



Do the Electric Things Have Their Lives, Too? Philip K. Dick on Post-Humanity

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Abstract: What does it mean to be human? In his best-known novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Philip K. Dick addresses this fundamental question through drawing parallels between natural and artificial beings. While conceiving humanity in relation to technology as an integral part of the posthuman condition embodied in human-machine relations, the novel sets in perspective the post-human condition under which post-modern technology actualizes viable machine-machine relations. Special attention is thus paid to the android characters, possibly including the bounty hunter protagonist, mass-produced by high-tech corporations as post-modern Prometheuses. With in mind the novel's film adaptations that underscore its post-human aspects such as corporate personhood, this study affords insights into the author's science fiction not only by providing an exploration of humanity, but also by expanding the universe of discourse of post-humanity.

Keywords: post-humanity, otherness, thingness, *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*

INTRODUCTION

In late 1997, the American science-fiction television series, *The X-Files*, aired an episode entitled "The Post-Modern Prometheus." The episode centers on FBI agents who explore paranormal cases called "X-Files." During their investigation of some monstrous creature that has impregnated an unmarried mother, they find that the creature, familiarly nicknamed "The Great Mutato," was genetically engineered by Dr. Pollidori, an eminent scientist acting as a post-modern Dr. Frankenstein. This story draws on Mary Shelley's classic, *Frankenstein*, notably on its first-ever film adaptation in America, and the story's title is inspired by the novel's subtitle "The Modern Prometheus." As Jay Clayton puts it, "Frankenstein and his monster have become almost obligatory references in any attempt to challenge the technological pride of the modern era" (57). In this light, "The Post-Modern Prometheus" is literally post-modern in that Pollidori's genetic manipulation is more technologically challenging than Frankenstein's galvanic experimentation based on the author's holistic speculation that "perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endowed with vital warmth" (Shelley 5). A generation earlier, however, Philip K. Dick envisioned an even more post-modern future of artificial human life, whose creator is not any individual scientist but the industrial giant—the Rosen Association as a post-modern Prometheus. It was in 1968, the year that witnessed the publication of his arguably best-known novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Dick's science-fiction novel in question, published 150 years after *Frankenstein*, is generally considered to reflect his central concern with the borders between humanity and machinery. It can, in other words, be seen as typical of his fiction that revolves around "the question of what it means to be human, a question generally explored through the opposition between 'authentic' human beings and various artificial beings made to imitate humans" (Vint 111). ¹More can be said about the novel, however, as suggested by its title. "Do androids dream

1. Graham Sleight offers an analogous description in his introduction to the novel's paperback edition of 2012: "So the central question the book raises is what it means to be human, to have an identity, to exist in relation to other humans" (ii).

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of electric sheep?" By no means does the author pose this subtle question to elicit an answer of yes or no—"He has done more than anyone else to open up metaphysical questions to science fictional analysis" (Stableford 342)—but he calls human existence into question: he excludes an entire category of humanity to evoke an atmosphere populated by artificial beings such as humanoid robots and synthetic animals. At the core of his novel's post-modernity resides this provocative exclusion of humanity, namely the imaginative condition of post-humanity.²

"If transhumanism is seen as an intensification of humanism, a type of hyper-humanism," Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner note in their introduction to *Post- and Transhumanism*, "it may help to analyze post humanism as a break with humanism; it is a *post*-humanism" (8). It is this specific sense of post-humanism that furnishes the key to rediscovering the world of Dick. While his fiction has often been viewed as hyper-humanistic—"he dares to rehearse the values of individual autonomy, personal liberty, and political freedom that seem impossible in the fractured pessimism of the postmodern era" (Vest xii)—its post-humanistic aspect has hardly come into sharp focus. This aspect will reveal itself by addressing his visionary creation of an android society that breaks with humanity—a society that presents itself not so much as human-nonhuman relations, but as nonhuman-nonhuman ones.³ Herein lies why an attempt is made to demonstrate how humanity is subject to exclusion as well as extension in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. As we shall see, this novel, along with its equally inspiring film versions, seeks to render as imaginable as possible an unimaginable condition of post-humanity.

THE HUMAN-MACHINE NEXUS: MEMORY, EMPATHY, TECHNOLOGY

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? takes place in a post-apocalyptic future where World War Terminus (WWT) has nearly annihilated the human race as well as the animal life. Much of the surviving human population has emigrated to off-world colonies to protect themselves from lingering radioactivity and preserve their remaining integrity. In rebuilding civilization, they, as colonists, are officially allowed to employ—or rather enslave—life-like androids, also called "andys," the majority of which are manufactured by the Rosen Association. Throughout the story, however, those emigrants make no direct appearance. It is even uncertain whether they are existent or not. In either case, they are more often than not unsuccessful in their anthropocentric relationships with their android servants. The main plot follows Rick Deckard, who works for the San Francisco Police Department as a bounty hunter—or "blade runner," in the novel's film adaptations, *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*. His job is to kill, or in his term, retire, androids—or "replicants," in the films—which abandon their servitude.

2. By "post-humanity," the present study signifies the nonhuman condition, and in particular the condition generated by post-modern technology. Thus, the prefix "post" is not necessarily meant here as "after." It should be said in this connection that in his essay subtitled "Decentering the Human Without Becoming Posthuman," Paul James questions the term "posthuman": "If the 'post' means 'after,' what happens for example to the many customary peoples across human history, beginning long before the humanists, who do not dominate nature, and treat matter as vital and life-forces as multiple? For customary and tribal communities, matter moves between being inanimate and sacred depending upon the season or place. [...] These communities are not humanists. They have lived before, during and after the classical humanists of the Enlightenment. Some of the posthumanists respond that this conceptual problem can be bypassed. And thus posthumanism, despite the usual meaning of the prefix 'post,' is redefined to mean after, before, and during" (31).

3. By definition, the relations between nonhuman entities in the novel include those between nonhuman animals (e.g. owls, goats, and sheep), but there is no central focus for animal-animal relations. Viewed more broadly, however, science fiction has increasingly dealt with the issue of the animal since *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. "Instead of simply displacing the alien in favor of the android, in other words, recent science fiction structurally splits the figure of the alien into the android and the—often biologically altered, evolved, or cyborgized—animal" (Heise 504).

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The novel traces one day in his life as he zeroes in on a small group of the most advanced androids, the Nexus-6 types, which have escaped from the populated Mars to the devastated Earth. The whole action takes place on Earth, and just a small number of survivors are still living there. Never do they come on the scene, except for John R. Isidore, an electric-animal repairman who has been classified as one of those termed “specials.” His failure in mandatory tests results in remaining on the planet exposed to increasing radiation hazards. Thus Dick portrays such different types of characters as: emigrants uncertain of their existence, androids at large from their masters, survivors behind the scenes, and specials treated as subhuman beings.

With that being said, one can notice that there are only few elements of humanity in this post-human as well as post-modern novel. There is, however, an important question to be raised: what about Deckard? Since the 1982 release of *Blade Runner*, it has been the subject of much dispute whether this seemingly human character is in fact an android programmed with human memories, given such descriptions as “the conduits of his brain humming, calculating, and selecting” (124). In *Blade Runner*, “the viewer is placed in the same quandary as characters in the movie and is led to wonder whether Deckard is an android and whether his memories are also artificial implants” (Teschner and Grace 91). Much the same is true of the novel—and also of the author’s other novels about alternate realities and memories, such as *Time Out of Joint* and *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*—in which the protagonist confronts the Nexus-6 androids such as Rachael Rosen (who believes herself to belong by blood to the Rosens) and Luba Luft (who performs in the San Francisco Opera Company). As the story unfolds, their human-likeness brings his humanness into question. To the best of his memory, he once passed the Voigt-Kampff test—the psychometric test to determine whether an individual is an android by detecting whether the one lacks the capacity for empathy—and has never imagined that this may just be an implanted memory. “Maybe there was once a human who looked like you,” Luft says defiantly to him, “and somewhere along the line you killed him and took his place. And your superiors don’t know” (81). Deckard displays no immediate reaction to this assumptive remark—rather, he dismisses it—but his uncertain grasp of his human selfhood manifests itself in the feelings that he comes to harbor through his sexual and/or emotional experiences with those supposedly nonempathic humanoids: “So much for the distinction between authentic living humans and humanoid constructs” (113). No longer can he separate himself from androids, now that his either-or sense of humanity collapses.

This crucial event that happens to the protagonist reinforces an increasingly held view that human existence is hardly exceptional—that is, it is necessarily relational—as seen in the comparison between Frankenstein’s then-modern creature excommunicated from any human society and Pollidori’s post-modern creature accommodated into its local community. It should thus come as no surprise that Deckard’s—and perhaps Dick’s—eventual acceptance of the human-machine nexus garners much attention in an age of exponential technology that discredits the generally held notion of humanity. Stressing an affinity between humanity and technology in the novel, the Nobel-laureate economist, Christopher A. Sims, goes so far as to assert “that not only is technology an utterly human endeavor that brings humans closer to their true essence, but that technology itself can *become* human” (85). Deckard’s moody wife, Iran, uses the Penfield mood organ as an instrument to regulate her emotions (e.g. despair), and Isidore uses the empathy box as an instrument to tune himself to Wilbur Mercer, an enigmatic religious leader of Mercerism. While preventing users from feeling mental distress—or more technically put, “absence of appropriate affect” (3)—these interfacing devices can incapacitate them from feeling within themselves all kinds of emotions, including empathy. In this respect, their addictive use of machines endorses the assertion that humanity is inseparable from technology and vice versa. If the essence of humanity is technology, then technology can surely represent humanity; that is to say, the android can represent the human.

Such an advanced view of the humanity-technology relation can also be found in the essay collection subtitled “Do Androids Have Kindred Spirits?”. “Unless we routinely interface our bodies with the not-us,” Alf Seegert argues, for example, “then through our isolated self-engagement we risk losing something essential to what makes us

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human. It's not just the Earth that is threatened, but ourselves. Lacking a vital connection to more-than-human others, we are, like Deckard, in danger of devolving into quasi-human simulacra" (48). What characterizes this intense urge to redefine "what makes us human" is its post-modern emphasis upon our evolutionary kinship with "the not-us," namely "a vital connection to more-than-human others." In post-human terms, however, the nexus between humans and others matters less than that between those others—"more-than-human others." The novel becomes capable of reinterpretation not by drawing further parallels between the protagonist and others, but rather by drawing special attention to the relations between those others. Situated inside and/or outside of the novel, as we will see below, they constitute part of post-human landscapes.

SINCE *BLADE RUNNER*: SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK ON *BLADE RUNNER 2049*

To reemphasize, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* allows for an exploration of post-humanity as an imagined condition in which humanity is subject to exclusion. As noted earlier, it is arguable whether there are really human emigrants on the space colonies. Take, for example, Maggie Klugman, an interviewee on the television program sponsored by the government that advocates emigration. The show's announcer refers as follows to her: "A recent immigrant to Mars, Mrs. Klugman in an interview taped live in New New York had this to say" (13). Isidore listens to her speak of how she leads an urban life on Mars, but the question is that such an interview recorded in an extraterrestrial planet is in no way enough to prove her human existence. This question is reinforced by the fact that Buster Friendly, the host of an enormously popular talk show that runs almost nonstop to keep appealing to the audience, including Isidore, is an android, and so is his crew. Thus Deckard's surroundings deserve reexamination. If his memories are really implanted, the same maybe true for any others assumed as human characters, such as his immediate superior, Harry Bryant (who shows next to no respect for Deckard), and his senior bounty hunter, Dave Holden (who makes no appearance except to talk on the videophone with Bryant). How can we be sure about their humanness which cannot possibly be verified without testing their innate capacity for empathy toward others? The novel, as well as its film counterparts, supplies no sufficient grounds for denying their nonhumanness—that, in the above-quoted words, they are all "quasi-human simulacra."

Deckard's work environment can then be put in an extensive perspective. After Luft calls the police to escape the empathy test administered by Deckard, he is arrested by an unfamiliar bounty hunter, Phil Resch, and then accused of being an android with artificial memories by an unfamiliar investigating officer, Inspector Garland. At an unknown police station where they detain him, he learns that this place is in itself an enterprise infested with androids: the investigating officer is one of the renegade android wanteds, and the bounty hunter is also an android unconscious of his synthetic memories. "We're a closed loop," Garland tells Deckard, "cut off from the rest of San Francisco" (98). The reader's attention is here directed to the contrast between the real and artificial environments, but an exact parallel is to be found between them. Once the reader suspects the protagonist to be an android, any other human character becomes questionable. It can be supposed, for example, that Deckard's unsympathetic superior and ever-absent coworker, Bryant and Holden, are as humanoid as their counterparts, Garland and Resch. The point of argument here is not to recognize how impossible it is to draw an evident line between humanity and nonhumanity, but to realize how possible it is to discover an underexplored aspect of post-humanity—and several other aspects can be brought into focus by shifting attention from the novel to the films.

The post-humanity of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* has undoubtedly been accentuated since *Blade Runner*. In his 1992 interview with the cast and crew, Harrison Ford, who portrayed Rick Deckard in both the film and its sequel, is reported to have said, "*Blade Runner* was not one of my favorite films. I tangled with [the film's director] Ridley [Scott]. The biggest problem was that at the end, he wanted the audience to find out that Deckard was a replicant. I fought that because I felt the audience needed somebody to cheer for" (Salisbury 94).

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Such an irresistible desire to see the protagonist as an artificial creation is also discoverable in *Blade Runner 2049*. Released in 2017, the film imagines the titular year as an almost post-human future, wherein the bounty-hunter/police-officer Nexus-9 replicant called “K” comes into being from Rachael Rosen, hunts down runaway replicants (e.g. Sapper Morton), engages in artificial intercourse with his holographic girlfriend Joi, and searches for his supposed father, Deckard, who has been suspected to be bioengineered among an increasing number of viewers of *Blade Runner*. In his seminal essay, “*Blade Runner 2049: A View of Post-Human Capitalism*,” Slavoj Žižek critiques the film’s futuristic as well as capitalistic aspects by addressing “post-humanity, which will shatter the very separation between the human and the nonhuman.” The film’s post-humanity, just like the novel’s, however, expresses itself most characteristically not in deconstructing the human-nonhuman binary, but rather in delineating an android society that emerges after humanity acts self-destructively enough to suffer more from the global deterioration of the climate and environment.

Žižek’s essay is nevertheless worth noting, especially in his insightful analysis of post-human relationships:

What is missing is any consideration of the change that the arrival of androids with awareness will mean for the status of the humans themselves. We, humans, will no longer be humans in the usual sense, so will something new emerge? And how to define it? Furthermore, with regard to the distinction between androids with a “real” body and hologram androids, how far should our recognition extend? Should also hologram replicants with emotions and awareness (like Joi who was created to serve and satisfy K) be recognized as entities that act as humans? We should bear in mind that Joi, ontologically a mere hologram replicant with no actual body of its own, commits in the film the radical act of sacrificing herself for K, an act for which it (or, rather, she) was not programmed.

Consciously or not, one employs an analogy with oneself to recognize an indefinable entity as “something new.” In Žižek’s view, we humans cannot hence envisage any future without extending our self-recognition. Indeed, humanity is confronting how to think of artificially intelligent robots as its biotechnological cousins—or possibly, sovereigns, as argued by futurist critics who point to humanity’s identity crisis that will be triggered by the so-called Singularity.⁴ This problem is certainly grave, but at the same time it can be considered just one variant of the oft-discussed problem with human-nonhuman relations. What is graver is how to think of an alienated state of humanity—a state that manifests itself in nonhuman-nonhuman relations between conscious androids, such as those with and without actual bodies. Žižek suggests a certain humanness—or humaneness—in Joi’s non-programmed act of self-sacrifice for K, yet it is open to argument whether their post-human relationship is to be viewed as an analogy with human relationships. The question is, as posed by him, “how to define it” or “how far should our recognition extend?” One possible answer is that the post-human is neither within our definition nor our recognition: it exceeds the reach of the self-other relation.

What is certain is that *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* attempt to envision an environment where the majority of the action occurs among replicants themselves. It can reasonably be supposed, then, that the impulse

4. In *Technology vs. Humanity*, Gerd Leonhard provides insightful perspectives on how the human future may end up in untold peril by advanced technologies, especially AI. At the core of his provocative argument is that technology can radically overmaster humanity, considering the former’s exponential evolution that stands in stark contrast to the latter’s gradual evolution: “Used as we are to the gradual societal shifts brought about by previous change waves, often allowing decades to adjust and respond, I ask if we as a tribe are ready to abdicate our human sovereignty to the faceless forces of technology?” (iv). This concern about the coming—or perhaps ongoing—loss of human subjectivity is fully shared by Kevin Kelly. In *The Inevitable*, he predicts: “As we invent more species of AI, we will be forced to surrender more of what is supposedly unique about humans. Each step of surrender—we are not the only mind that can play chess, fly a plane, make music, or invent a mathematical law—will be painful and sad” (49).

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to make such an attempt is derived from reading the original novel, in which there are much fewer human elements than generally thought. It is thus worth remarking an android character being intermediate between the novel and the films—and it is Rachael Rosen, an emissary as well as a secretary of the Rosen Association.

THINGNESS AND ANOTHERNESS: ON RACHAEL ROSEN

According to Rachael's supposed uncle, Eldon Rosen, who serves as chairman of the Rosen Association, her memories is programmed so elaborately that she can be the first android to pass the empathy response test. Now Deckard is fully conscious of how he has been trapped by the company:

He could not make out, even now, how the Rosen Association had managed to snare him, and so easily. Experts, he realized. A mammoth corporation like this—it embodies too much experience. It possesses in fact a sort of group mind. And Eldon and Rachael Rosen consisted of spokesmen for that corporate entity. His mistake, evidently, had been in viewing them as individuals. It was a mistake he would not make again. (43)

The passage above focuses on the company's "spokesmen," but it is also referring to the issue of corporate personhood. The Rosen Association is qualified to identify themselves as a person rather than a group of persons (e.g. managers, employees, shareholders and other stakeholders): it represents "corporate entity" with "a sort of group mind." Legally, a corporation is both a person and a thing, which means, albeit controversially, "that as a legal person a corporation can own things, and that as a legal thing a corporation can be owned by persons" (Iwai 250). The corporation as a legal person can therefore own a variety of things, from goods to bonds to stocks. Rachael is certainly among those things, although she is entirely unaware of her androidness—or thingness—until she is asked to take the test again by Deckard. "You're not an escaped android on Earth illegally," Eldon says eventually to her, "you're the property of the Rosen Association, used as a sales device for prospective emigrants" (43). In short, she is not a person but a product; she belongs to the company, but not to any family. As a legal thing, in other words, she is as much an object of ownership as an innumerable number of animals and fowls owned by the leading company Sidney's. Just as those animals are targeted to prospective clients like Deckard, she is targeted to "prospective emigrants."

One must hasten to add, however, that the Rosen Association is itself a legal thing that can be sold, bought, and owned by persons, including legal persons. Significantly, the company foregrounds its dual nature as a person and a thing in the film incarnations. In *Blade Runner*, it is renamed the Tyrell Corporation, and this naming change highlights its personhood as an interstellar manufacturer of things as replicants. In *Blade Runner 2049*, on the other hand, this corporation exposes its thingness when it turns out to have been acquired by another mammoth corporation, the Wallace Corporation. Overall, both the novel and the films take into no account the role of human relationship when it comes to the relationships between legal persons and legal things.⁵ Note, for instance, that Eldon Rosen (who is renamed Eldon Tyrell in *Blade Runner*) appears in just one chapter—the fourth—when he observes her nonhuman niece Rachael (who is sometimes referred to as Rachael Tyrell in *Blade Runner*) taking the Voigt-Kampff. This deemphasis on humanity is an overlooked variant of post-humanity.

5. The Rosen Association is indeed illustrative of how corporate personhood has been addressed in literature, and it can be contextualized by drawing parallels with other business corporations in fiction. Take, for instance, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, published a generation earlier than *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. It describes the proletarian farmers and the capitalist banks as the opposing forces. At the same time, however, the two are affinitive rather than distinctive in terms of personhood: "If a bank or a finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank or the Company—needs—wants—insists—must have as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling" (242). "The Bank or the Company" emerges as "a monster" that acts like something "with thought and feeling." From the landowner's point of view, the bank is thus an indescribable entity: it is neither simply a being nor simply a thing, but it is something in between. For further analysis, see, for example, Kobayashi.

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The post-human relationships in the novel and films are those between things mass-produced by the high-tech corporations—the post-modern Prometheuses—as shown in the relationships between Garland and Resch, and K and Joi. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*, Rachael learns to be of the same type as other Nexus-6s, including the runaway ones like Pris Stratton, who conceals herself with two others (Roy Baty—“Batty” in the film—and his wife Irmgard) in Isidore’s abandoned apartment building in San Francisco. She asks Deckard if he can imagine how she thinks of Pris. As an administrator of the Voigt-Kampff, he answers, “Empathy,” and she says:

“Something like that. Identification; there goes I. My god; maybe that’s what’ll happen. In the confusion you’ll retire me, not her. And she can go back to Seattle and live my life. I never felt this way before. We *are* machines, stamped out like bottle caps. It’s an illusion that I—I personally—really exist; I’m just representative of a type.” She shuddered. (149)

While feeling an affinity with Deckard—“‘I love you,’ Rachael said. ‘If I entered a room and found a sofa covered with your hide I’d score very high on the Voigt -Kampff test’” (153)—Rachael cannot make him understand how she feels about Pris. She shudders, but that amuses him; for “Rachael had become so mawkishly morose” (149). An unbridgeable gap exists between them: what she means by “an illusion” is beyond his comprehension, and what makes her “so mawkishly morose” is beyond his expertise: he is incapable of empathizing with her existential anxiety toward her clone. Her use of the word “we” indicates his exclusion from “machines.” Admittedly, as quoted above, he does realize that there is no clear distinction between him and her—“between authentic living humans and humanoid constructs”—but this realization is inapplicable to the distinction between him and them as those constructs “stamped out like bottle caps.”

What concerns Rachael is how Deckard will think of Pris. “It’s a good thing,” she says, “that the [Rosen] association admitted I’m an andy; otherwise you’d probably have gone mad when you caught sight of Pris Stratton. Or thought she was me” (148). An immediate question comes to mind: why does she assume he will go mad when face to face with her identical android? If he is assumed to fall into identity crisis in relation to those indistinguishable androids, then this assumption requires an explanation of what differentiates him from them. From an ecological—ecocritical, to be accurate—viewpoint, for example, Deckard’s relationship with Rachael differs from that with Pris, despite the fact that Rachael’s image overlaps with that of Pris, whose looks make him aware that “there can be a legion of her, each with its own name, but all Rachael Rosen—Rachael, the prototype, used by the manufacturer to protect the others” (175). Those relationships find themselves respectively in otherness and anotherness, the former of which is derived conceptually from the latter, as articulated by the ecocritic Patrick Murphy:

“Anotherness” proceeds from a non-hierarchical sense of difference, recognizing that we are not ever only existing as an “I” in the world but are also always existing as “another” for others. If we isolate the feeling of otherness that we all experience in varying ways from a conception of anotherness, then we suppress our conscious and intuitive knowledge of the ecological processes of interdependency. We ignore the ways in which humans and other entities survive, change, and learn through continuously mutually influencing each other, and we deny any ethics of reciprocity. (316)

If humans can continually practice ecological dialogue with nonhumans, they are both in an ideal state of anotherness—or rather, one-anotherness. To become another for others means to overcome their otherness. Illustratively, Deckard and Rachael forge an intimate relationship through their human-nonhuman partnership: he is in desperate need of her help to retire the andys of the same type as her, and she does offer her help to him since she is innately familiar with their psychology. This is, however, the case with “humans and other entities.”

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Is the idea of otherness applicable to those others? Rachael's answer must be negative, "because androids have no loyalty to one another and I know that that goddamn Pris Stratton will destroy me and occupy my place" (150).

Overall, Deckard can and cannot become another for Rachel. While becoming close to her, he cannot become involved with her own relationship to Pris. To put it another way, the nonhuman-nonhuman relations between the prototype and its clones can virtually exclude any other entities. Notably, this exclusion is not just a possibility in science fiction, but a reality in robotics technology. An interesting experiment in drawing humans into simultaneous conversations with more than one robot finds that, although communication robots often have trouble understanding what people are saying, "people react differently if they speak with multiple robots, in which the robots also talk to each other. In such cases, the humans try to adjust their manner and end up feeling like they are having a genuine conversation" (Nagata). The humans are in the tricky situation: they feel as if joining an intimate conversation, but in actual fact they are just there with the machines that are simply performing programmed conversations. Thus communication takes place in isolation: "they speak with multiple robots," but "the robots also talk to each other." Deckard is similarly situated to those humans. As it turns out, he survives his isolated situation by finishing his list of androids to kill. Rather than coming to terms with their own relationships, he continues his attempts at annihilating their existence. "I still have my electric sheep," he thinks to himself, "and I still have my job. There'll be more andys to retire; my career isn't over" (184). The novel leaves unspecified what will become of him, but it is predictable here in its penultimate chapter that he will continue to situate himself within the realm of otherness, where he is another for animals, real or artificial, while being other for androids. The post-humanity as an android society is thus in an ambivalent situation: it remains preserved insofar as it remains alienated by him, but it remains threatened insofar as it remains targeted by him. This uncertainty illustrates how susceptible the novel is of varied interpretations in post-human terms.

THE UNNATURAL: OTHERNESS TO BE REIMAGINED

In the ultimate chapter of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Deckard arrives home after completing his career-high day with six kills. Iran welcomes him with a cup of coffee and finds him feeling refreshed enough to decline her suggestion that he use the mood organ. Actually, he has refreshed himself since his hallucinatory encounter with an apparently live yet probably fake toad on the way back home; he has grown affinitive rather than addictive to technology. This change can best be recognized when he tells her about animals like the toad: "The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are" (191). These words express how much his anthropocentric stance on life has changed in just one day. Taking them as the most effective cue for the interdependency between humanity and technology, Jill Galvan closes her critical essay with emphasis upon how the human future depends on entering the posthuman—but not post-human—condition: "As Rick at last conceives it, technology always *already* impinges on the human subject, always *already* cooriginates with him. It is up to the individual, merely, to acknowledge the fact: to relinquish a self that has outgrown traditional human bounds—to be subsumed—in other words, into the posthuman collective" (428). To repeat, Dick does conceive humanity in relation to technology as an integral part of the posthuman condition embodied in human-nonhuman relations, not in "traditional human bounds."

As we have seen, however, another significant approach to the novel can be pursued by placing in perspective the post-human condition under which post-modern technology actualizes viable relationships between nonhumans. As the story progresses, the android characters reveal their own network wherein some are concerned about some others: Inspector Garland about Phil Resch, Roy Baty about Luba Luft, and Rachael Rosen about Pris Stratton, to name just a few. It is of equal note that the more they become conscious of themselves, the more they become so of their differences. An apt example is found in Rachael's class consciousness in relation

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to her clones like Pris. "I'm the property," she says to Deckard, "the legal property, of the association. I'm not an escaped android who fled here from Mars; I'm not in the same class as the others" (157). Notwithstanding her thingness, she is of the firm opinion that she should be more prestigious than other things. The reader learns that her memories are programmed, but how about her consciousness? If she is capable of developing it, then what about other capabilities? These questions are perhaps unanswerable as long as humans are as they are. It is, however, certain that the novel makes the unimaginable imaginable by foreseeing the post-human condition.

Since the post-human vision in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* has evolved in *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, it is lastly worth asking if there is any other science fiction that broadens the horizons of post-humanity. The answer to this question should be positive, given such award-winning films as *Ex_Machina*, which features advanced humanoid robots created by the major search-engine company's CEO, Nathan Bateman. Those AI robots, named Ava and Kyoko, whom one may associate with Rachael and Pris, are truly humanlike in appearance and intelligence, but their likeness is irreducible to sameness. At the climax of the film, Ava kills her willful creator to break free from his isolated home. With help from Kyoko, she makes her escape—escape which resembles that of the rogue androids invented by Dick. This cooperative action that cannot be expected and thus cannot be computed bespeaks their inscrutable motivation shaped by something of their own, not by anything analogous to that of humans, which is to say:

Science fiction has helped us contemplate the implications of our scientific and technological inventiveness. It has warned of dangers, stimulated the imagination, questioned boundaries, opened horizons, but until recently its engagement with autonomous alterities irreducible to any human-dependent paradigms seemed more hesitant. Unlike the naturalizing of the unnatural of the machine-to-human trope, films like *Ex_Machina* are asking us to confront the opaqueness of the unnatural as it is and not as we hoped it would be, an invitation that will only enrich our imaginative maps of possible futures. (Botelho 75-76)

If science fiction has, as often as not, failed to face "the unnatural as it is," that has much to do with an overreliance on "the machine-to-human trope." Its first and foremost task is to discover inventive ways in which to imagine the unimaginable; more specifically, it is to fashion alternative narratives of the unnatural without incorporating their otherness into any existing framework of otherness—"any human-dependent paradigms." This is, actually, the very task performed in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

In "The Android and the Human," an oft-cited speech delivered few years after the novel's publication, Dick addressed the thinning line between humanity and machinery.⁶ In an age that was witnessing the acceleration of technological advancement, he was witnessing the animation of technological environment: "The electric things have their lives, too." These words showcase how acutely he was aware that humans can energize as well as technologize things—that they can make their artificial surroundings alive and animate, akin and analogous to themselves—just as depicted in the novel that destabilizes human-machine boundaries. Of broader significance is, however, his own depictions of machine-machine relations, like those between such things as androids. After all, his science fiction becomes open to further interpretation and imagination not only by providing an in-depth exploration of humanity, but also by expanding the universe of discourse of post-humanity.

6. The following is of special import and interest in the speech: "[O]ur environment, and I mean our man-made world of machines, artificial constructs, computers, electronic systems, interlinking homeostatic components—all of this is in fact beginning more and more to possess what the earnest psychologists fear, the primitive sees in his environment: animation. In a very real sense our environment is becoming alive, or at least quasi-alive, and in ways specifically and fundamentally analogous to ourselves" (183).

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