scientific and speculative writing. Stableford highlights Hugo Gernsback as the inventor “of the new genre of ‘scientifiction’” (30), which was a “didactic enterprise intended to spread enthusiasm for the various technological devices (including radio sets) that Gernsback imported and sold” (30). Having found its vessel in pulp magazines and having been influenced by Gernsback’s scientific rhetoric, Stableford claims that “it was from this point that the collaborative work of horizon-expansion, social extrapolation and moral sophistication which has been the labour and triumph of modern science fiction began anew” (31), ushering in the magazine era of science fiction.

Science fiction as a genre came into its own during the so-called magazine era and established itself as a serious outlet for writers, both from an inspirational and commercial standpoint. Brian Attebery argues that, though seminal pieces of sf in this era were published in several different types of medium, it was “sf magazines (...) that were chiefly responsible for creating a sense of sf as a distinctive genre” (32). One of the most renowned and influential magazines of that era was the aforementioned Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories*, where Gernsback attempted to promote stories and writing in line with his newly coined genre of scientifiction. Attebery underscores *Amazing Stories* as the first magazine to narrow its scope

to “scientific extrapolation and outer-space adventure” (33) and also to replace the original name of the genre and start referring to it as “science fiction” (33). Although the name science fiction had now been bestowed upon the genre, a name by which it is most recognizable today, several other factors had to come together to form the core principles that define it and the magazines that promoted it. Attebery recognizes these factors as being “the literary mode to which Gernsback refers, a mode often called ‘scientific romance’, (...) the collection of popular story-telling formulas that developed in dime novels and pulp magazines” and “scientific journalism” (34). The term scientific journalism was by far the most important factor in defining science fiction and sf magazines, since it went in line with the primary purpose which Gernsback envisaged for *Amazing Stories*, which was, according to Attebery, “not only to educate but also to convert his readers to the habit of thinking about the future” (34). The success of Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories* brought about a boom in the sf magazine development in the 1940s and 1950s, with the most notable new additions to the market being *Astounding Stories* (later renamed to *Astounding Science-Fiction*) by John W. Campbell and *Galaxy Science Fiction* by Horace L. Gold. Attebery confirms that it was in the latter of the aforementioned magazines that Philip K. Dick, one of the focal points of this thesis, first appeared with some of his major stories (44).

Many journals and stories published therein attracted numerous readers and accomplished the widespread acclaim of the sf genre. Adam Roberts even goes further in claiming that “SF, its assumptions and icons were now part of the mental furniture of most Americans – and most Europeans as well. There are good reasons why the decades that followed, the 1940s and 1950s, are known as ‘the Golden Age’” (193). The Golden Age of Science Fiction encompasses works published from 1940 until 1960 and owes its name to the fandom of the genre (Roberts 195). Furthermore, Roberts highlights the aforementioned John W. Campbell, the editor of *Astounding*, as having had the most significant role in spreading authoritative notions about the proper characteristics of science fiction (195) and explains the core tenets of the genre: “‘Hard SF’, linear narratives, heroes solving problems or countering threats in a space-opera or a technological adventure idiom” (195). As Campbell was a scholar of his predecessor Gernsback, the stories that he approved of and published all had to share common characteristics and be “rooted in recognisable science” (Roberts 195) and, as Roberts maintains, contain “can-do stories about heroes solving problems or overcoming enemies, expansionist humano-centric (and often phallo-centric) narratives, extrapolations of possible technologies and their social

and human impacts” (195). Although Campbell and his *Astounding* introduced the wider audience to some of sf’s greatest writers, e.g., Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein and A. E. van Vogt, his strict stipulations bringing about new form of literature in terms of sf, Roberts claims that his approach was too restrictive and that it resulted in subsequent writers trying to step away from the same cookie-cutter fiction and offer a dialectic alternative (196). It did not help that, when humanity achieved what sf of the Golden Age was trying envisage, those achievements led to a realisation that space travel and adventures were not only not yet viable, but also dull; consequently, the optimism around it started to wane (Roberts 230). Roberts explains that what followed was a radical response to the genre of science fiction, which also came from its exhaustion and Campbell’s restrictive practices: “The science-fictional response to this was complex; a Hard SF denial, or an insistence on looking beyond NASA’s limitations by some; a reconfiguring of the logics of the genre by others ...” (230). Thus, the ‘New Wave’ of science fiction emerged.

The phrase ‘New Wave’ denotes a loosely connected group of writers from the 1960s and 70s who, in various ways, responded against the established norms of conventional science fiction. Their response led to the creation of innovative, unconventional and experimental forms of the genre (Roberts 230-231). As mentioned before, Roberts argues that the cause of this sudden shift in the trajectory of science fiction was the exhaustion of the genre and its ideas: “By the 1960s so much SF had been published, so many ingenious ideas developed and fleshed out, that thinking of something new, bringing novelty to the SF novel, was becoming harder and harder” (231). Burdened by the focus on the ideas and technological advancements, writers began to reassess the standard approach to sf, and instead opted to experiment with the form, style and aesthetics of the genre (Roberts 231). Aside from the focus on the formal aspects of sf, the ‘New Wave’ introduced another new notion, that of the messiah (Roberts 232). Furthermore, Roberts underscores Robert A. Heinlein with *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Frank Herbert with *Dune* and Philip K. Dick with *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* as the most important and influential authors and works of the 1960s, all of which display messianic tendencies (232-233). The reasoning behind these tendencies was twofold: on the one hand, there was a sentiment of deep anxiety and the fear of nuclear annihilation, as human technology had developed to the point of catching up to apocalyptic visions of previous generations (Roberts 233). On the other hand, Roberts asserts that it had to do with the determining logics of the genre itself:

While space travel (the ur-narrative of SF) remained something to look forward to in an imagined future, that future event inflected the idiom of SF as transcendence, a metaphor

for a more literal escape velocity. (...) Nuts-and-bolts accounts of space travel in a fictional idiom seemed less enthralling; space travel as mystical passage chimed more with the spirit of the age. In place of transcendence, SF reverted to one of its core, ordinary anxieties: all we have learnt, all of our new science and technology, all that we know now about the cosmos – does this not fatally degrade the uniqueness and effectiveness of the very idea of the messiah? (233)

In essence, ‘New Wave’ science fiction became more introverted, pessimistic and philosophical and pondered on the impact of human discoveries on themselves and on the Earth. In other words, the genre was “looking back rather than a looking forward” (Roberts 233). Furthermore, the genre was growing more and more political, the prime example being Herbert’s *Dune* and its sequels, in which the writer depicts “the coming of the messiah in an accurately observed political context, noting as he did so how close the messianic impulse is to the fascistic” (Roberts 236).

Though the aforementioned writers undeniably made their mark in the context of ‘New Wave’ science fiction, Roberts highlights Philip K. Dick as being “the most important SF writer of the twentieth century” (240) and as having gone furthest in “his intervention into the matter of the messiah...” (240). A common thread found throughout Dick’s oeuvre is his skilful exploration of the concept that reality may not align with its outward appearance. According to Dick, reality and one’s sense of self hinge on perception, which is intrinsically unreliable (Roberts 240). In his dynamic imagination, no reality holds ultimate authority, eroding trust, which might induce a degree of paranoia, anxiety and even mental instability, all of which Dick seemingly deemed fitting and even beneficial (Roberts 240). In his most famous novel, and the focal point of this thesis, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Dick introduces a new brand of sf, where not only the titular androids, but also the human characters are completely “alienated from their own emotions, relying instead on synthetic emotions generated by ‘mood organs’...” (Roberts 241). Moreover, as Roberts maintains, the religion within this context is also subject to mechanization and commercialization, exemplified by the portrayal of the messiah figure, Wilbur Mercer, as an elderly individual (241). This peculiar and deliberately fabricated religion counterbalances the concept of ‘kipple’, which is Dick’s coinage used to denote useless, worthless clutter or junk that accumulates and multiplies over time. Pervasive in the novel’s envisioned reality, the inexorable dominance of kipple is juxtaposed with the ongoing ascent of Wilbur Mercer, symbolizing hope and opposition against kipple’s pull (Roberts 241).



As the thesis focuses on Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and its cinematic adaptations that are often labelled as cyberpunk, the next chapter deals with this specific sub-genre of sf.

## Cyberpunk

In his *Reflections on "Cyberpunk"* Mark Bould attributes the coinage of the term to Bruce Bethke for the title of his short story "Cyberpunk" published in *Amazing*, which, a year later, would become the defining term for works from notable sf writers William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Lewis Shiner, Pat Cadigan, and Greg Bear (217). The word cyberpunk itself consists of two words that have had a defining impact on the culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that each have a separate meaning pertaining to the core principles of the cyberpunk movement: Bould makes the distinction and explains that "'cyber' was taken from cybernetics (the Greek root of which means 'to steer'), a term coined in 1948 by Norbert Wiener to describe a new science devoted to the study of communication and control systems in animals and machines" (218) and that, as "Punk" is associated with punk rock, it "can be seen as urban political disaffection expressed through incoherent outbursts against accepted authority, whether musical, social, or political" (218). Furthermore, Bould argues that the core principles of the punk movement "resonated with Cyberpunk's socially excluded, often criminal, characters living in the ruins and in the shadow of multinational capital" (218), while 'cyber' signified "the computer networks and cyborging technologies which constituted the essential furniture of Cyberpunk futures" (218). The word Cyberpunk itself can therefore be regarded as an oxymoron, as 'cyber' and its reference to cybernetics implied control, which Bould claims "was generally envisioned not in cybernetic's neutral descriptive sense but in terms of inherently repressive social structures and institutions, of the 'mechanized control of social life, of the body itself'" (218), while 'punk' implied the fight and revolt against that imposed control. Having followed the emergence of 'New Wave' science fiction, cyberpunk as a genre built upon the therein established tendency of challenging traditional genre conventions and introducing avant-garde narrative approaches, as well as rebelling against and denouncing any kind of control and the status quo, much as 'New Wave' science fiction denounced Campbell's strict stipulations and the core characteristics of the Golden Age science fiction.

From the aforementioned cyberpunk writers, Adam Roberts connects Cyberpunk to one of the focal points of this thesis, the film *Blade Runner*, and hails William Gibson and his seminal work *Neuromancer* as having "established many of the premises of cyberpunk: combining the premise of the movie *Tron* (1982) – a consensual, computer-generated virtual reality or cyberspace, which Gibson calls the Net, or Matrix – with the grubby-chic stylings of *Blade Runner* (1982): a noir plot, a degree of violence, and a conceptual breakthrough at the end"

(311). As with 'New Wave' science fiction, cyberpunk does not so much look outwards and explore the classic themes of hard sf, but is more introspective and balances the material with the mystic. As Roberts explains, "cyberpunk authors spent a good deal of attention on the *things* of their world, the quiddity, the textures and flavours of actual experience. But the more cyberpunk authors delved in the *material* of their urban dystopias, the more the other half of the SF dialectic asserted itself in their work" (312). The other half of the dialectic mentioned refers to the mystic element of cyberpunk, namely the cyberspace, where it acts as the substitute for religion and aims to construct alternate bonds among individuals who are becoming progressively disconnected (Roberts 312). In essence, the cyberspace of cyberpunk is the reimaged messiah introduced in 'New Wave' science fiction, which explains the smooth transition from the 'New Wave' novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* into the cyberpunk of its cinematic adaptations, as the former gave rise to the cyberpunk visuals of the latter. Furthermore, apart from the material and mystic aspects of cyberpunk, the relationship between humans and technology is explored. In her work *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and the Work of William Gibson*, Dani Cavallaro discusses an important question that is also raised in cyberpunk fiction, namely the inquiry into the fundamental traits of humanity that define our human nature:

This question is undoubtedly central to cyberpunk and crops up repeatedly as so-called real humans interact with Artificial Intelligences, androids, cyborgs, computer-simulated bodies, mutants and replicants and are required to establish what exactly distinguishes the natural from the artificial. Much of the time, this distinction is very hard to draw. (13)

As the lines between human and artificial are gradually blurred, it becomes harder to define characteristics that make humans human, calling into question the aspects of reality and identity. In cyberpunk, these aspects become uncertain as they are transformed into commodities, becoming interchangeable and disposable items destined for a predetermined and rapid decline (Cavallaro 14-15). Moreover, Cavallaro claims that it is not only the intangible human qualities that change, but that there is a concept of bodily transformation by employing invasive technologies, viewing the notion of "body invasion", which involves prosthetic limbs, implanted circuits, cosmetic modifications and genetic changes, as a significant motif within cyberpunk literature (16). What is more, some cyberpunk literature goes even farther, to the extent of depicting societies where humans are deemed obsolete, replaced by a range of posthuman

entities (Cavallaro 16). The mentioned bodily transformations of humans and the implied complete substitution of humans allude to trans- and posthumanism, as will be discussed anon. The focus on trans- and posthuman elements in cyberpunk can be explained in relation to the zeitgeist of the period. As opposed to the brand of science fiction which preceded it, in which writers had to speculate about technologies that would eventually be and allow humans to transcend themselves and the Earth, Cavallaro argues that cyberpunk, and particularly its exploration of themes like identity and physical transformation, can be comprehended within the context of the cultural environment and generational background of its representatives (18). Unlike previous generations, cyberpunk writers grew up exposed to the actual emergence and development of technologies that were previously only speculative in science fiction and have been able to incorporate elements of these evolving technologies into their narratives, contributing to the authentic resonance of their stories with the readers who were already living in a technologically transformed reality (Cavallaro 19).

As mentioned before, one of the key aspects of cyberpunk, and the reason for the gradual melting of humans and technology, was the introduction of the cyberspace. In relation to that, Cavallaro maintains that “the multi-accentuality of cyberpunk is paralleled by that of the related phenomena of cyberspace and virtual reality” (26) and that “cyberspace and virtual reality are celebrated by others as a means of establishing new communities unhampered by traditional prejudices” (26). As Cavallaro explains, these new modes of communication and experiences were fundamentally different from anything that preceded them:

The user of virtual reality receives images and impressions from various mechanical devices attached to the user’s body, to provide the impressions of sight, sound and touch. Stereo headphones supply sounds; head-mounted goggles (eyephones) supply computer-generated images; wired gloves (datagloves) and computerized suits (datasuits) supply the sense of touch. These devices are also able to monitor the body’s movements, so that what users see or feel changes according to their movements. In addition, different people may experience the same virtual spaces simultaneously without physically occupying the same location, since information can be communicated across a broad network via modems. (28)

In a virtual reality, the user is essentially transported into a computer-generated plain, in which multiple users can interact and receive sensory stimulations as they would in the real world. However, Cavallaro argues that, in the context of cyberpunk, virtual reality is taken

“several steps further by positing the possibility of a direct neural connection between the human brain and the computer” (28). Once integrated, “human bodies and minds are not only in a position to enter an intimate relationship with computers” (Cavallaro 28), but are also “made harder and shinier by its fusion with technology” (Cavallaro 28). Furthermore, Cavallaro underscores that this introduces the concept of hybridity, as the human essence becomes intricately connected with non-human apparatuses (28), which can lead to two different outcomes in regards to technology: “on the one hand, technology is viewed as a kind of magical mirror capable of multiplying human powers ad infinitum and of reflecting humanity in an idealized form; on the other, technology is associated with the engulfment of the human by the non-human” (28).

As modifications of the body and the mind in conjunction with technology are two of the central themes in the cyberpunk genre, these notions have to be explored in the context of the relatively more recent theoretical lens of transhumanism and posthumanism.

## **Trans- and Posthumanism**

Similar to Dani Cavallaro in relation to cyberpunk fiction, Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner argue in “Introducing Post- and Transhumanism” that “trans- as well as posthumanism frequently question their relationship to humanism and reconsider what it means to be human” (7). Although both movements incorporate the term ‘humanism’ in their name and indeed have a critical approach to the human condition, each term encompasses a set of fundamentally different ideas. What is more, posthumanism can be considered a direct result of transhumanism. Ranisch and Sorgner explain that transhumanism can be perceived as an ideology advocating the profound alteration of human biological capacities and societal circumstances through technological means, creating a technologically-driven form of evolution that culminates in the concept of the posthuman (7-8). While transhumanism presents a comprehensible collection of technologically optimistic ideas, which can be interpreted as an amplified form of humanism, posthumanism can be approached as a departure from humanism and rejection of fundamental humanist ideas, with a specific emphasis on emerging technologies. (Ranisch and Sorgner 8) Furthermore, it questions the conventional notion of the “human being” by examining the ways in which humans interact and engage with technology. (Ranisch and Sorgner 8) Though they are often viewed and defined in tandem, each approach will be analysed separately.

On his website, one of the leading experts in the field of transhumanism, Nick Bostrom, deals with transhumanism in greater detail and enumerates the possible topics under consideration for enhancement, such as the extensive prolongation of human health and lifespan, the eradication of disease, the alleviation of needless suffering and the enhancement of human cognitive, physical and emotional abilities, though the scope is not confined solely to devices and medical advancements, but also covers economic, social and institutional frameworks, cultural progression, as well as psychological abilities and methodologies (Bostrom). Moreover, transhumanists believe that the current version of humanity does not have to be “the endpoint of evolution” (Bostrom), but that the final goal is becoming post-human, having “vastly greater capacities than present humans have” (Bostrom). Though transhumanism displays an optimistic outlook on the future of human evolution and holds substantial promise for positive applications, there exists the substantial risk of misuse, potentially leading to severe consequences, such as the eradication of intelligent life and the gradual diminishment of valuable human connections and ecological variety. (Bostrom) Additionally, Bostrom raises another previously mentioned problematic, that of identity: “If the mode of being of a post-human being is radically

different from that of a human being, then we may doubt whether a post-human being could be the same person as a human being, even if the post-human being originated from a human being” (Bostrom). While there are enhancements that allow for the preservation of one’s identity after becoming post-human, such as increased physical abilities and health, which could substantially and positively impact the life of an individual, Bostrom believes that the complete emphasis is not solely on the preservation of individual identity, but that a more profound weighing of the pros and cons of such transformations is needed in order to determine if giving up our identity is a worthwhile trade-off on the path of becoming post-human (Bostrom). Another topic of discussion in transhumanistic discourse is human and genetic engineering, the morality of which, according to Bostrom, “has been extensively debated in recent years” (Bostrom). Furthermore, Bostrom claims that “objections that are based on the idea that there is something inherently wrong or morally suspect in using science to manipulate human nature are regarded by transhumanists as wrongheaded” (Bostrom). In the scope of transhumanism, it is recognized that some outcomes would be reprehensible and that the potential psychological and cultural effects of commodifying human nature carry significant implications. However, Bostrom claims that the benefits far outweigh the potential risks and that

Being free from severe genetic diseases would be good, as would having a mind that can learn more quickly, or having a more robust immune system. Healthier, wittier, happier people may be able to reach new levels culturally. To achieve a significant enhancement of human capacities would be to embark on the transhuman journey of exploration of some of the modes of being that are not accessible to us as we are currently constituted, possibly to discover and to instantiate important new values. (Bostrom)

By being aware of the potential negative consequences in relation to not just genetic engineering, but also to technological modifications that transhumanism predicts, the human race will gain a deeper understanding of the problematic and will be able to implement precautionary measures (Bostrom).

While transhumanism can be characterized as a discourse of technological optimism, where notions and ideas linked to it are discussed and advanced in an interdisciplinary sense, Ranisch and Sorgner argue that, conversely, pinpointing a unified posthumanist movement proves challenging, considering that there exists a lack of consensus concerning the history, concepts and goals of posthumanism (14). As it followed the emergence of postmodern theories, posthumanism, as a philosophical movement, shares much of its characteristics with it, namely the plurality of ideas. Ranisch and Sorgner recognize posthumanism as “an umbrella term for

ideas that explain, promote or deal with the crisis of humanism” (14) and, in the sense of plurality, enumerate the varying schools of thought. In her essay “Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms”, Francesca Ferrando expands upon the posthuman and highlights critical and cultural posthumanism as the two schools which evolved into a more philosophically oriented exploration into the re-evaluation of prior anthropocentric and humanistic assumptions (29). Furthermore, posthumanism fundamentally signifies a departure from both the concept of the human and the historical dominance of humanism, which were founded upon hierarchical societal constructs and human-centered beliefs (Ferrando, “Posthumanism” 29). Though the goal is the departure from the human concept, Ferrando argues that the “overcoming of human primacy, though, is not to be replaced with other types of primacies (such as the one of the machines)” (Ferrando, “Posthumanism” 29), but that “Posthumanism can be seen as a post-exclusivism: an empirical philosophy of mediation which offers a reconciliation of existence in its broadest significations” (Ferrando, “Posthumanism” 29). In other words, as opposed to transhumanism, posthumanism does not require humans to upgrade and embellish themselves with machine, or even to become machines, because it constitutes a predominantly philosophical endeavour and, in relation to exclusivism, suggests that “human diversity should not stand on human supremacy, and that non-human persons (such as non-human animals and plants, as well as inorganic entities like robots) should also be granted the condition for a dignified existence” (Ferrando, “Leveling” 2). As Ferrando explains, transhumanism is essentially humans becoming ‘H+’ or ‘Human Plus’ with the primary avenues being science and technology, where the end goal is the posthuman, whereas posthumanism regards the posthuman as an ongoing paradigm shift that is already taking place through the lens of a posthumanist perspective (“Transhumanism/Posthumanism” 439). Although posthumanism can be understood as anti-human, Ferrando disagrees and maintains that “the recognition of non-human dignity does not come by denigrating actual humans, but by understanding them as part of a larger interconnected picture, which does not stand on human supremacy” (“Leveling” 3). To put it plainly, posthumanism therefore denounces any kind of discrimination, either against other humans or other species, but instead aims to “achieve a posthuman society based on co-existence and multi-species justice” (“Leveling” 3).

Having delved deeper into the history of science fiction and the emergence and characteristics of cyberpunk, transhumanism and posthumanism, the following chapters will examine the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and the two films *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* through the lens of the above introduced theoretical framework.



## **The Storylines of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner***

As the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* directly inspired the 1982 film adaptation *Blade Runner* and they share the same core themes, they will both be given a brief overview and analysed in this chapter. The novel is set in a decaying post-war and dystopian San Francisco, where the human population has been feeling the lasting effects of radiation. The radiation brought about the almost total extinction of animals, hampered human reproduction, as humans now carry “distorted genes” (Dick 12), and produced so-called ‘chickenheads’, which are humans who “had failed to pass the minimum mental faculties test” (Dick 12). In light of these consequences, raising children has been replaced by a trend of owning and nurturing animals, both artificial and real, as the natural resources have become scarce and therefore are considered a high-worth item and a symbol of wealth. Due to the hostile state of the Earth and the considerable technological advancements achieved, the wealthy have emigrated to other planets, mainly Mars, accompanied by androids which were originally envisioned and designed as aides and workers, essentially second-class citizens and slaves. These androids are almost indistinguishable from real humans, as they are granted a real person’s memories upon construction. The reader is introduced to the main character Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter tasked with tracking and eliminating six escaped androids that have travelled to Earth. Rick happily accepts the issued bounties, as it will allow him to surprise his wife Iran with a real animal, to replace the electric sheep they already own. Before Deckard can set out on his mission, his superior Harry Bryant sends him to the Rosen Association, the manufacturer of the latest in the line of androids, the Nexus 6 types, which are described as having “surpassed several classes of human specials in terms of intelligence” (Dick 18), to assess if the Voight-Kampff Empathy Test can identify even these advanced androids. The machine relies on testing the empathy of the individual at hand by gauging the reactions to certain stimuli, and rests upon the bedrock of Mercerism, a type of religion where individuals fuse with the godlike figure of Wilbur Mercer and share his suffering and ascent. Having arrived at the Rosen Association, Deckard meets Rachel, the niece of the company president, on who he performs the Empathy Test, concluding that she is an android, but feels a somewhat strong attraction towards her. After refusing Rachel’s help in tracking down the androids, he tracks down and kills the first three suspects in his files: Max Polokov posing as a Soviet police inspector, Luba Luft posing as an opera singer and Garland posing as police chief who secretly protects androids living on Earth.

While apprehending Luba Luft, Deckard meets another bounty hunter by the name of Phil Resch, whose experiences prompt him to question his own reality and if he is himself an android. Parallel to Deckard's story, John Isidore, a special and a 'chickenhead', who lives in one of the derelict San Francisco buildings, aides and accommodates the other three escaped androids Pris Stratton, Irmgard Baty and their leader Roy Baty. Having been tasked to eliminate the rest on the very same day, Deckard employs the help of Rachel; however, she seduces him with the goal of diminishing his willingness to kill androids. After arriving at Isidore's building, Deckard dispatches the remaining androids with some difficulty, as Pris Stratton is an exact replica of Rachel Rosen, and feels empty and crushed afterwards, having developed a kind of empathy towards the androids. In the end, Rick's goat, which he bought with the bounty money, is killed by Rachel, Wilbur Mercer is exposed as a hoax and Deckard sets out on an aimless journey, where he experiences fusion with Mercer and finds a toad which he then brings home to his wife. After finding out the toad was indeed an electric replica, Deckard accepts it, resigns himself to his bed and sleeps.

As opposed to the novel, in which the main focus is on empathy and the purpose of humans in relation to the androids, the cult film adaptation by director Ridley Scott takes the theme of the humanity of the androids, or 'replicants' as they are called in the film, and explores it in great detail. In fact, the only characteristics that the film shares with the novel are some of the characters' names and the basic premise of escaped androids posing a threat to humans on Earth. One further difference is that the titular blade runners do not at all appear in the novel, but are just a name chosen for the bounty hunters. The film takes place in a futuristic and multicultural Los Angeles, where Deckard (played by Harrison Ford) is also employed to eliminate several replicants in light of his partner's demise when identifying one of them. The story beats in the beginning of the film partially follow those of the novel, as Rick starts his investigation at the Tyrell Corporation (the film's equivalent of the Rosen Association) and meets the highly sophisticated replicant Rachel, who does not know that she is one. This fact saddens Deckard and makes him feel sorry for Rachel, as well as the replicants he is hunting, namely Leon Kowalski, gymnast Pris, exotic dancer Zora and their leader Roy Batty. Whereas their novel counterparts denounce the living conditions on Mars and claim to have the right to visit and experience the Earth as real humans do, the replicants in the film aim to track down Eldon Tyrell, the leader of the Tyrell Corporation, in order to expand their four-year life span. The main premise is that, as they display the same characteristics as humans and are almost indistinguishable from them, they deserve the chance to live as long as humans: "You are made as well as we could

make you (...) But not to last?" (*Blade Runner* 1982, 1:25:00-1:25:03). As in the novel, Deckard gets help from Rachel and eventually they develop feelings for one another. The film culminates in a dramatic chase scene between Deckard and Roy Batty, where Rick is spared by the replicant and shuts itself down and the actor portraying Batty, Rutger Hauer, delivers one of the most iconic monologues in film history: "I've... seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those... moments will be lost... in time... like... tears... in rain. Time... to die" (*Blade Runner* 1982, 1:46:24-1:47:12). The speech makes Deckard realise how truly desperately the replicants want to be human. The ending is the point where the film diverges from the novel the most, as Deckard continues his relationship with Rachel in order to find meaning and solace within it. However, the film ends on an ambiguous note, similarly to the novel, with Rick questioning his own reality, as the film suggests that he himself might be a replicant.

## Cyberpunk Aspects of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*

Though both the novel and the film adaptation preceded the cyberpunk movement, they share much of the same ideas and characteristics. In his article “Blade Runner and Cyberpunk Visions of Humanity” W.A. Senior claims that *Blade Runner* and William Gibson’s seminal novel *Neuromancer* “share enough features that one might well retroactively call *Blade Runner* the first truly cyberpunk film” (1). This claim can be extended to the novel, as Gibson drew his inspiration from it as well. Furthermore, Senior comments on the central questions present in both cyberpunk fiction and in the film and novel: “what does it mean to be human? what are the boundaries of humanity? how human or humane are humans? when android/replicants and humans meet, how can one tell them apart? how human are replicants, androids, or genetically designed wo/men?” (1).

These questions are addressed right at the beginning of the novel, where Deckard immediately shows his derision towards androids and that he does not consider them human: “I’ve never killed a human being in my life” (Dick 3). This initial premise and opinion changes as he proceeds to deal with androids throughout the novel, and the uncertainty grows as he employs his Voigt-Kampff Empathy Machine, a tool for identifying androids. As mentioned, in the novel, empathy is the primary difference between humans and androids, because, as the narrator puts it, “ultimately, the emphatic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim, between the successful and the defeated” (Dick 19). To add to the implied disparity and to enhance the sense of danger surrounding them, androids are described as “a solitary predator” (Dick 19). Christopher A. Sims discusses this disparity in relation to the human relationship with technology and Dick’s works:

Previous frameworks that regard all technological relationships to be between user and instrument or subject and object cannot accommodate the android, because the android is both user and instrument, subject and object. (...) The only way to ensure the conformity of the android to traditional power systems and technical paradigms is to insist on maintaining a difference (through the realignment of social values) and on creating a means to measure and identify that difference. (70)

The first instance of ambiguity and uncertainty is found in later pages, where Rick and his boss discuss the possibility of psychotic humans failing the test: “a small class of human beings could not pass the Voigt-Kampff scale. If you tested them in line with police work you'd assess them as humanoid robots. You'd be wrong, but by then they'd be dead” (Dick 23). This issue is exacerbated after Deckard's arrival at the Rosen Association, where he is tasked with accurately distinguishing the new Nexus 6 type androids in a group with real humans. Rachel Rosen, the niece of the association's president, presents a potential problem for Deckard, as he has to ask over a hundred questions, as opposed to the usual thirty, to identify her as an android. Furthermore, as Nigel Wheale points out, after the test concludes, Rachel “ceases to be an inanimate object for Deckard, because he finds himself attracted to ‘her’” (300) and starts “accusing him of being *inhuman* because of the instrumental cold way in which he tries to deal with her” (300). In the film, this sequence plays out much in the same way and signifies the same uncertainty, but focuses much more on presenting it in a visually complex way. Wheale assesses the film's fixation on Rachel's contracted pupil as Deckard closely observes it for an emphatic response, which embodies the concept of the eyes being windows to the soul (301). What is more, this scene reminds the viewers of the film's establishing shot of the futuristic city, where a pupil is seemingly looking at the Tyrell Corporation's pyramid-like headquarters, which prompts the mystery and the question about whose pupil it is and how it is reacting (Wheale 301). In both the novel and the film, the Empathy Test can be considered an aspect of cyberpunk, as it underscores human interaction with androids.

The humanization of androids and Rick's engagement towards them and his questioning of himself is further explored in the novel when Rick encounters his next target, opera singer Luba Luft. Rick contemplates the quality of this specific android, mentioning that “the Rosen Association built her well” (Dick 62) and that he perceived himself as “the formdestroyer called forth by what he heard and saw here” (Dick 62). Furthermore, he comments on her abilities, which seem genuinely human, and wants to justify his actions: “Perhaps the better she functions, the better singer she is, the more I am needed” (Dick 62). Upon escaping Deckard's first elimination attempt, Rick, accompanied by another inspector, Phil Resch, finds her at an exhibition of Edvard Munch's paintings. After being apprehended by Rick, she asks him to buy her a reproduction of one of the paintings. This, along with the fact that she attended the exhibition in the first place, gives Luba a more human and cultured dimension. Wheale considers this request a new developmental stage of androids, as she wished to experience something androids never had (300). Moreover, after killing her, Wheale raises the question of who exactly displays

behaviour resembling that of an android in this situation, as Luba seemed genuinely alive (300). Both Luba and Rachel change Rick's outlook on hunting androids and make him empathize with them. As Sims points out, at the end of the novel, after Deckard eliminates the remaining androids, he considers himself to be unnatural and inhuman, as he persisted in his endeavour even after acknowledging that artificial entities also possess their own lives (84). In other words, his perspective towards androids as mere technological objects has shifted into a perspective regarding them as conscious entities, as from Deckard's viewpoint, androids have ceased to embody pure technology (Sims 84).

In lieu of Luba Luft, the film adaptation uses the replicant Leon to humanize androids. Wheale reflects on the Tyrell Corporation, which provides its replicants with intricate fabricated memories intended to attach a false sense of significance to the emotions that these robotic subjects start to feel during their limited lifespan (302). Though Leon is in essence violent and murderous, he seeks the maternal care and youthful experiences through the search for pictures of his family and thereby displays profound emotional and human behaviour, much as Luba Luft does in the novel (Wheale 302). This is true of the other replicants in the film, namely Roy Batty and Rachel. Senior challenges the initial premise of both the novel and the movie that although the replicants are not supposed to have emotions, they develop feeling through contact with others: "Leon is saddened by the loss of his pictures; Rachel is desperate to prove herself human; Batty is sympathetic with and understanding of the rather dense Leon" (6). Furthermore, Senior argues that apart from their pursuit of extended lifespans, the replicants are driven by a strong desire for immediate love and security, as evidenced by the images implanted in their memories (7). The replicant's situations, behaviours, reactions and needs often match or even exceed the intensity displayed by the few human characters in the film, which serves as a counterbalance and contrast to Deckard, whose fervour and zest for life is largely absent (Senior 7).

Another aspect crucial to the constitution of cyberpunk is the notion of cyberspace. As opposed to the novel, *Blade Runner* forgoes the introduction of a cyberspace to focus solely on relationship between humans and replicants, but in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, it is a central theme and the vessel for empathy. Cyberspace is achieved through the use of an empathy box, a small television screen with two handles attached to it, which "transports the user into a spiritual domain, and allows for a fundamental shift in the way in which the user experiences reality" (Sims 79). This ties in with the novel's take on religion in the form of

Mercerism, a religion which is forced onto every human being and spearheaded by Wilbur Mercer, a messianic figure who ascends a hill. Through the empathy box, Mercerism enables every user to deposit their consciousness into the figure of Willbur Mercer on his ascent. This event, called fusion, involves a shared essence: while each individual retains their personal awareness, they also gain a collective understanding of all others, which is humanity's response to coping with the downfall of its most advanced civilization and the dispersal of the surviving human population (Sims 79). Furthermore, Sims argues that the fusion with Mercer "creates an empathetic synthesis of every human mind. From within this synthesis each individual has the knowledge that he or she is not stumbling through reality alone, that there is in fact an 'other' with whom we can actually connect and commiserate" (80). This need for fusing with another to experience solidarity and companionship speaks to the aforementioned aspect of cyberpunk, where, outside the cyberspace, humans and artificial being alike are alienated from their own emotions and require technological apparatuses as a substitute. What is more, the empathy box, much as religion outside of fiction, serves as a kind of control over the general population.

To conclude, not only are there philosophical and narrative aspects of cyberpunk present in both the novel and the film, but the way in which the world and technology are presented (visually in the film and through descriptions in the novel) is distinctly cyberpunk. How W. A. Senior describes the setting in *Blade Runner* also partially applies to the novel: "Future urban nightmares form their settings; huge financial conglomerates usurp the powers of government; technology, Japanese influence, and a bouillabaisse of postmodern history and culture permeate each" (1). The film opens with a bird's-eye view of the technological megalopolis of Los Angeles, which is sprawling with skyscrapers and flying cars, and centres on the gigantic pyramidal structures of the Tyrell Corporation, offering the viewer an immediate taste of the futuristic setting. This opening, alongside the opening to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), from where it draws the layout of the futuristic city, can be considered one of the most famous openings to sf films. Conversely, the novel's world is a desolate and irradiated wasteland in the wake of World War Terminus, and San Francisco is draped by derelict and mostly abandoned skyscrapers. The narrator describes the morning air as the "involuntarily the taint of death" (Dick 6) and the buildings as "giant, empty, decaying" (Dick 10). In addition, the world is plagued by dust and the amassment of kipple, which are "useless objects, like junk mail or match folders" (Dick 41) and which "when nobody's around, (...) reproduces itself" (Dick 41). Furthermore, the technological advancements in both works are evident: the androids/replicants represent a major leap

in human technology, being employed as either combatants in World War Terminus, aides or workers on the Earth and on Mars; Deckard drives a flying car in both the novel and the film and uses laser weaponry and various gadgets in his pursuits. Notable technological omissions from the film are the mood organ, a device that lets users choose between a variety of moods and emotions and then experience them, and the aforementioned empathy box. Both of these elements will be further discussed in the following chapter in the context of trans- and posthumanism.



## Trans- and Posthumanism in *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

As transhumanism explores the relationship between humans and technology and the transcendence to the posthuman through the use of technology, it is closely intertwined with posthumanism, and both the novel and film will be analysed in terms of how transhumanist elements lead to a posthuman condition.

The most notable transhumanist examples in the novel are the mood organ, the empathy box, the Voigt-Kampff Test and androids, which were all developed to aid individuals in adapting to the challenging, post-apocalyptic environment of Earth, but have ultimately become intermediaries that control and shape every aspect of their existence. This challenges Bostrom's optimistic transhumanism, as a paradigm shift in the way that humanity thinks and sees the world around them has not been achieved. Firstly, the mood organ can be considered a technological enhancement of the human, as it allows humans to detach from their emotions and select the exact ones they want to experience, and serves as an example of the increased mechanization of humans. Without it, humans would have to face, as Tony M. Vinci puts it, the trauma "caused by severe physical isolation, psychological alienation, and consistent and pervasive practices of discrimination" (91). The realisation of the trauma is exemplified in Rick's wife Iran, who has fallen into a deep depression and uses the mood organ to perpetuate the feeling: "So I put it on my schedule for twice a month; I think that's a reasonable amount of time to feel hopeless about everything, about staying here on Earth after everybody who's small has emigrated, don't you think?" (Dick 4). In other words, she is aware of their condition and the surrounding emptiness, but chooses to use the mood organ to remain passive and indulge in the artificially created emotions. As opposed to his wife, Rick accepts the status quo as natural. This, however, results in essentially becoming empty beings and becoming "what they most fear and despise: 'androids' incapable of feeling for or with others" (Vinci 92).

Where the mood organ serves to allay the incapability of developing feelings, the empathy box, and in extension Mercerism, serves as a means of feeling with others, to evoke a sense of community, but also as a form of control. Although the box should decrease the loneliness of individuals, it is apparent from Rick's thoughts that this serves only to increase the abyss of his relationship to Iran: "Going over to the empathy box she quickly seated herself and once more gripped the twin handles. She became involved almost at once. Rick stood holding the phone receiver, conscious of her mental departure. Conscious of his own aloneness" (Dick

114). Jill Galvan claims that this aloneness “exactly fulfills the project of the empathy box, as that mechanism is manipulated by the government: (...) Mercer’s image serves the purpose not of social solidarity but of disintegration – an outcome which dramatically reduces the potential for public unrest” (416). Through the use of the empathy box not only does the government impose control over its few remaining subjects, but it also entices them to return to it religiously in search for empathy, which, ironically, disrupts rather than fosters emotional bonds among people (Galvan 418). Furthermore, it raises doubts not only about the concept of empathy itself, which is considered a defining trait of humanity, but also about the device that supposedly enables it, thereby challenging the conventional understanding of human beings in relation to androids. (Galvan 418) As it is revealed at the end of the novel, Mercerism is a hoax, which completely undermines its primary principle of empathy and displays the effect of the technological degradation of human community:

Technology thus drastically compromises an insulated human community in two ways: it separates the individual from human contact; but more significantly, it makes her dependent upon-addicted to-the life of the machine. Hooked up to her empathy box, entranced by the simulation of the television screen, the human has already, in fact, become the posthuman. (Galvan 418)

In addition to the empathy box, Mercerism prescribes the care of animals as a means of showing empathy and as a means of standing out from the androids, who cannot empathize. Neglecting and animal is considered unethical and lacking in empathy. Therefore, those who cannot afford a real animal have to settle for an electronic version, if they want to preserve what makes them human. Though owning an electric sheep demoralizes him, Rick admits that he must uphold the façade to conform to social conventions: “Owning and maintaining a fraud had a way of gradually demoralizing one. And yet from a social standpoint it had to be done, given the absence of the real article. He had therefore no choice except to continue” (Dick 6-7). In this sense, animals become objectified and commodified, as they are “cultural signifiers that prove in the flesh that the human is indeed a specialized category of existence in its ability to empathize and care for the animal” (Vinci 100). The objectification of the animals is exacerbated in the examples of the Voigt-Kampff Test and Sidney’s Animal and Fowl Catalogue. The catalogue provides a monthly update on the status and price of each animal, with rarer and near extinct animals holding the most value and whose ownership signifies a higher social status, while the premise of the Voigt-Kampff Test rests on asking the subject questions in relation to animal cruelty to determine an emphatic response. In this context, animals are elevated as the

ultimate symbol of humanity's unique ability to connect with and understand others emotionally and, when juxtaposed with the androids, are part of an ideological debate that deflects traumatic experiences by reinforcing the idea of essential human superiority over androids and human empathy towards animals, who are seen as vulnerable and in need of human care, which introduces the notion of speciesism and human exceptionalism (Vinci 93).

Speciesism and human exceptionalism do not only underscore human relationship to animals, but they play pivotal roles in examining the human-android dichotomy in the novel. Not unlike animals, androids become commodities for the benefit of human society and are seen as tools. However, considering that with each upgrade to the Nexus-6 the line distinguishing humans from androids becomes increasingly blurred, and that they do not possess the ability to show empathy, they are perceived as a substantial threat to humanity. The novel also strongly suggests that androids have surpassed humans certain physical and mental tasks, as is the case with Luba Luft: "On tile stage Luba Luft sang, and he found himself surprised at the quality of her voice; it rated with that of the best, even that of notables in his collection of historic tapes" (Dick 62). In order to combat this perceived threat and to preserve the belief in human exceptionalism, Vinci explains that "androids must remain culturally and ontologically marginalized, enabling a cultural displacement of the inherent absence in the human onto the android" (93). This marginalization reaches its climax in Deckard's executions of the androids. According to Vinci, "In killing the androids, Deckard performs in the flesh what the entire human culture performs ideologically: he sacrifices the android" (108). However, as he goes down the list, Deckard gradually doubts his role as a bounty hunter and reconsiders his task. He can no longer rationalize the anthropocentric perspective that prioritizes humans as empathetic being over androids. In spite of that, and prompted by Wilbur Mercer to continue the job, even though it is essentially wrong, he eliminates the remaining three androids in J.R. Isidore's apartment. This includes killing the android Pris, who is an exact replica of Rachel, whom he developed feelings and a sense of attachment for. In that sense, as Vinci argues, "if he feels empathy for the androids and can still kill them, then he proves the human to be inhuman and undoes the 'human' part of his subjectivity" (108). In the end, his motivation for hunting and killing the androids does not stem from hatred of purely financial gain, but arises from a genuine sense of empathy towards them, and by killing them, he departs from the norm and opens himself up to the profound ethical implications of posthuman trans-subjectivity (Vinci 108). Furthermore, the defeat of his humanity also marks a triumph for Rick, as he comes to his posthuman realization: "(...) his

new awareness that he lives in fluid conjunction with the technologies that populate his environment. There is no human self, Rick has discovered, that is not also other, and no android other that does not partake of self” (Galvan 426). The blurring of lines between human and android characters in the novel serves to enact posthumanism, insofar as it is used to introduce, as mentioned before, a departure from human exclusivism. What further exemplifies Rick’s transition is the finding of, what he thinks to be, a live toad in the desert. Upon learning from his wife Iran that the toad is, in fact, mechanical, his reaction shows that he has outgrown his previous mindset as an android bounty hunter: “The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are” (Dick 156). Rick finally accepts that technology is inherently intertwined with the human subject from the very beginning and that the responsibility lies with each individual to recognize this reality, which entails letting go of a self that has exceeded the conventional boundaries of humanity and, in essence, merging with the posthuman collective (Galvan 428). This also resonates with Bostrom’s transhumanism.

In relation to transhumanism, the novel’s adaptation *Blade Runner* forgoes the elements of the empathy box and the mood organs to keep the focus on the replicant-human dynamic, but the technological immersion is still evident in the Voigt-Kampff Test, the replicants and Rick’s photo inspector. The photo inspector also plays a part in the film’s increased attention to photos and memories in order to humanize both replicants and Rick, as opposed to the novel’s notions of empathy and emotions. In his examination of the photo inspector in the film, where Rick delves into the intricacies of the photograph using computer-enhancement technology, Nigel Wheale points out that “this technological chic allows him to look around corners into the depth of the image, and in the hidden recesses of the hologram/photo he catches sight of the enigmatic clue that he needs, and orders 'hard copy'. Deckard himself has become a kind of cyborg here, extending his in-sight via the voice- activated computer scan” (302) thereby insinuating that Deckard has become transhuman.

The replicants in the film mirror the androids in the novel, as they are superior to humans in every category except emotions, which they lack. To prevent the development of emotions, the Tyrell Corporation programmed them to have a built-in termination after four years. The discrimination and commodification of the replicants is evident in the film as well, as they are shipped off to colonies as slaves and workers and referred to by Harry Bryant as “skin jobs”, which suggests that he does not consider replicants to have meaningful lives or view them as genuine living entities. The discrimination is expanded upon the general non-white population of Los Angeles, a futuristic city run by big corporations, which Bryant calls “little people” when

urging Deckard to accept the job to hunt down five replicants. Kevin R. McNamara touches on the segregation and underscores Deckard as the agent of ensuring these differences stay intact: “Deckard understand that his continued enjoyment of the privileges of whiteness (his ninety-seventh-floor apartment and its furnishings) depends on his continuing to do his job; his particular job is lethally to police the boundaries of difference” (431). As opposed to the novel, in which androids are categorized as murderous robots, in the film replicants return to Earth in search for their maker in order to expand their lifespans, which displays their desire to live and humanizes them. Furthermore, the film “does much to humanize the replicants; (...) They bleed. They mourn. They capture Kodak moments” (McNamara 437). The capturing of pictures and the implanted memories of the replicants, in other words experiences, give replicants another human dimension and further blur the line between human and machine, making Deckard susceptible to their struggle. As in the novel, Rick’s preconceived notions about replicants are challenged when he meets and tests Rachel with the Voigt-Kampff Test. After finishing the test, in a conversation between Deckard and Tyrell, the viewer gets the first hint of anguish from Rick’s side: “She doesn’t know? How can it not know what it is?” (*Blade Runner* 1982, 0:21:53-0:21:58). Having learned that replicants are implanted with false memories, Deckard informs Rachel that she is a replicant and that her memories are, in fact, of Tyrell’s niece, to which Rachel responds negatively and even sheds a tear. In turn, Deckard expresses remorse and tries to backtrack his admission, which signalizes his changing mindset about machines and establishes his growing affection to Rachel and the emotional utility he is receiving from her. To accentuate the growing doubt in Rick in completing his job, upon eliminating the next replicant in line, Zohra, the camera focuses on Deckard’s dejected and remorseful face as he examines the corpse of the replicant. What is more, after Bryant informs him that he would have to also eliminate Rachel, Deckard begins to question the morality of his occupation. McNamara argues how the increasing doubt in Rick prompts the viewer to gradually empathize with Rick: “As part of the film’s strategy of forcing to a crisis the ideology that structures its society, these revisions allow us to continue to sympathize with Deckard only as he comes to recognize the lack of reasonable justification for the work he does” (437).

Where the novel focuses on the psychological aspect of Rick’s posthuman realization, the film takes a more explicit route to it. After saving Rick from Leon, Rachel accompanies him to his flat, where Deckard admits to her that he does not intend to hunt her down and kill her. What follows is a scene where Deckard forces himself onto Rachel sexually, treating her both

with affection and as an object, which juxtaposes his conflicting attraction and prejudices towards her. In other words, he tries to determine her humanity by compelling her to participate in the most instinctive and ordinary of acts, to which she complies, thereby cementing Rick's realization that she cannot be degraded to the level of any other machine.

As a parallel to Deckard's gradual understanding and acceptance of the humanity of replicants, the film's version of Roy Batty is progressively humanized throughout it and presented as profoundly capable and intelligent, and shows a will to live on. According to Senior, "In Roy Batty combat programming and calculated brutality contradict an otherwise compassionate and sensitive nature. He quotes poetry at various times for emotional effect; he seems to treasure Pris and Leon and is both angered and saddened by Zohra's death and the piecemeal destruction of his community" (8). Furthermore, the replicant's situations, behaviours, reactions and emotional needs often match or even surpass the intensity of those exhibited by the few humans in the film, as, "because they are so aware of their five-year existence, the replicants live with an intensity and *joie de vivre* that the genetic humans lack almost entirely" (Senior 7). However, in trying to prolong his lifetime and rebel against his maker, he becomes increasingly violent, exemplified by his murder of Eldon Tyrell, his maker, when he learns that their lifespans cannot be altered. In contrast to Batty, Tyrell "is a remote and distant deity to them; he seems ironically to have no feeling for their tribulations and even applies the Achilles proposition to Batty, explaining that he burns more brightly for having the shorter life, a state and statement, for all their truth, that offer little consolation" (Senior 7). After surpassing his maker, he displays a duality of compassion and violence, with each component motivating the other. In the last act of the film, upon finding his companion Pris, whom he loved, dead by the hands of Deckard, he spirals out of control and begins chasing Rick through the building.

This chase scene culminates on the rooftop of the same building, where the two characters achieve their posthuman realization. As Batty saves Rick from falling to certain death, and before his own death, he imparts a profound lesson in humanity onto Rick (Bertek 9) and, in his monologue, laments the loss of his experiences throughout his limited lifespan. Bertek highlights Batty's transformation, as "Roy-the-machine eventually renounces his program as a ruthless killer and instead chooses pity and compassion" (Kellner, Leibowitz, and Ryan qtd. in Bertek 9). Furthermore, Bertek explains that, confronted with the certainty of his impending death, he chooses to spare Deckard's life, erasing the boundary that separates human from non-human through his act of empathy, a quality he was not supposed to possess and one that was believed to mark his inferiority. (9) Consequently, having witnessed the awe and wonderment

with which a replicant interprets his life's experiences, as well as having been shown mercy by one, Deckard realizes the true value of human life and that both humans and replicants can coexist and share their experiences with each other.

The following chapter deals with the way the cinematic sequel to *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*, expands upon the themes of cyberpunk, trans- and posthumanism introduced in the first film and in the novel.

## **Blade Runner 2049 vs. Blade Runner and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?**

*Blade Runner 2049* (hereinafter called *BR2049*) was directed by Denis Villeneuve and serves as the sequel to the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, but also draws inspiration on the original novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick. This chapter will analyse how the film displays and expands upon the previously discussed elements of cyberpunk, transhumanism and posthumanism.

Set in the same dystopian future, only 30 years later, where bioengineered humans known as replicants are created by a powerful corporation called the Wallace Corporation, the story follows a new blade runner named Officer K (Ryan Gosling), a Nexus 9 replicant, whose job is to retire older, rogue replicants. The movie begins with K tracking down a replicant named Sapper Morton who has been living off the grid. During this encounter, K discovers a mysterious box buried under a dead tree. This box holds the remains of a female replicant who died during childbirth, which is significant because it challenges the long-held belief that replicants cannot reproduce, potentially disrupting the balance of power in this world. K's superiors instruct him to find and eliminate any evidence of this event, as the existence of a replicant child could lead to a war between humans and replicants. K starts his investigation, delving into the history of blade runners and the Tyrell Corporation, the creators of the original replicants. As K investigates further, he encounters Niander Wallace, the brilliant and sinister CEO of the Wallace Corporation, who is obsessed with unlocking the secret of replicant reproduction to expand his army of obedient replicants. He believes that replicants hold the key to the survival and colonization of other planets. K also discovers that the missing replicant child may have been Rachael's and Rick Deckard's offspring. This revelation leads K on a quest to find Deckard, who has been missing for decades. Along the way, he is accompanied by Joi an AI hologram who provides companionship and support to K. As K's journey unfolds, he faces numerous challenges, including a brutal encounter with Luv, Wallace's loyal enforcer. He also finds a hidden resistance movement of replicants who seek freedom and equality. Ultimately, K locates Deckard, who has been hiding in an abandoned Las Vegas casino. Their meeting reveals crucial details about the replicant child's identity, and K makes a life-altering choice to protect Deckard and the child, who is actually a memory crafter for the Wallace Corporation named Ana Stelline and, in fact, provided the memories with which K was implanted. When they are ambushed by the Wallace Corporation in Las Vegas, Deckard is taken back to Los Angeles in order to extract



the truth about the child, only to be saved by K and reunited with his lost daughter. Having received fatal wounds while saving Deckard, K lays himself down on the steps of Stelline's office, looks up at the snow falling from the sky and dies.

As opposed to the original film, *BR2049* focuses much more on depicting the world outside of cities as it is described in the novel: a barren wasteland, devoid of life, as animals and plants have become extinct. This is best exemplified by the film's opening shot of a hover-car gliding above endless artificial fields and greenhouses and by the shots of Las Vegas later in the film, which closely resemble the irradiated and dust-stricken wasteland in the novel. Furthermore, subtle nods to the novel's fixation on animals, both real and fake, are spread throughout the film: Rick now owns and cultivates a colony of bees and has a dog, and one of the main thematic elements related to memory is a wooden horse statue, which an underground broker appraises very highly, as it is made from real wood, and offers K a real horse for it.

The segregation of androids/replicants is also present in *BR2049*, with K being derisively being called 'skin-job' and K's supervisor, Lt. Joshi stressing how important it is to uphold the boundaries between humans and replicants: "The world is built on a wall. It separates kind. Tell either side there's no wall, you bought a war. Or a slaughter. So, what you saw... didn't happen" (*BR2049* 2017, 0:26:57-0:27:17). The initial distinction between the human and non-human is not as blurred as in the novel and the first film, which is amended by the introduction of the replicant child. She asks K to keep the birth of a replicant child a secret, as it would lead to disorder and an uprising, confirming that Rick's realization at the end of both the novel and the film, the possibility of replicants and humans coexisting in a posthuman world, was not achieved. In the same scene, in response to Joshi's request to erase both the child and all the evidence of the childbirth, K remarks that he had never killed something that was born before, as "to be born is to have a soul" (*BR2049* 2017, 0:27:55-0:27:57), thereby raising an important issue which is also the central theme in the film's predecessors: What it means to be human and what distinguishes the authentic human from a replicant. Timothy Shanahan argues that *BR2049* "reinforces that question while posing the additional question of whether a replicant giving birth demolishes the presumed 'wall' separating replicants and humans" (19).

Whereas the first film and the novel highlight empathy as the decisive factor at distinguishing humans from replicants, Shanahan provides four different answers to the posed question:

The first answer concerns *how one comes into existence*. (...) Human beings are *born*, replicants are *made*, and this distinction is assumed to carry profound moral implications. To be made is to be an instrument for another's use and disposed of when no longer considered useful. By contrast, to be born is to have an intimate connection to someone else to whom your own wellbeing matters. (21)

This interpretation once again highlights the distinction between the human experience, which is rooted in natural birth and connectedness, and the replicant experience, which is rooted in artificial creation and potential disposability. According to Shanahan, this notion of differentiation is also reinforced by Wallace when he wishes a happy birthday to one of his replicants and then killing it, acknowledging the made/born distinction that he is yet to transcend in trying to render it obsolete (21).

Furthermore, the question of genuine humanity encompasses the concept of the soul. As mentioned before, K expresses hesitation about retiring something that was born, that has a soul, which Lt. Joshi brushes off as says "You've been getting on fine without one" (*BR2049* 2017, 0:28:10-0:28:12). Shanahan interprets her reaction "as simply taking for granted the distinction between replicants and authentic humans that K presupposes, or else as dismissing the concern by implying that even if there is such a thing as a soul, it doesn't make any practical difference; so just get on with the task at hand" (21-22).

The third perspective on what defines an authentic human comes from Freysa, the leader of the replicant freedom movement: after she dispels K's belief that he is Rachel's child, and thus born a human, she tries to console him by suggesting that he can still attain true humanity by dying for the right cause. Shanahan expands on this notion and argues that "it is through one's choices and actions, rather than because of what one essentially is, that one can approximate the state of being authentically human that humans, who were born, automatically enjoy" (22). In contrast to humans who were born, replicants can aspire to this state through their deeds, which is a parallel to *Blade Runner's* Roy Batty, who attains his humanity by sparing Deckard.

Lastly, the fourth answer is not explicitly stated in the film but emerges from K's transitional journey from an obedient blade runner to being an individual. In order to prevent another replicant rebellion, the Nexus-9 replicant were engineered by Wallace to be obedient, a directive which K follows. However, as the story unfolds, he starts to question the orders of his superiors and asserts his autonomy, which culminates in his discovery of Deckard and facilitating a reunion between him and his daughter. This significant act has, according to Shanahan,

“nothing to do with being born, having a soul, or dying for a cause greater than oneself. Arguably, K’s growing awareness of himself as an autonomous agent, not defined by his maker or his past, is more important than any of those proposed answers. Parallel to Deckard’s gradual moral awakening in the original film, in the new film K’s incremental embrace of his own agency becomes its central and most-important motif” (22).

The segregation and the question of what makes something human in *BR2049* are not only apparent in the human/replicant dichotomy, but also in the film’s new addition in terms of technological advancements, the AI (Artificial Intelligence) holograms, e.g., K’s companion and partner Joi. This is best exemplified when K is approached by Mariette, a Nexus-8 replicant, who tries to seduce him, but upon hearing the Joi’s ringtone, she remarks: “Oh... you don’t like real girls” (*BR2049* 2017, 0:45:51-0:45:55). Paul Smart raises the question of Joi’s status as a sentient being and claims that, although she is evidently synthetic in the sense of being a technological creation, as the film unfolds, it becomes increasingly challenging to perceive her as anything other than a virtual person. (127) One perspective to deny her sentience pertains to Joi’s holographic nature, as she exists only as an intangible entity. However, Paul Smart concedes that “Joi is, in some sense, more ‘soul than substance’. But even if we are prepared to accept this Cartesian distinction between mind (soul) and matter (substance), why should Joi’s seeming ethereality undermine her capacity for phenomenal consciousness?” (128). Moreover, the scene where Joi appears in the rain creates a paradoxical tension in how the viewer perceives her:

On the one hand, the richness and expressivity of Joi’s behaviour encourages us to view her as a sentient being. On the other hand, however we are presented with a state-of-affairs (i.e. the freeze-frame) that makes us doubt the evidence of our senses. If, for example, we see consciousness as a process, then it seems unlikely that Joi could be conscious when she is in freeze-frame mode. (Smart 129)

Other than the issue of her sentience, the question of her autonomy introduces a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity. Having been manufactured by the Wallace Corporation, she likely comes with pre-programmed functions, but is also a highly adaptive system. According to Smart, “the question, of course, is whether this sort of adaptive capacity is sufficient for her to evolve beyond the constraints of her programming. Is she able to become a free-thinking, autonomous individual (like K, perhaps), or is she forever condemned to comply with the functional imperatives laid down by those who designed her?” (131). This also calls into question whether her love for K is real and genuine or just a programmed facet of her personality. Smart

maintains that the issue presents itself in both possibilities, one being that she is capable of feeling love but just pretends to love K and the other being that she is programmed to feel love whenever her owner wants her to feel love (132). While there are hints in the film that Joi's "feelings" for K may intensify as the story unfolds, Smart claims that "we are never given a straightforward answer to either the autonomy or the authenticity issues. In respect of the authenticity issue, for example, we are never explicitly told that Joi is capable of feeling love; nor are we explicitly told that Joi does indeed love K, even if she is capable of feeling love" (132). What is more, to symbolize the uncertainty of her character, before she can express her love for K, her emanator is crushed and her proclamation is cut short, as the viewer only hears "I love y..." (*BR2049* 2017, 2:00:54-2:00:56) This uncertainty and ambiguity, both in terms of her sentience and her ability to love, represent cyberpunk elements also found in the source novel and the original film.

Lastly, the motif of the eye is central to the original *Blade Runner* and it is also present in *BR2049*, specifically in the character of Niander Wallace, the head of the Wallace Corporation, and used to denote trans- and posthumanist aspects, specifically the technological enhancement of the human body and the departure from human exceptionalism. What is more, Wallace serves as this film's iteration of the messiah, succeeding the novel's Wilbur Mercer and the original film's Eldon Tyrell. Although the film and he himself portray him as a god, he is aware of his shortcomings at creating replicants that can reproduce and even envies Tyrell: "I cannot breed them. So help me, I have tried. (...) Tyrell's final trick: Procreation. Perfected, then lost" (*BR2049* 2017, 0:41:47-0:42:55). In relation to Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*, this Prometheus is aware of his promethean fallacy. Furthermore, Shadbolt and Smart highlight the fact that "Wallace is biologically blind, yet he is able to see via a technological implant that enables his brain to interface with the six independently manoeuvrable floating drones" (209) and that he therefore "views the world not through his own biological eyes but through the lenses of technology" (209). Consequently, according to Shadbolt and Smart,

There are clearly reasons to think that Wallace sees the world in a way that is radically different from our own. But, in addition to altering the nature of Wallace's perceptual reality (i.e., the content of his visual experiences), there are also reasons to think that Wallace's technological prosthesis may also alter the nature of his conceptual reality. (210)

In other words, Wallace's visual system does not merely affect his visual perception of the world, but reshapes the way in which he comprehends the world. Furthermore, Shadbolt

and Smart question his status as a human being, as he no longer meets the criteria that define cognitive humanity, and consider him in a posthuman context: “In this sense, Wallace’s on-screen persona resonates with the notion of a posthuman god: the idea that technological enhancement may one day lead to the emergence of beings so powerful as to be god-like in comparison with present-day humans” (211). The notion of a posthuman god in relation to Wallace can be considered an oxymoron, as a deity represents hierarchy, where posthumanism aims to cancel hierarchy. Moreover, for him to rise to the status of a posthuman god, he would need to embrace the world around him as equal and strive to create an environment where humans and replicants can coexist peacefully. Taking his enhancements into consideration, it would therefore be more appropriate to view him as a transhuman god. To conclude, Niander Wallace’s unique biotechnological augmentation addresses the question of how technologies can potentially transform the human archetype, leading to shifts in how the world is perceived and cognitively interacted with.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore and analyse the themes of cyberpunk, posthumanism and transhumanism in the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and its cinematic adaptations *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, as well as to provide an overview of the history of the science fiction and the cyberpunk genre. Additionally, this thesis argues that, when viewed through the lens of posthumanism and transhumanism, the novel and its aforementioned adaptations reveal a complex interplay of ethical, existential and societal questions and challenge conventional notions of humanity and its relationship with the non-human.

As discussed in earlier chapters, after the exhaustion of the themes present in the “Golden Age”, the “New Wave” of sf, characterized by experimentation with narrative forms and a more introspective and political focus, paved the way for one of sf’s most prominent figures, Philip K. Dick, and brought about the emergence of the cyberpunk genre, which focused on technology, identity and rebellion against authority. Furthermore, cyberpunk explores the relationship between humans and technology, highlighting the blurring of lines between the two, and introduces the concept of cyberspace and its role in reshaping human experiences, along with its potential to either empower or engulf humanity. In a similar vein, transhumanism is an ideology advocating the enhancement of human abilities through technology, while posthumanism questions the traditional notion of “human” and explores the co-existence of various forms of life and is seen as a departure from anthropocentrism and human exclusivism.

In both the novel and its first cinematic adaptation, there is a profound exploration of themes related to the essence of humanity and the blurring lines between humans and artificial beings. The central questions revolve around what it means to be human, the boundaries of humanity and the role of empathy in distinguishing humans from androids or replicants. In the novel, empathy emerges as a key differentiator between humans and androids. Additionally, both the novel and *Blade Runner* depict futuristic, dystopian settings characterized by advanced technology, corporate control and a sense of urban decay, aligning with the cyberpunk genre. In the end, both works lead their protagonists to question the dehumanization of artificial beings and acknowledge the importance of empathy and shared experiences, marking their own transformation towards a posthuman understanding of existence.

*Blade Runner 2049* explores the themes of cyberpunk, transhumanism and posthumanism in a dystopian world 30 years after the original film. The film delves into four perspectives on what defines humanity: birth, having a soul, choices and actions, and autonomy. Furthermore, it introduces AI holograms like Joi, raising questions about sentience and autonomy.

To conclude, these narratives not only challenge the conventional notions of humanity, but also confront the ethical and societal implications of our rapidly advancing technological landscape. Ultimately, they invite us to ponder the evolving boundaries of what it means to be human in an ever-changing world, which is even more relevant today than it was when the original novel first came out, considering the profound potential of technology in the near future and the development of artificial intelligence happening now.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis delves into the intricate themes of cyberpunk, posthumanism, and transhumanism as portrayed in Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and its cinematic adaptations, *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*. The study traces the evolution of science fiction as a genre and explores the emergence of the cyberpunk genre, characterized by its focus on technology, identity, and rebellion against authority. Within these narratives, questions about the essence of humanity, the boundaries between humans and artificial beings, and the role of empathy in distinguishing the two are thoroughly examined. Additionally, the dystopian settings, advanced technology, and corporate control depicted in these works align with the cyberpunk genre, while introducing concepts of transhumanism and posthumanism that challenge traditional notions of what it means to be human. The thesis concludes by emphasizing the transformative journey towards a posthuman understanding of existence in a world where technology blurs the lines between human and non-human.

**Key words:** *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*, cyberpunk, transhumanism, posthumanism, technology, identity

