

Posthuman Anxiety: The Fear of the Loss of Humanity

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Abstract

This research incorporates my analyses, based on close-readings, of cultural representations of the posthuman, each of which embodies different anxieties and power-relations. I depart from the assumption that there are three dominant anxieties represented here: the fear of disembodiment; the fear of a loss of human uniqueness; and a fear of totalitarian control in relation to technology's dehumanizing potential. By close-reading Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) I address issues concerning the representation of the female cyborg as disembodied. Philip K. Dick's *Do Android's Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and the novel's adaptation into Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982) are analysed as challenging ideas about human nature and human uniqueness as based on more affective notions such as empathy. The analysis of the game *We Happy Few* (Compulsion Games, 2016) focuses on how the game thematises concerns about the dehumanizing potential of technologies in relation to notions of control and state-regulation. The aim of this research is to achieve a better understanding of the social and economic influences that shape different representations of humans and posthumans, and to demonstrate how definitions of what it means to be human are produced and represented in order to conceal their inherent fabricated, artificial character. I will demonstrate that fears and anxieties surrounding potential dystopic outcomes of human enhancement are all informed by (a fear of the loss of) power and control, and ideas of inequality and potential social disruption already present in society today.

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Introduction

What makes a human human? What is the nature of humanity? In many different ways – whether socially, physically or mentally – humans have tried to overcome or extend the boundaries of human existence. Changes in social and economic life and speculation about the status of humanity in the light of technological innovation and human enhancement have often been reflected upon in philosophy, art, literature, cinema and recently videogames. From as early as 1818, when Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published, literature and art have called into question the status of humanity and what it means to be human in a radically changing world. Shelley's work challenged and questioned the boundaries between human and non-human, between authentic and artificial, and finally between humanity and inhumanity by representing a figure that imitates the human, but that is also different from the human. Figures like Frankenstein's creature explore the nature of humanity by challenging the fixity and security of concepts such as 'human nature' and basic assumptions on which ideas of humanity and human uniqueness are founded. The prospect of radical human enhancement seems to threaten humanity's essence, but what does that mean?

In general, human enhancement refers to the pursuit to overcome perceived limitations of the human body. Human enhancement can refer to existing technologies such as medical implants, plastic surgery, performance-enhancing drugs, or reproductive technologies. In literature and film, but also in philosophical and cultural discourses, the term 'human enhancement' often involves emerging technologies as well as more speculative technologies such as human genetic engineering, advanced prosthetics and mind uploading. Used in this sense, human enhancement refers to a more general application of different aspects of biotechnology, information technology and nanotechnology to improve human life.

Transhumanism is a movement that aims to transform and overcome human limitations by technological enhancement. Transhumanism departs from the assumption that humans in their current form represent an early phase in development rather than an end. In his manifesto “In Defense of Posthuman Dignity” (2005) Nick Bostrom defines transhumanism as a movement that has developed gradually over the past decades and that can be viewed as “an outgrowth of secular humanism and the Enlightenment” (n.p.). More specifically, transhumanists follow humanist thinking in the belief that humanity can be improved by “promoting rational thinking, freedom, tolerance, democracy, and concern for our fellow human beings” (Bostrom, “The Transhumanist FAQ”, 4). A common idea in transhumanist thought is that humans may possibly transform themselves into beings with capabilities beyond their natural limitations to such an extent that they can be considered ‘posthuman’ (Bostrom 2005).

While transhumanism aims to improve humanity through technological means, in ‘posthumanism’ humanity as defined traditionally has been surpassed. However, critical and philosophical discourse related to posthumanism is not homogeneous; rather, it consists of sometimes contradictory ideas and definitions. Generally speaking, posthumanism reflects on the way in which humans, human thought, and society are reshaped or transcended by human enhancement or the digitalization of everyday life. Posthumanist thought emerges from the challenging and questioning of assumptions on concepts like humanism, humanity, and the human as presently defined.

The mission to transcend the so-called natural limitations of human existence has often been looked at with ambivalence. The current feasibility of *radical* human augmentation, such as the creation of cyborgs, has resulted in a debate between ‘transhumanists’ and ‘bio-conservatives’. Bio-conservatives such as Francis Fukuyama are outspoken critics of radical human augmentation and fear for a loss of humanity’s essence,

while transhumanists such as Nick Bostrom generally advocate human enhancement and its possibilities. To what extent human enhancement should be considered a necessary supplement to life, or a radical displacement of what constitutes us as humans, remains a common topic for discussion in speculations on human enhancement.

Because *radical* human enhancement remains largely speculative to date, art, literature and other cultural expressions can play an important role in the discussion and imagination of future possibilities. These fictional works can be seen as possible world experiments by way of which we experiment with becoming posthuman. In this respect, it should be noted that it is the figures of the android and cyborg as re-imaginings of the human figure that pervade our cultural representations of the future today. The representations of these figures evoke the question if we can stick to a concept of ‘human’ based on notions and concepts that define ‘humanness’ according to essentialist ideas. While non-artistic responses may simplify notions of human nature and humanity’s essence, I will argue that film and literature can bring back complexity to the debate.

Both Bostrom and Fukuyama retain essentialist ideas when it comes to their analysis of humanity. For potential future problems with human enhancement related to injustice and oppression both theorists suggest utopic conventional solutions. However, there is no such thing as a universal essence of humanity. There is, on the other hand, a need to problematize these utopian humanistic perspective and conventional political solutions. Similarly, the transhumanist idea of a world in which humans can choose whatever they wish and be respected for their choices seems nice, but highly utopic. Through analysis of my case-studies and by engaging with different perspectives on posthumanity I hope to make it clear that the term ‘human’ is increasingly irreducible to a clear-cut definition. Based on the struggles present in these works I argue it is not ‘human nature’ or humanity that is changing; instead, the anxieties about posthumanity stem from a fear of a loss of control that was precisely (and

falsely) justified by the use of such fixed categories. It is not so much the technologies themselves that are dangerous and frightening, but the way they are valued and distributed: who is in control of technological innovation, its application, and evaluation? In short, I claim that the fears and anxieties surrounding potential outcomes of human enhancement are informed by (a fear of a loss of) power, and ideas of inequality and potential social disruption already present in society today.

Film and literature can reveal the conceptualization of human(ity) itself as problematic, and explore the way in which the human inability to properly define its boundaries and essence results in anxiety and instability. I will argue that representations of human enhancement and the figures of the cyborg and android in particular can be seen as an extension of human desires, but even more so of fears. Through an analysis of the figure of the posthuman in popular culture I will attempt to foreground the anxieties and issues brought on by the transgression of boundaries. These boundaries and categories can include the differences between man and machine, or, alternatively, between authenticity and artificiality, that are inherently tied to socio-economic interests and struggles for power. The aim of this research is not to reach a conclusion about what posthumanity or humanity means, but to get a better understanding of the social and economic powers that shape and influence different representations of humans and posthumans; a better understanding of how early and contemporary definitions of what it means to be human are produced and represented in order to unveil their inherent fabricated, artificial character. The central question I will attempt to answer is:

How and why do representations of the posthuman in popular culture address anxieties about the impact of present-day social issues and technologies upon our understanding of human identity in a posthuman future?

In order to answer this question each of my three chapters will be informed by sub-questions that aim to explore different fears evoked by the transgression and transformation of traditional categories and boundaries by figures of the posthuman. My first sub-question, to be dealt with in Chapter One, involves complications concerning the relationship between mind and body as theorized within a tradition that stems from René Descartes' mind-body dualism: *In what way does the figure of the cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's Ghost in the Shell (1995) express anxieties concerning the representation of body and mind, and why are these Cartesian dichotomies and assumptions fundamental to the preservation of male control?* The second sub-question, which informs my Chapter Two, involves notions of human uniqueness and human superiority as based on humanity's perceived empathic abilities: *In what way does the figure of the posthuman call into question categories of 'human uniqueness' and 'human nature' which we use to define what is distinctively human?* Finally, my third chapter, which focuses on the potential of technology to manipulate social conformism and complacency, revolves around the question: *In what way do the figure of the posthuman and the game-rules in Compulsion Games' We Happy Few (2016) foreground concerns about control and agency?*

Mamoru Oshii's animation *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and Rupert Sanders's homonymous live-action remake address issues and anxieties relating to the relationship between body and mind by presenting a world in which cybernetics and mind-uploading are commonly used technologies. Additionally, a comparative analysis evokes questions and contrasting ideas about what it means to be human within different cultural and social contexts. Philip K. Dick's *Do Android's Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and the novel's adaptation into Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982) both challenge ideas about human nature and human uniqueness as based on more affective notions such as empathy. Labelled

as ‘more human than human’, the replicant android as the uncanny human ‘Other’ questions the fixity of boundaries between humans and machines, authenticity and artificiality from a psychoanalytical perspective. Compulsion Games’ *We Happy Few* (2016) concerns fears about the way in which technology can be employed not to improve human capacities, but to repress unwanted developments in society. With this final case study, I explicitly address the fears surrounding the dehumanizing potential of technology to enforce social conformism and complacency.

This research is academically relevant because the topic of posthumanism is of interest across different academic disciplines and discourses, but also within popular culture. Research that draws on posthuman perspectives offers different ways of understanding current and new possibilities of human existence. It can lead to a better understanding of what posthumanity might entail, but it also reflects on how the concept of humanity is given meaning today. Consequently, by addressing different experiences and anxieties as expressed in popular culture, this research adds insights and much-needed complexity to the current debate between bioconservatives and transhumanists. Research into the figure of the posthuman enables a different way of thinking about technology, humanity, the human, and the relationship between these categories.

I position myself within the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies. Theorists in cultural studies seek to understand how meaning is created, and how it is intrinsically tied to systems of control and power, and produced within specific social, economic or political context. According to Stuart Hall in “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies” (1992) cultural studies is a ‘discursive formation’ that has no simple origins. In order to study cultural phenomena, cultural studies draw from different discourses and different histories and can combine a variety of approaches, such as Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial theory,

poststructuralism, political theory, philosophy, history, but also literary and media theory (Hall, 1992). My research incorporates analysis based on close-readings of representations of the posthuman that embody different power-relations and anxieties. As such, it is embedded in a tradition of poststructuralism. Because poststructuralists engage with binary oppositions, non-essentialist thought, and the deconstruction of so-called normative truths, this background is important for a critical analysis of social and cultural phenomena.

With my research, I build on the work of a number of different contributors to the broad field of 'posthumanism'. Some of these theorists are concerned with the more ethical problems and concerns of the posthuman, such as Francis Fukuyama, Leon Kass and Nick Bostrom. Other works are more directly related to the changes in society, body and mind associated with posthumanism and their representation, such as Elaine L. Graham's *Representations of the Post/Human* (2002) and Katherine Hayles' *How we Became Posthuman* (1999). Additionally, I will approach my question about the relationship between mind and body from a perspective that is embedded in a (poststructuralist) feminist framework, enlisting the works of Andreas Huyssen and Judith Halberstam. Timothy Iles' *The Crisis of Identity in Contemporary Japanese Film* (2008) informs the (inter)cultural context and background for the first chapter of my research. In addition, throughout my entire research I make use of psychoanalysis and cultural studies for my study of anxieties and power relations. To this purpose I invoke Sigmund Freud's "Das Unheimliche" (1919) and Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013).

1. The Fear of Disembodiment

There are countless ingredients that make up the human body and mind, like all the components that make up me as an individual with my own personality. Sure, I have a face and voice to distinguish myself from others, but my thoughts and memories are unique only to me, and I carry a sense of my own destiny. Each of those things are just a small part of it. I collect information to use in my own way. All of that blends to create a mixture that forms me and gives rise to my conscience. I feel confined, only free to expand myself within boundaries.

Major Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995)

Breakthroughs in genetic engineering and technological enhancements on humans evoke the promise that humanity may soon be able to prevent diseases and overcome the natural limitations of the body. For transhumanists like Nick Bostrom the prospect of technologically and bio-medically enhanced humans and intelligent machines is a desirable goal. However, some people express their unease about this potential future. Theorists like Francis Fukuyama and Leon Kass express concerns based on moral grounds about people who seek genetic and technological enhancement to enhance their physical or mental capacities beyond the norm. For them, the promise of technologically enhanced humanity comes with the fear that these new technologies will destroy or distort the essence of human nature.

As an antidote to these alarmist, technophobic discourses, the figure of the posthuman in popular culture can challenge the desirability of certain assumptions about what it means to be human. Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is often

described as the first cyborg (Short, 2005; Halberstam, 1995). The history of the cyborg as a kind of monster relates to anxieties about humanity being destroyed by technology. In *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995) Judith Halberstam argues that the creation of a figure like Frankenstein's monster "[t]hrows humanness into relief because it emphasises the constructedness of all identity. While superficially this novel seems to be about the making of a monster, it is really about the making of a human" (38). These 'cyborg' figures have the ability to uncover the constructed nature of categories such as 'human nature' and to expose the artificiality of fixed definitions of the 'human'. Fears about the status of humanity are not so much about the actual prospect of posthumanity, but about economic and societal struggles, and power structures already present in society. In the context of posthumanity and 'makeable humans' these influences on conceptualizations of 'human' should be examined.

In "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" (1986), Andreas Huyssen claims that as soon as machines became to be perceived as a threat, writers began to imagine the "*Maschinenmensch*" (226) as woman. The threat of technology running out of control is substituted by the threat of woman, and: "[...] the machine-woman typically reflects the double male fear of technology and woman" (227). In other words, through the figure of the female cyborg in popular culture both technology and women are seen as a threat to masculine control. Paradoxically, technology itself is traditionally seen as masculine: "[...] the world of technology has always been the world of men while woman has been considered to be outside of technology" (224).

This chapter is a first step in my exploration of how anxieties and fears about what it means to be human in a technologized world are expressed through the figure of the post/human. More specifically, I will analyse the figure of the female cyborg in Mamoru

Oshii's animated film *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and Rupert Sander's live action remake by the same title from 2017. In this chapter I ask the question:

In what way does the figure of the cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) express anxieties concerning the representation of body and mind, and why are these Cartesian dichotomies and assumptions fundamental to the preservation of male control?

First, I will elaborate on what fears are expressed in relation to disembodiment in technophobic texts such as those of Fukuyama and Kass. I will engage with Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) in order to argue that the figure of the cyborg in my case-studies relates to the idea that human consciousness and identity exist by way of "emergent processes" (Hayles 288), rather than by some essential characteristics. After a short introduction to my case-studies, I will discuss how the cyborg character in Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) complicates the traditional Cartesian mind-body dichotomy by way of which human subjectivity and essence have been traditionally theorized. In these works, the fantasy of artificial intelligence and cyborgs combines present-day desires with fears about technological and societal change. Through visual analysis and close-reading I aim to uncover the effects of male control and anxiety on representations of the female cyborg¹ specifically. An analysis of the female cyborg character will unveil societal expectations and power structures that intentionally (re-)position the female character in dichotomies such as woman/man, nature/technology, and mind/body; dichotomies that are fundamental to the existence of male control.

¹ Parts of this analysis are taken from a paper I have previously written for the course "Approaches to Literature" given at Leiden University.

1.1 The Fear of Disembodiment

Transhumanism is a process and movement “that affirms the possibility and *desirability* of fundamentally improving the human condition” (Bostrom, “The Transhumanist FAQ”, 8). From a transhumanist perspective technology cannot be separated from human evolution because technologies are already part of what it means to be human. The notion of posthumanity, for transhumanists, is desirable rather than a frightening prospect. In opposition to this utopian transhumanist view we find the perspectives of bioconservatives that argue against the use of technologies to radically modify human existence. A common criticism against human enhancement is that it may be used in ignorance of long-term consequences on individuals and society (Fukuyama, 2002; Kass, 2001). For example, there is the fear that humans will have unequal access to human enhancements, which will lead to unfair physical and mental differences between different social and economic groups (Fukuyama, 2002). However, a more common fear among those against human enhancement is that radical alterations to the body may lead to a loss of ‘humanity’ as we know it.

In “Preventing a Brave New World” (2001) Leon Kass states that “For anyone who cares about preserving our humanity, the time has come to pay attention” (n.p.). For Kass, what is most troubling are “technological interventions into the human body and mind that would surely effect fundamental (and likely irreversible) changes in human nature, basic human relationships, and what it means to be a human being” (n.p.). Kass does not give a specific definition of human nature or what it means to be a human. However, from his references to Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) it is obvious that the ‘human nature’ Kass is afraid to lose concerns feelings of anxiety, love, suffering, and all those emotional aspects of human life that are traditionally associated with being human: “At long last, mankind has succeeded in eliminating disease, aggression, war, anxiety, suffering [...] But

this victory comes at the heavy price of homogenization, mediocrity, trivial pursuits [...] and souls without loves or longings” (n.p.). In order to save these essential human qualities from being destroyed by unforeseen alterations to the body Kass suggests that humans should confess and accept the “limits of our control” (n.p.). His argument evokes the notion that perspectives about what it means to be human stand and fall with a particular representation of-, and approaches to, the connection between mind and body.

In *Our Posthuman Future* (2002) Francis Fukuyama similarly argues that the biggest threat posed by contemporary (bio)technologies is the possibility that it will destroy human nature. He defines his use of the term human nature as: “the sum of the behaviour and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors” (Fukuyama 130). Fukuyama locates the source of human nature in the genetic makeup of the body, the brain as “the source of all human behaviour” (19), but also in human consciousness. By consciousness he means: “subjective mental states [...] the sensations, feelings, and emotions that you experience as part of everyday life” (166). Like Kass, Fukuyama argues that what we should protect from any future advances in (bio-)technology is this “full range of our complex, evolved natures” (Fukuyama 172).

With their focus on human consciousness and emotions as intrinsically connected to the body it becomes clear that Kass and Fukuyama both fear that humans may become less complex; the fear that humans do not possess some inherent depth, but are merely machines. In what way ‘human nature’ as affective qualities is given meaning by Fukuyama will be discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. For now, it is important to note that Kass’ and Fukuyama’s fears can be read as a response to fantasies about the future of humanity that are grounded in an idea of disembodied existence. According to Fukuyama, “the fear of dualism” (166) – the idea that there are two essential types of being, material and mental – is strong among researchers in the field of (bio-)technology. What both Fukuyama and Kass oppose

here is the tendency in transhumanist discourses to sustain the idea that human consciousness and identity can remain unchanged by alterations to the body; a tendency to overlook the interrelation of body and mind. Additionally, both theorists fear that fantasies of total control over nature and technology will paradoxically result in a loss of control; they fear that technology will overtake humans and they suggest solutions to ensure that “technology remains man’s servant rather than his master” (Fukuyama 10).

Meanwhile the influence of the transhumanist ‘fantasy of disembodiment’ on present day and future conceptualizations of the human has been researched extensively in other theoretical works. Katherine Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), does not see posthumanity as some terrible future. Rather, she claims we are already posthuman in our thinking now. Her version of the posthuman is not the cyborgs we encounter in science fiction, but a particular point of view characterized by the following assumptions:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition [...] as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines (3)

Hayles argues that in this age of fantasies about artificial intelligence and cyborgs,

information is becoming disembodied and so are bodies. Most significant is the theoretical construction of human and machine as fundamentally similar; as information processors. Hayles stresses that this idea informs many narratives on human-machine relations in society. Previous conceptualizations of the human/machine analogy have led to fantasy scenarios – as an example she names Hans Moravec’s *Mind Children* (1988) – that envision a world in which, for one thing, human consciousness can be uploaded into a computer. What these stories and fantasies evoke is the idea that even with radical alterations of the body, an uploaded or reproduced consciousness will be identical to an ‘embodied mind’; a notion that is questioned in both science fiction and the technophobic texts of Fukuyama and Kass.

To be sure, Hayles herself is not fond of these fantasies of disembodiment and she stresses the importance of human’s sense of vulnerability and material embodiment, which ensures that a subject can retain or regain a form of agency and subjectivity. She follows Antonio Damasio (*Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*) in her statement that the concept of the disembodied mind does not recognize the importance of the human mind as being “anchored in the body” (246). Damasio argues that “feelings are a powerful influence on reason, that the brain systems required by the former are enmeshed in those needed by the latter, and that such specific systems are interwoven with those which regulate the body” (Damasio 245). Accordingly, Hayles asserts that “human mind without human body is not human mind” (246).

At the same time, Hayles does not see the rise of ‘posthuman consciousness’ only as a negative development. The ideas of disembodiment of information and the similarity of humans and machines “evoke terror” (4). However, while evoking fears about a possible dehumanization of humanity, or the overthrowing of humans by machines, this idea of the posthuman also “excites pleasure” (4). For Hayles, pleasure and terror are combined insofar as it entails possibilities for political change. In this respect, posthumanist thought can open

up new ways of thinking about the meaning of being human:

emergence replaces teleology; reflexive epistemology replaces objectivism; distributed cognition replaces autonomous will; embodiment replaces a body seen as a support system for the mind; and a dynamic partnership between humans and intelligent machines replaces the liberal humanist subject's manifest destiny to dominate and control nature (288)

All in all, she argues that the idea of disembodiment should not be written into dominant concepts of human subjectivity. Hayles prefers a version of the 'posthuman' that "[e]mbraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by unlimited power and disembodied immortality" (5). She argues that the fantasy of unlimited power and full control over consciousness is a myth to sustain or justify social dominance over certain groups in history. Hayles contends that this illusion of control "[b]espeaks a fundamental ignorance about the nature of the emergent processes through which consciousness, the organism, and the environment are constituted" (288). Hayles argument represents a critical analysis of the fantasies of power and control at play in some posthumanist approaches. Her theory about the posthuman is grounded in a post-structuralist approach in which it is discourse and power-constructs that shape subjectivity. Her main concern is materiality and to unveil the oppressive, exclusionary ideologies and discourses in posthumanist approaches. In her argument, she focuses on "decontextualizing moves of the transhumanist movement" (Hayles, "Wrestling with Transhumanism", 2011) that oversimplify conceptualizations of human, body, and mind. Hayles insists that we embrace our mortality and limitations in order to gain a more productive posthumanism that does not further sustain fantasies of unlimited human control.

I have now discussed some fears expressed in theoretical discourse concerning a problem with conceptualizations of post/human as disembodied entities. Both Fukuyama and Kass express the desire to stick to a concept of human nature. However, their ideas of human nature and human essence, each in their own way, remain very simplistic. Their fears for the loss of human nature – that is in essence a fear for a loss of control over humanity and technology – is countered by their own attempt to (re-)assert control over such concepts. When this fear is expressed as a fear for the loss of emotion, the desire for control seems to lead to a loss of control. In what way does popular culture respond to these fears? How can the analysis of the figure of the posthuman in popular culture bring back a more nuanced view and help us understand the struggles underlying these technophobic and transhumanist discourses?

1.2 Case Study: *Ghost in the Shell*

Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) is an animated adaptation of the homonymous manga by Masamune Shirow. The animation involves many philosophical themes that question our notions of humanity, identity, and the boundaries between body and mind, technology and nature. Situated in the near future, in the year 2029, it tells the story of Major Motoko Kusanagi, a member of the public security agency 'Section 9'. Apart from her human brain, Kusanagi's body is fully technologically enhanced. Kusanagi and her team are sent out to track the mysterious 'ghost-hacker' Puppet Master, who can hack into people's ghosts – their souls or consciousness – and gain total control over them. Eventually, Puppet Master infiltrates 'Section 9' in order to track down Kusanagi, with whom he wants to merge and create offspring – a higher life form – in cyberspace. Eventually Puppet Master is discovered not to be a person at all, but a highly functioning artificial intelligence. In an attempt to abandon her doubts about identity, humanity, and freedom, Kusanagi accepts

Puppet Master's request to merge with it and the information network - that is, to leave her 'shell' *and* 'ghost' behind and take the next step in human evolution.

On a thematic level Rupert Sanders' *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) deals with more or less similar ideas as Oshii's version: what does it mean to be human? However, because Sanders' remake removes a lot of the complexity of the animated film it will serve as a contrast to Oshii's original in my analysis. Sanders' film depicts a near future where a majority of humans are technologically enhanced. The leading developer of these technologies, Hanka Robotics, has created a project to develop mechanical 'shells' in which a human brain can be transplanted. Mira Killian, the only survivor of a terrorist attack that killed her parents, is chosen as a test subject for Hanka's project. Months later Mira reappears as a Major in the anti-terrorist bureau 'Section 9'. After stopping a terrorist attack by a robot-geisha during a business meeting attended by Hanka representatives, Mira discovers that the attack was organized by a hacker named Kuze. After Kuze attempts to hack into Mira, she increasingly starts to experience hallucinations she does not understand. Dr. Ouelet – the woman in charge of the maintenance of Mira's body and mind – dismisses these hallucinations as 'glitches', but it later becomes clear that these are memory-flashbacks. After Kuze reveals that he is a rejected test subject from the Hanka project, Mira tries to figure out who she was before she was a cyborg. She follows an address given to her by dr. Ouelet and finds a small apartment occupied by a lonely mother. The woman tells Mira that her daughter named Motoko Kusanagi ran away from home a year earlier and disappeared. The woman was told her daughter had been arrested for writing anti-augmentation manifestos; however, she doubts that her daughter has 'disappeared' of her own accord. This 'daughter', as it turns out, is Mira's former self.

1.3 Descartes' Mind-Body Dualism

As I mentioned earlier, Hayles expresses concerns about fantasies of disembodiment that greatly influence fantasy scenarios of posthumanity. The title of my case-study, '*Ghost in the Shell*', of course recalls René Descartes' dualism of body and mind. As mentioned before, Hayles refers to Antonio Damasio's *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994). Damasio argues that René Descartes' 'error' was his dualist conception of body and mind, rationality and emotion. He claims that it is precisely Descartes' 'error' that remains very influential in both scientific and fictional discourses: "The Cartesian idea of a disembodied mind may well have been the source, by the middle of the twentieth century, for the metaphor of mind as software program" (250).

Descartes' theory was a response to a broad philosophical question, "How can one know that anything, even oneself, actually exists"? He argued that there was only one thing he could be sure of: he could trust that he could not be thinking and wondering about his existence if he did not exist. His ideas on the nature of mind and body evoke the notion that the mind is an immaterial 'thing' that engages in rational thought, feeling and imagination: "What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels" (Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1- 10). From Descartes' perspective, mental and physical events are not of the same nature. However, Descartes does argue that physical events are caused by the mind willing the body to do something:

I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am very closely united to it, and so to speak so intermingled with it that I seem to compose with it one whole [...] For all these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain, etc. are in truth none other

than certain confused modes of thought which are produced by the union and apparent intermingling of mind and body (Descartes, 1 -29)

This idea gives rise to problems and questions about how exactly this interaction happens. However, despite the idea that the mind and body maintain a close interactive connection, Descartes still further theorizes its separation. Following the dualism inherent in this thinking, the mind, then, theoretically could exist without the body²:

I possess a body with which I am very intimately conjoined, yet because, on the one side, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I [that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am], is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (Descartes, *Meditation VI. Of the Existence of Material Things, and of the Real Distinction Between the Soul and Body of Man*, 1 - 28)

Descartes theory is more complex than can be fully explained in my thesis. However, it is important to note that by way of this theoretical dualism his work has reinforced a hierarchy

² This claim is of a highly theoretical nature; it does not mean that these substances really do exist separately but that they, by “God’s will”, theoretically could. Descartes had religious and scientific motivations for making this claim:

“And as regards the soul, although many have considered that it is not easy to know its nature, and some have even dared to say that human reasons have convinced us that it would perish with the body, and that faith alone could believe the contrary, nevertheless, inasmuch as the Lateran Council held under Leo X (in the eighth session) condemns these tenets, and as Leo expressly ordains Christian philosophers to refute their arguments and to employ all their powers in making known the truth, I have ventured in this treatise to undertake the same task” (“Prefatory Note to the Meditations” *Meditations On First Philosophy*, 1-2, René Descartes).

that prefers the mind over the body, since the mind contains those essential aspects of what makes us human: “I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason...” (Descartes, 1-10). Interestingly, this representation of ‘human as mind’, or of the mind as the essence of human consciousness, is complicated and critiqued in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). In the anime, the characters are continuously put in extreme situations that evoke the question: What exactly is it that constitutes the ‘ghost’ inside a ‘shell’?

1.4 A Ghost in a Shell?

The world presented in Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) at first sight seems to fully embrace the mind-body dualism; a mind can be transplanted into a machine and people have overcome the limitations of their physical bodies by replacing parts with mechanical substitutes. Thus, the separation of mind from body is literally possible in this world: the mind can be uploaded and downloaded into a different vessel, and Kusanagi can make her mind leave her body to digitally ‘travel’ through cyberspace. Despite this apparent dualism, I argue that the relationship between Kusanagi’s mind and body in Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) is more complex and ambiguous. Furthermore, though the separation of mind and body is shown to be possible, it is not presented and valued as some inherent, unchangeable, natural state of being human. Rather, this *artificially* created dichotomy is precisely the source of Kusanagi’s existential anxiety.

In Oshii’s anime the ‘ghost’ refers to a person’s consciousness, or soul. No matter how much of the biological body is replaced with mechanical replacements and enhancements, as long as the individual still possesses a ghost, its humanity and individuality are preserved. Despite having an artificial body since birth, and a lack of memories of her life before becoming a cyborg, Kusanagi knows she has a ghost that resides in her shell. This

representation seems to run counter to Hayles' statement that "human mind without human body is not human mind" (246). Following Hayles' statement, Kusanagi would not be human. Indeed, while Kusanagi's brain is the only biologically human part of her that remains, the particular make-up of her body at times makes her question the 'humanness' of her ghost. The anxieties she expresses involve the question if being only a brain in an artificial body (a ghost in a shell) makes her *less* of a human. In this respect, the film seems to echo Kass's and Fukuyama's fears that there is such a thing as 'human nature' that may be lost when the body is radically enhanced. Most significantly, and in contrast with Fukuyama's and Kass' conceptualizations of human nature, Kusanagi doubts what it means to be human in the first place. Because the anxieties expressed by the cyborg character concern exactly the question if her ghost is human (because her body is not), the film arguably implies that the ghost, despite its artificial split from the body, is, or should be, to some extent in connection with it. But how? To answer this question, it is important to first look at the cultural context of Oshii's film.

According to Timothy Iles in *The Crisis of Identity in Contemporary Japanese Film* (2008) the posthuman perspective seeks to "situate the identity of the entire human species within a framework capable of encompassing all forms of conscious existence" (161). Like Hayles, Iles states that the posthuman perspective is concerned with "identity as a particular form of embodied consciousness" (166). However, according to Iles this "view of the world as one system" (172) is not unique to Western science and philosophy. What is more, he claims that the idea that humans are different from other animals and machines – an idea that still informs Kass' and Fukuyama's texts – runs counter to Japan's traditional way of thinking as exemplified by Shinto. According to Iles, in the Shinto perspective "all things can communicate; all things can relate; all things can engage in a mutually necessary, harmonious sharing of the bounty of life" (176). Generally speaking, Shinto is about connectedness and

the interconnectedness of all things. Furthermore, humans are not considered the sole masters of their world: “this world always has other occupants, others who share its spaces and its beauty” (177). Therefore, Shinto is “decidedly not anthropocentric” in that it sees humans as being part of a world “composed of the natural and spirit worlds as well” (177). Conversely, non-organic objects such as dolls or stones can take on qualities that make them more than objects: “‘human’ existence and the things that constitute ‘the human’ are present in non-human agents” (171). Indeed, Shinto is not anthropocentric, but it is anthropomorphic, since it sees “something comprehensible and recognizable within the non-human worlds, something which corresponds with human emotions, functions and processes of existence” (177).

The Shinto perspective enables the thought that a machine is not just some inanimate object, but that it too has a ‘soul’. This may explain why in Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) the idea that the soul must be present – even in an artificial body – is taken for granted. The idea of a spirit inhabiting objects and “endowing them with human traits of consciousness, community, and benevolence [...] mitigates what could otherwise be an alienating experience” (Iles 178). Following these views, technology, cyborgs, and sentient machines do not necessarily evoke fears and anxieties in the Japanese context. Neither is consciousness or ‘ghost’ something that is necessarily human or disembodied, since all things can possess these qualities. In this context, the fear that posthumanity and human enhancement may lead to some dehumanized or altered state – the fear underlying Fukuyama’s and Kass’ texts – does not need to be a concern. Yet, in this chapter, I claim that the figure of the female cyborg in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) still experiences anxieties related to the connection between body and mind.

While the term ‘spirit’ implies a more harmonious relation to the living world, traditionally, the ghost is usually conceived as the disembodied soul of a dead person that

appears to the living. In this sense, the term ‘ghost’ does not need to merely refer to a spirit or soul, but it can have the more frightening connotations of ‘haunting’. While the term ‘ghost’ is a perfect metaphor for the disembodied state of the posthuman, it simultaneously recalls ‘something’ from the past haunting the present. The ghost, then, is something that is neither fully present, nor missing. The way I use this concept here comes close to Judith Halberstam’s and Ira Livingston’s arguments in *Posthuman Bodies* (1995). They claim that the “lingering nostalgia for a humanist philosophy of self and other, human and alien, normal and queer” is just an echo of a “discursive struggle that has already taken place” (19). This ‘echo’, I contend, is what haunts the ghost in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). Despite the Japanese context, in the anime Kusanagi, who has doubts about her particular makeup, initially expresses the desire for some sense of wholeness. However, concepts such as ‘human nature’ and ‘human consciousness’, but also the body, are represented in the anime as not present and fixed, but as relational and ‘ghostlike’. The ghost, then, cannot be defined precisely, but can haunt the present nonetheless. In this sense, *Ghost in the Shell* complicates the mind-body dichotomy paradoxically by exaggerating the apparent split.

In the anime, this idea of the ghost and body as being tied by a ‘ghostlike’ relationship is further emphasized by the formal aspects. For example, Kusanagi’s doubts are foregrounded by the juxtaposition of objectifying shots of her (often naked) perfectly-crafted body with shots of her actual artificial creation in the opening sequence, and her existential anxiety as expressed through inner monologues and (brain)dialogues with her colleague and friend Batou. In these brain-dialogue scenes we can see an immobile Kusanagi on screen, yet the audio effect creates the illusion of her being somewhere else. In other instances, her body is invisible but represented acoustically. In his article “Voice and Vision in Oshii Mamoru’s *Ghost in the Shell: Beyond Cartesian Objects*” (2011) Hyewon Shin explores Oshii’s experiments with sound and vision. He argues that the disembodied voice in the film –

illustrated by the character's electronic-brain dialogues where we can hear but not see them speaking – “dissolves the conventional voice-image conformity” (7). Unlike conventional cinema, these scenes in the anime question the naturalness of fixed perceptions of mind and body because they explicitly reveal the “falsity of image/sound unification” (Shin 8). The ghost, as a disembodied voice, is literally represented as ‘ghostlike’.

Similarly, the body is represented as ghostlike, multiple, and refracted, confirming Halberstam's and Livingston's claim that “the dependence or interdependence of bodies on the material and discursive networks through which they operate means that the umbilical cords that supply us [...] are always multiple” (17). In the anime, the multiple ‘umbilical cords that supply us’ are explicitly visualised by the multiple ways Kusanagi's body is presented. Kusanagi wears a thermoptic suit that enables her to camouflage herself and blend in with the environment. At times, we can see her wearing the suit as if it were ‘normal’ clothes (see fig. 1); sometimes she appears as the outline of a colourful humanoid shape (see fig. 2). Frequently she is fully invisible; in other scenes, the body suit reflects the urban environment (see fig. 3), while at times she does not wear the suit at all. In one of the most iconic fighting-scenes, where Kusanagi chases and captures one of the Puppet Master's ‘puppets’, it is water, or the ‘natural environment’, that interacts with the bodysuit in order to reveal Kusanagi's ‘flickering’ presence (see fig. 4).



Fig. 1. Kusanagi wearing the thermoptic suit (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)

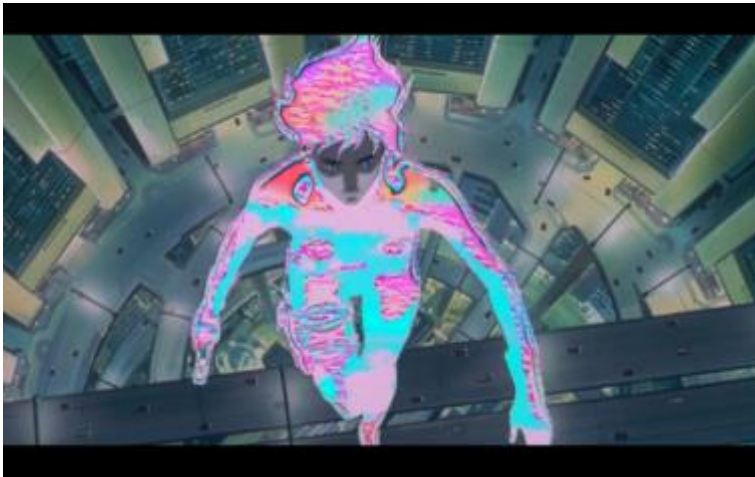


Fig. 2. Kusanagi appearing as a colorful humanoid shape (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)



Fig. 3. The thermoptic suit reflects the urban environment (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)



Fig. 4. Water interacts with the thermoptic suit (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)

In line with Halberstam's conceptualization of the body as interdependent on multiple material and discursive networks, the anime presents Kusanagi's body as not singular, but multiple, fluid, and refracted. In this way, the anime visually incorporates Hayles' "emergent processes through which consciousness, the organism, and the environment are constituted" (288), but also evokes a more haunting presence. Furthermore, it represents the nature of human identity as "formed of the experience of being an embodied consciousness", but it also demonstrates that this consciousness and the body which contains it "need not be limited to the strictly, biologically, 'human'" (Iles 184). The separation between voice and vision, and the way the body is represented as multiple and refracted, go beyond traditional binary or essentialist constructions of subject/object. In this sense, the anime evokes a meaning of existence as an "assemblage with no fundamental organizational principles" (Shin 19). Both the body and ghost are represented as scattered and heterogeneous in order to evoke a ghostlike presence across multiple forms of existence. Additionally, this is not just about ghosts, but it also relates to posthuman perceptions of the human being as not unitary, but multiple and refracted.

1.5 Memory and Origin

Another way in which the anime emphasizes a haunting presence from the past and future is by showing how memory and the idea of origin play a central part in the conceptualization of human identity in Oshii's fictional world. The anime reflects on the value humanity attaches to an idea of having an origin and memories. For example, when Kusanagi tries to confront one of Puppet Master's 'puppets' she asks: "Can you remember your mother's name or what she looks like? Or how about where you were born? Don't you have any happy childhood memories? Do you even know who you are?" [00:23:46 – 00:24:00] in order to elicit an emotional response and to re-trigger some form of subjectivity. It is initially suggested that without (familial) origin and memory, a cyborg cannot be considered authentically human; it cannot express human subjectivity and identity. Indeed, for cyborgs like Kusanagi the concept of origin is problematic in relation to their sense of identity: "Well, I guess cyborgs like myself have a tendency to be paranoid about our origins [...] Maybe there never was a real me in the first place" [00:42:09 – 00:42:23].

Why this idea of origin and authenticity is problematic in Oshii's fictional world is expressed by the character Puppet Master, who views humanity from an outside perspective:

So, man is an individual only because of his intangible memory [...] and memory cannot be defined, but it defines mankind. The advent of computers, and the subsequent accumulation of incalculable data has given rise to a new system of memory and thought parallel to your own. Humanity has underestimated the consequences of computerization. [00:48:44 – 00:49:03]

This citation stresses how humans have always used an idea of an essence (that cannot be properly defined!) and origin in order to explain what is human. However, through the figure of Puppet Master the anime also questions the value societies sets on origin and memory. It

evokes a different mode of thinking in which it is not so much origin that shapes identity – no predetermined ‘real self’ – but a dynamic engagement of the individual with others, the environment, and information: “We have been subordinate to our limitations until now. The time has come to cast aside these bonds and to elevate our consciousness to a higher plane” [01:12:50 – 01:13:01]. In this sense, contrary to the idea of essence and origin as valuable, the animation suggests that the ‘nature’ of humanity is precisely the ability to adapt and to continuously re-shape and re-evaluate knowledge. It does not dismiss the idea that familial origin and memory play an important part in the construction of a sense of identity, but it emphasizes that these factors are only a part and not the whole. The importance of this dynamic interaction with one’s surroundings – the re-imagination of identity not as something pre-determined, but dynamic and relational – is emphasized further when Kusanagi expresses her doubts about Puppet Master’s final request: “You talk about redefining my identity. I want a guarantee that I can still be myself”. To which Puppet Master responds: “There isn't one. Why would you wish to? All things change in a dynamic environment. Your effort to remain what you are is what limits you” [01:12:02 – 01:12:16]. Memory, origin, and the tendency to ‘remain what we are’ and stick to traditional concepts are considered to be limiting.

At first glance, these ideas about memory and origin are also present in Sanders’ *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). Here, ‘The Major’s’ background story – which is only hinted at slightly in the manga and not at all in the anime – becomes a major plot element. In Sanders’ adaptation, instead of questioning what it means to be human, or what it is that constitutes one’s ghost, Mira’s main concern is to find out who she was before she was a cyborg: “I know I have a past. I’ll find out *who I was*” (*Ghost in the Shell*, 2017). Her search is motivated by Kuze’s comment that “They did not save [her] life; they stole it”. Here, too, we

find the idea that there must be a human essence that is related to memories and the past; the modern concept of a coherent, narrative self. However, memories are not evaluated as uniformly positive in the film. First of all, it turns out that *false* memories about the death of Mira's parents have been implanted in her mind in order to motivate her to fight against terrorists. In this fictional world, runaways and anti-enhancement activists – including Mira's former self – are considered to be disposable; they are stripped of their subjectivity by destroying both their bodies and memories. This happens as a means to legitimize how they are used as objects later on.

In one scene, Mira asks dr. Ouelet how she knows if her hallucinations are glitches or parts of her memories. The doctor lies to her that she can see the difference in the texture of the coding her mind expresses. However, it is obvious that in this fictional world memories of the past (that would lead to a clear understanding of identity and subjectivity) are seen as 'glitches' by the government: "She was supposed to have a clean brain" (dr. Ouelet, *Ghost in the Shell*, 2017). Mira herself is unaware that the medications she takes on a daily basis are used to suppress memories of her past, but Kuze urges her to stop taking them and question her memories. In this sense, the film first suggests that some 'bad people' consider memories to be unreliable and unwanted sources for an idea of identity and subjectivity, but for others such as Mira and Kuze they are the only authentic part of the self.

However, there is a major difference between this film and Oshii's anime regarding their conclusions. In the anime, Kusanagi is less apprehensive about merging with the Puppet Master to achieve the next step in human evolution, underscoring the idea that there is no such thing as a fixed 'authentic' or 'essential' human. In the 2017 re-make, Mira tells Kuze: "I am not ready to leave. I belong here". She goes out to take 'revenge' for what Hanka has done to her: "Tell him its justice, it is what I was built for". The film concludes with a voice-over of Mira stating: "My mind is human. My body is manufactured. We cling to memories

as if they define us; it's what we do that defines us". This statement only seemingly coincides with Oshii's non-essentialist representation of human identity and subjectivity. Sanders' fictional world, in fact, restricts Mira's supposed agency and quest for 'justice' and 'revenge' to a traditional framework of nationalist discourse, in which certain dichotomies exist on the assumption that all humans have an origin that is pre-determined and *extremely* different from others (and at times unwanted). Notwithstanding the character's statement that 'what we do is what defines us', it is precisely by regaining her memories that Mira returns to an idea of a fixed, unitary, predetermined origin that motivates her desire for justice. In this sense, this film confirms and re-inscribes Kass' and Fukuyama's fears about a potential loss of essential human aspects caused by the misuse of technology. Sander's film seems to confirm Fukuyama's claim that: "[...] while human behaviour is plastic and variable, it is not infinitely so; at a certain point deeply rooted natural instincts and patterns of behaviour reassert themselves to undermine the social engineer's best-laid plans" (14).

Even more troubling is that in this context the claim that 'what we do defines us' removes the complexity of human identity that is present in the animation and real life. I would propose that Mira's eventual 'acceptance' of her state of being – that is, her admission that memories do not define us – does not resolve or deal with other social and economic influences on the body. At some point Mira states: "They created me, but they cannot control me", but is that so? Mira finds her 'true self' in her memories and by finding her mother. Consequently, despite her claim to serve justice, the film does not further question the status of her body. This is especially troubling considering that Mira's 'former self' was a Japanese woman named Motoko Kusanagi while her new shell is that of a white female. The figure of the cyborg here seems to invoke Donna Haraway's cyborg in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1990) that is, "a creature in a post-gender world" (292) that "has no origin story in the Western sense" (151 – 152). Haraway uses the figure to show how high-tech culture challenges

dualisms persistent in Western tradition. However, while the cyborg in Sanders' *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) seems to move beyond issues of race, traditional dualisms are paradoxically reinstated since this 'absence of race' is disturbingly (re)presented as 'white'. To be sure, what I mean here with 'absence of race', is not that the cyborg characters are not represented as any kind of race, they are after all represented as white. I refer to the fact that Mira basically accepts her transformation from a Japanese female to a white female as if race and this erasure of difference plays no part at all in the formation of her identity.

Sanders' film avoids discussion of real-life struggles where questions of race and gender are definitely still an issue. Despite the fact that the film slightly touches on these concepts, it fails to properly address these issues or even represent them as real. It seems to *misinterpret* the figure of the cyborg in Oshii's animation as a figure in a post-racial and post-gender utopia (ironically, the context is very dystopic here). It seems to align with the 'fantasies of disembodiment' in which cyborgs can switch bodies whenever they want and identities linked to the body such as race and sex would be practically meaningless. However, in Oshii's animation, the ghost and the shell are linked; race, gender and ethnicity definitely are components of identity – though not fixed or essentialist in nature – for both humans and non-humans. This is already clear from the opening text of the animation: "In the near future – corporate networks reach out to the stars, electrons and light flow throughout the universe. The advance of computerization, however, has not yet wiped out nations and ethnic groups" (Oshii, 1995). My analysis serves to further illustrate the co-existence and conflict of many different representations and interpretations of 'human nature'. From this comparative analysis of fictional representations, it follows that it is precisely ideas of authenticity and essentialist concepts that 'haunt' and collide with more relational modes of being.

1.6 Who Controls Body and Mind?

Earlier in this chapter, I explained how Fukuyama's and Kass' fears about technology were related to fantasies of disembodiment. With Hayles' theory it became clear that both the transhumanist discourse and the technophobic discourse of Kass and Fukuyama are related to fantasies of total control as well as its opposite: fears for a loss of said control. I have stated that in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), both the cyborg-body and its ghost which is inherently connected to it appear ghostlike and refracted. As a consequence of the literalized split between mind and body as represented by the figure of the cyborg in Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), societal influences, like traditional gender expectations, are further inscribed on the body. Despite influences of the Shinto perspective that "mitigates what could otherwise be an alienating experience" (Iles 178) there are also "social conditions which in many ways work against [this] understanding of community as operating across the human/spirit/natural worlds, emphasizing instead the changing nature of the human community as exclusive of those other dimensions" (178).

Indeed, in Oshii's fictional world, apart from having an (undefined) ghost, what makes individuals feel human is how they relate to others in society. According to a discussion between Kusanagi and Batou what makes them feel human is the way they are treated: "That's the only thing that makes me feel human: The way I'm treated. I mean, who knows what's inside our heads. Have you ever seen your own brain?" [00:42:27 - 00:42:40]. However, there are downsides to 'the way we are treated' that can shape and limit identities and further establish anxiety. Kusanagi expresses this feeling of being restricted explicitly:

There are countless ingredients that make up the human body and mind, like all the components that make up me as an individual with my own personality [...] All of

that blends to create a mixture that forms me and gives rise to my conscience. I feel confined, only free to expand myself within boundaries.

The opening line to Oshii's animation similarly suggests that while there is potential for technological advancement to move beyond traditional concepts such as nations and ethnic groups, these may still persist. While tradition itself need not be problematic, the characters in the anime continuously express feelings of being confined. I argue that one of these 'suppressing' influences – one of the persisting traditional concepts – as exemplified by the figure of the cyborg is gender. In contrast with the separation of voice and vision that goes beyond traditional binary or essentialist constructions of the object, the way the female body is given meaning in the anime generally still adheres to dualist notions. The film reflects on the concept of gender in two ways. First, it creates a character that confirms masculine desire. Secondly, it simultaneously reveals gender as an artificial construct through the inherent artificiality of the cyborg. However, this inherent artificiality also (re-)induces anxiety.

In "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" (1986), Andreas Huyssen claims that as soon as machines became to be perceived as an "inexplicable threat and as harbinger of chaos and destruction" (226), writers began to imagine the "*Maschinenmensch*" as woman: "The fears and perceptual anxieties emanating from ever more powerful machines are recast and reconstructed in terms of the male fear of female sexuality" (226). He argues that woman, nature and machines had become "a mesh of significations which all had one thing in common: otherness" (226). This 'otherness' raises fears and threatens masculine control. The female cyborg figure in *Ghost in the Shell*, I argue, becomes a technological artefact upon which the "[...] male view of destructive female sexuality has been projected" (230). According to Huyssen, the myth of

the dualistic nature of woman as either “asexual virgin-mother or prostitute-vamp” is projected onto technology, which “appears as either neutral and obedient or as inherently threatening and out-of-control” (229). So it is the male vision that “puts together and disassembles woman’s body, thus denying woman her identity and making her into an object of projection and manipulation” (231). Because women and technology are considered to be threatening, these kinds of representations serve to relieve male anxiety.

Timothy Iles proposes that women in Japan, too, are often equated with technology. He states that “[...] very often in Japanese science fiction, women embody technological advances in the forms of cyborgs or subservient robots” (68). He quotes Sato Kumiko’s statement that: “female cyborgs and androids have been safely domesticated and fetishized into maternal and sexual protectors of the male hero, whose function is usually reduced to either maid or a goddess obediently serving her beloved male master” (68). In this way, Oshii’s film preserves the “old ideal of female subservience [...] continued in a different guise” (Iles, x). The female cyborg, then, ends up being a “nexus of anxiety” (x) in a gendered world.

In the anime, traditional notions and expectations about gender are already obvious in how the cyborg bodies correspond with the gender they were assigned at their original birth as humans. Cyborgs are either male or female, even if they do not necessarily need to be. They are not presented as *post-gender* beings but as very obviously gendered entities. Kusanagi, then, is traditionally ‘female’: her body, voice and overall conduct correspond with traditional categories and expectations. However, since she was built by a company it is obvious that this gender identity is imposed on her from the outside. Furthermore, her body is literally owned by the (predominantly male!) government she works for, evoking the notion that identity and gender in particular are not something inherent to the body but shaped by cultural expectations. By way of this representation traditional ideas of ‘male dominance’

over the female body become quite explicit. Susan Bordo's "Unbearable weight" (1993) examines in what ways cultural images and expectations shape how people see a female body as 'desirable'. Not all bodies are the same; a variety of social forces combine in shaping a body. As such the body "does not have a fixed and enduring nature; bodies are plastic and change in response to the social demands placed on them" (Bordo 2238). Accordingly, Kusanagi's body in the anime appears refracted and 'ghostlike', and is not only created as a perfect human weapon, but also as a 'servant' to the patriarchal dominant order. Kusanagi's creation, in Oshii's film, is explicitly achieved without the participation of a mother-figure (unlike Sander's version) and thus fulfils "the male phantasm of a creation without mother" (Huysen 227). In this sense, the female cyborg is completely under male control and functions as an extension of male desires.

In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Laura Mulvey contends that the asymmetry of power between genders influenced the way cinema is constructed. Her concept of the 'male gaze' explains how cinema depicts the world and women from a heterosexual male's point of view, with women functioning as objects of male pleasure. According to Mulvey, the female character is inserted in the film in order to support male roles and "connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (2090). From this perspective, Oshii's film creates a character that (initially) confirms masculine desire. Kusanagi's body is owned by the predominantly male government, which raises the question whether she is seen as an individual or as property. This idea of a body as literal property is an interesting metaphor for the way in which society often objectifies female bodies regardless of the female subject or consciousness that is tied to it. In this way, the anime reflects a mind-body dichotomy (both discursive and institutionalized, and experienced) that is present in real life.

In the anime, Kusanagi's body is created in the image of a conventionally 'perfect' female with big breasts and a beautiful face, both aspects which are unrelated to her

‘purpose’ as a terrorist-fighter. Additionally, the thermoptic suit described earlier narratively ‘justifies’ Kusanagi taking off her clothes, with the suit creating the optical illusion of her being naked. Furthermore, in many scenes, the naked Kusanagi is in a completely passive state, confirming Mulvey’s claim that the woman in cinema is passive to the active gaze from the male. Additionally, it confirms Huyssen’s and Iles’s claims that the cyborg female functions as a way to relieve male anxiety by presenting the female as subservient robot.

Mulvey states that the act of looking is generally seen as an exclusively male function, in which pleasure is gained from the voyeuristic act of looking. The way the character Batou is represented in the anime conforms to this idea. The character does not fully conform to traditional gender expectations – he is Kusanagi’s ‘servant’ more than she is his – but the focus does lie on his technologically enhanced eyes. Sigmund Freud, in “The Uncanny” (1919), claims that traditionally there is an anxiety connected with the eyes and going blind that is often a “substitute for the dread of castration” (7). The character Batou in Oshii’s anime represents this anxiety in quite literal way, since he has lost his organic eyes. However, this figure of the male cyborg here also serves as a way to relieve this anxiety. Batou has not only lost his eyes, but they have been replaced by a better-working artificial pair. Instead of his eyes being a sign for the male anxiety about castration, his eyes emphasize an even stronger male gaze.

In one scene in particular, the character Batou serves as a way to extend and ‘maintain’ this male gaze in the anime. In this scene, Kusanagi changes out of her clothes after a diving session. Again, she seems to be in a passive state in relation to her naked body, while Batou looks away in embarrassment. Often, he also offers her his jacket in order to cover her body. This courteous behavior aligns with the traditional expectation that females – while being objectified nonetheless – should have some form of ‘modesty’; to be sexually active and confident seems undesirable (because it is threatening!). In this sense, the anime

confirms traditional expectations about female and male interaction. Because of his enhanced eyes, Batou can already see through clothes and other obstacles; he does not need Kusanagi to take off her clothes in order to be tempted or embarrassed by looking at her. However, as Kusanagi visibly (to the viewer) takes off her clothes Batou's view seems to align with that of the viewer, emphasizing the objectifying gaze, while his reaction serves as a confirmation of this gaze. In one shot the viewer's vision aligns with Batou's and is followed by a counter-shot of Batou looking away (see fig. 5 and fig. 6). Consequently, Batou's reaction is a way to confirm and relate to the voyeuristic act of the audience in watching the naked female cyborg body.



Fig. 5. The viewer's gaze aligns with Batou's (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)



Fig. 6. Counter-shot of Batou looking away (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)

In the anime, not every character has the same amount or same kind of technological enhancement, so that different meanings and experiences are created amongst the different characters in relation to their bodies and identities. Each particular representation of body and mind further inscribes gender expectations on the body. Despite Kusanagi's feminine appearance, and because she was built with a specific purpose, her mechanical body is stronger than was traditionally possible. Indeed, in Oshii's fictional world, there is no difference in strength between female and male cyborg bodies; technology makes them equal. However, while bodies are equally strong there is still a difference in how the film assigns power related to traditional gender expectations. Thus, Kusanagi relies mostly on agility and stealth, while Batou handles big guns.

Huyssen states that neither technology nor women can only be seen as an extension of man's abilities and desires: they are always also "qualitatively different and thus threatening in their otherness" (228). In *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) the female cyborg body is also represented as containing this otherness. This happens not only through the visual and auditory formal features that I have discussed earlier, but by explicitly showing the artificial nature of the cyborg body. During the opening scene of the anime, we learn that Kusanagi is a cyborg through a sequence that shows how she was mechanically constructed (see fig. 7 and fig. 8). Initially, in these scenes Kusanagi appears to function as Mulvey's fetishized, objectified female since again she is shown naked while the camera zooms in on specific body-parts; however, her visualized mechanical construction also problematizes this notion, obstructing mindless visual pleasure. In these scenes, I argue Kusanagi does not only function as an object of male visual pleasure, but also of male anxiety: the explicit artificiality and nakedness of her cyborg body also draws attention to the difference of this body from human (male) bodies, and to the artificiality of constructs such as gender.



Fig. 7. Kusanagi's construction (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)



Fig. 8. Kusanagi's mechanical insides (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)

This artificiality of gender is further emphasized by the character Puppet Master. After infiltrating ‘Section 9’, Puppet Master appears as a naked, destroyed torso of a blonde long-haired cyborg, yet its voice is very deep and masculine. Thus, its sex and gender are hard to determine according to traditional characteristics. Nonetheless, the government officials refer to Puppet Master as ‘him’, but they admit that this is only done for convenience: “The sex of the perpetrator is unknown and ‘him’ is just a nickname the doctor gave it” [00:46:40 – 00:46:46]. Indeed, the government official subtly admits that gender and pronouns rely mostly on arbitrary choices. In the anime, Puppet Master is initially introduced as the evil robot-villain that has a specific perception of what is wrong with the world:

humans rely too much on staying the same, thereby limiting themselves. This ‘evil computer boss’ is a common trope in science fiction that again relates to fears of technology taking over humanity. In the anime, this fear is subtly expressed by the chief of ‘Section 9’ when he comments on the company’s security checks: “Of course the ones who check are only human” [00:41:08 – 00:41:14]. In the anime, the fear about technology taking over is mainly expressed by those who are already in power and are afraid to lose it. Despite the potential for the cyborg to challenge traditional concepts, ‘those in power’, here, are complicit with the maintenance of what Elaine L. Graham in *Representations of the Posthuman* (2002) calls ‘ontological hygiene’: “[s]eparating human from non-human, nature from culture, organism from machine, binary pairings whose mutual purification is complicit in the discourses of modernity” (35).

As said, the anime emphasizes that the ‘fear of technology taking over’ is really a fear of losing control over the female subject by those (males) already in power. This explains why in the diegetic world of the characters Puppet Master is initially represented as evil: he threatens this particular power-construct. The female cyborg body, too, has the potential to move beyond traditional gender constructs related to power; consequently, this body is likewise kept within boundaries in the narrative. Indeed, the female cyborg, displayed for the visual pleasure of men, also “always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified” (Mulvey 2090). It is the threat of otherness which causes male anxiety and “reinforces the urge to control and dominate that which is other” (Huyssen 228). This reinforced urge to control is most obvious in the scene discussed above, but also in the subsequent final fighting scene of the anime.

Kusanagi’s particular ‘disembodied state’ as the female objectified cyborg eventually leads to the total destruction of her body. In an attempt to overthrow Puppet Master, she literally rips her body apart. This denouement further sustains the idea of the female body as

an object of “contradictory demands of the contemporary ideology” (Bordo 2246), exemplifying the “destructive quality of cultural categories” (Bordo 2246). In addition, the government Kusanagi works for has turned against her after she starts siding with Puppet Master and they aim to completely destroy her and Puppet Master altogether. The female cyborg is now being represented as “inherently threatening and out-of-control” (Huysen 229). When Kusanagi fights Puppet Master her mechanical insides are exposed until her outer shell is almost completely ripped apart (see fig. 9). While the mechanical process by which the female body is constructed is made threateningly visible in the anime, this constructedness is reflected in reverse when Kusanagi’s mechanical insides are again exposed. The construction of the female body through the male gaze is thus also linked to the fragmented nature and eventual destruction of that body, a representation that can be explained as necessary to relieve this continuous threat to the male fantasy of control.



Fig. 9. Kusanagi's destruction (*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995)

While the female “always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified” (2090), Mulvey states that the male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this ‘castration’ anxiety: the “devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object”; or “complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the

represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (2090 - 2091). In *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) not only do we witness Kusanagi’s destruction and merging with the Puppet Master, but eventually her brain is saved by Batou, who now serves as the ‘hero’ that saves the ‘guilty object’. In the final scene of the anime, we see Kusanagi with a new ‘shell’ of a young child. After merging with the Puppet Master she no longer is the Kusanagi she was before, nor is she the Puppet Master. In this sense, the female cyborg is now completely stripped of her ‘threatening’ sexuality and becomes ‘reassuring rather than dangerous’. At the same time, the ending retains some minor sense of ambiguity. Now that her body is de-sexualized and in some way not (yet?) gendered, Kusanagi finally feels less restricted: “Where does the new-born go from here? The net is vast and infinite” [01:17:19 – 01:17:27]. In a sense, this new body enables her to *potentially* move beyond the previous limitations. As such, (male) anxiety is sustained throughout the entirety of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995).

I have shown that the threat of technology and woman combined in the anime is exposed as a fear of a loss of control. By remaining ambiguous and inconclusive about the state of humanity, the anime obstructs essentialist conclusions while exposing the effects of male control and anxiety on representations of the female cyborg in particular. By representing the female body as scattered and ghostlike, it represents societal expectations and power structures that intentionally position the female cyborg in dichotomies such as woman/man, nature/technology, and mind/body; dichotomies that are fundamental to male domination and the relief of male anxieties. Through its formal aspects and philosophical themes, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) shows an assemblage of different aspects that shape human consciousness and identity: memories, family, experiences, how we relate to others, the ‘ghost’, but also the body. The film emphasises how all these aspects are interrelated, while none of them defines ‘human nature’, which is always changing, relational, and fluid. The

anime reveals there is no such thing as human nature. However, as I have shown, there are distinct societal expectations and power struggles at play that aim to control and sustain conceptualizations of 'human'. In my next chapter I will analyse the way in which human nature is defined as based on affective qualities such as empathy; a definition of human nature which leads to a sense of human distinctiveness and uniqueness.

2. The Fear of the loss of Human Uniqueness

Replicants like any other machine, are either a benefit or a hazard.

If they're a benefit, it's not my problem.

Rick Deckard (*Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott, 1982)

In my previous chapter I focused on the way in which the figure of the cyborg problematizes conceptualizations of the human based on transhumanist fantasies of disembodiment. I mentioned that both Kass and Fukuyama argue against the radical enhancement of humans because they fear it will lead to a loss of human nature. In this chapter, I will focus specifically on this concept of human nature that according to Kass and Fukuyama defines the essence of humanity. In Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and Ridley Scott's film adaptation *Blade Runner* (1982) the quality of 'being human' is based on affective qualities such as empathy. I argue that both in the novel and the film, the figure of the posthuman android, or replicant, inspires fear because it challenges the fixity of human nature and thus threatens a sense of human superiority and distinctiveness based on that notion of fixity. In this chapter I will present an answer to the following research question:

In what way does the figure of the posthuman call into question categories of 'human uniqueness' and 'human nature' which we use to define what is distinctively human?

After introducing my case studies, I will elaborate on how Francis Fukuyama defines human nature in *Our Posthuman Future* (2002). Alongside Fukuyama's definition of human nature, this chapter follows definitions of those characteristics that would be uniquely human and

those that constitute human nature as proposed by Nick Haslam in his “Dehumanization: An Integrative Review” (2006). I will analyse how, in *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), the idea of essential human distinctiveness as represented by the perspective of the character Rick Deckard is undermined by the replicant characters that are shown to be capable of emotions formerly thought of as distinctively human. I will take two deconstructive steps: First, I deconstruct the opposition human/replicant by showing that characteristics ascribed to replicants really belong to humans; second, I destabilize the whole opposition by showing that in both the film and the novel there is no firm categorization possible. In my analysis, I follow Rosi Braidotti’s conceptualization of the human as described in *The Posthuman* (2013), in which she argues that the human is a normative convention that is “highly regulatory and hence instrumental to the practices of exclusion and discrimination” (26). I will argue that in my case-studies, the essentialist concept of human nature is represented as an artificial construct used to dehumanize and control those considered to be other.

2.1 The Fear of a Loss of Human Uniqueness

Francis Fukuyama, in *Our Posthuman Future* (2002), claims that when we strip all of a person’s “accidental characteristics” away, there remains some essential human quality which he names “Factor X” (149). This Factor X is “the human essence, the most basic meaning of what it is to be human” (150). But what precisely is this Factor X? According to Fukuyama, for a religious person, Factor X comes from God: “Man is created in the image of God, and therefore shares in some of God’s sanctity, which entitles human beings to a higher level of respect than the rest of natural creation” (150). From Fukuyama’s own secular perspective, Factor X has something to do with human nature: “the species-typical characteristics shared by all human beings qua human beings” (101). However, Fukuyama

cannot give a simple answer to the question of what Factor X is: “Factor X cannot be reduced to the possession of moral choice, or reason, or language, or sociability, or sentience, or emotions, or consciousness [...] It is all those qualities coming together in a human whole that make up Factor X” (171).

Fukuyama admits that the idea that there exists such a thing as a human essence has been attacked by modern science. Darwinism, for example, maintains that species do not have essences, but that behaviour changes in response to an organism’s interaction with the environment. Nonetheless, Fukuyama explicitly opposes the view that human behaviour is so changeable that human nature has become a meaningless concept. It is clear that he sees certain qualities as *uniquely* human; qualities that separate humans from non-humans and machines:

It is not sufficient to argue that some other animals are conscious [...] for their consciousness does not combine human reason, human language, human moral choice, and human emotions in ways that are capable of producing human politics, human art, or human religion. (170)

Fukuyama seems to re-instate ideas of a hierarchical difference not only between humans and animals, but also between humans and machines. Regarding the difference between machines and humans he claims that “the machine will obviously not have any subjective awareness of what it is doing, or feelings about its activities” (Fukuyama 167). Apart from naming human language and reason as part of human nature, he specifically questions the likelihood that machines will ever gain qualities such as human emotions and his reason for saying this is not so much that nobody truly understands “what consciousness and emotions are ontologically”, but: “no one understands why they came to exist in human biology” (168).

What is important for my argument here is that Fukuyama claims that every human possesses qualities that *distinguish* humans in essence from other types of creatures and objects. Factor X concerns humanity's complexity and thus gives humans "dignity and moral status *higher* than that of other living creatures" (171). This thought informs Fukuyama's, but also Leon Kass' fears that humanity may become less complex, or demystified, at the hands of (bio-)technological enhancement and consequently lose its unique status.

These ideas of human uniqueness and distinctiveness are recurrent themes that are questioned and undermined in popular culture and scientific representations through the figure of the posthuman. According to Elaine Graham in *Representations of the Post/Human* (2002), popular culture questions notions of human uniqueness and human nature but simultaneously reinstates ideas of human essence by way of three recurrent focal points: "firstly, ideas of affectivity; secondly, of embodiment; and thirdly of spirituality" (127). All of Graham's emphases are explored and scrutinized in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and *Blade Runner* (1982), but in this chapter I will focus mainly on the texts' exploration and critique of empathy as a uniquely human quality. By representing android replicants as beings more intelligent than humans, with 'human reason', 'human moral choices', and 'human language', these case-studies specifically foreground and undermine emotion and empathy as qualities which distinguish humans from machines.

2.2 Case Studies: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*

Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) presents a near-future, post-apocalyptic world where almost all of nature has been destroyed by World War Terminus. Many of the surviving population of the earth have emigrated to other colonised planets such as Mars, but some people have been forced to remain on earth. The novel follows Rick Deckard and his work for the police in hunting down and 'retiring' so-called

replicants, that is, humanoid androids created for the sole purpose of serving humans on the colonised planets as slaves. When a group of replicants escapes to Earth in search of freedom, Deckard takes on the job to hunt them down in order to use the bounty to pursue his own personal dream. As the war has caused massive nuclear fallout organic animals have become extremely rare and valuable, and Deckard's dream is to own a live animal – the ultimate status symbol. He already takes care of an electric sheep on his roof, but he despises having to pretend to his neighbours that it is real.

Questions about the value of artificiality and authenticity are spread throughout the novel. These questions do not only involve real and artificial animals, but also humans and androids. In order to determine who is human and who is a replicant Deckard uses the so called 'Voight-Kampff test'. This test consists of questions involving various social situations in order to see who shows 'normal' human reactions and who does not. The replicants are supposed to lack empathy, the main characteristic that distinguishes humans from androids. However, Deckard soon learns that the replicants have become increasingly sophisticated and to tell the difference between them and humans has become almost impossible. By way of the novel's questioning of the difference between artificiality and authenticity it simultaneously raises the question: what does it mean to be human?

The novel's adaptation into Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982) changes some inherent parts of the novel. For example, Deckard's goal of owning a live animal is fully omitted, but the plot still revolves around the question how humanity can insist on fixed boundaries and categories that divide humans from non-humans when this distinction becomes increasingly blurred. While the theme of the relationship between humans and animals has been almost fully omitted, the film criticizes more strongly the perceived difference between humans and machines, and the idea of empathy as exclusive to human nature. I have decided to incorporate both the novel and the film in my analysis, mainly

because both narratives complement each other in their treatment of anxieties about the status of humanity in a posthuman world.

2.3 The Uncanny Valley

Blade Runner and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* raise two important questions: why is there such an anxiety towards replicants that are almost completely human, and why do humans insist on denying them the same rights as humans? There is something about the replicants that both attracts and threatens the human characters; they are like humans, but human they are not. This anxiety and threat of something that is ‘simultaneously attractive yet repulsive’ invokes Sigmund Freud’s essay “Das Unheimliche (The Uncanny)” (1919), in which he explores the peculiar emotional affect of some ‘strangely familiar’ situations or things on humans. According to Freud there are many elements that can cause a sensation of uncanniness. First, Freud argues that in storytelling one of the most successful devices for creating uncanny effects in the reader is to leave them in uncertainty about whether a character is a “human being or an automaton” and to do it in such a way that “his attention is not directly focused upon his uncertainty” (Freud 7). However, Freud claims that the question whether something is alive or not, human or robot, is not the only cause of an experience of uncanniness. There is also the theme of the human ‘double’, the *doppelgänger*, which Freud claims, paraphrasing Otto Rank, has connections with “belief in the soul and the fear of death” (9). Traditionally, the figure of the *doppelgänger* had been perceived as a token of immortality, but for Freud it is “the ghastly harbinger of death” and a “vision of terror” (Freud 9).

Freud’s notion of the uncanny has made its way into philosophical theories about humanoid robots, cyborgs and the like. In his “The Uncanny Valley” (1970), roboticist Masahiro Mori similarly claims that robots or human replicas may either evoke a response of

repulsion or affinity in people. His idea is that when robots look increasingly humanoid, as is the case with for instance a child's toy robot, people's responses to the object become increasingly empathic: "we naturally respond to it with a heightened sense of affinity" (n.p.). However, Mori argues that as the robot, or a prosthetic hand in his example, becomes increasingly indistinguishable from humans, the slightest difference can lead to a response of repulsion: "when we realize the hand, which at first sight looked real, is in fact artificial, we experience an eerie sensation" (n.p.). In between the empathic response and the more 'repulsive' response there is an area which Mori calls the uncanny valley or uncanny curve.

Similarly, in "More Human Than Human: Does the Uncanny Curve Really Matter?" (2013) Jakub Złotowski, Diane Proudfoot, and Christoph Bartneck argue that: "[...] a more human-like physical appearance of a robot can increase the empathy expressed by people towards it" (n.p.). They claim that it is easier to relate to robots that share physical similarities with humans than with ones that resemble machines. On the other hand, they state that people are *intentionally* searching for features that distinguish androids from humans, and that "even a slight difference may lead to their rejection" (n.p.). What is important in their essay and for the analysis of my case-studies is the idea that it is not only the robot's physical appearance that may elicit feelings of unease and anxiety. There are many other factors that affect whether humans value a robot as human or not; factors such as movement, verbal communication, gestures, intelligence and emotions (Zlotowski et al).

Indeed, in *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the uncanny feeling evoked by the replicants is not so much caused by their appearance – they are physically indistinguishable from humans – but their ability to develop emotions, higher intelligence, stronger bodies and verbal communication. While the replicant from *Blade Runner* is not exactly a doppelgänger in the traditional sense, Freud's idea of the uncanny suggests these replicants are intriguing and attractive because of their human-likeness, but

this likeness simultaneously re-triggers anxieties. In *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the figure of the replicant reveals humanity's limitations and thus threatens perceptions of human uniqueness and superiority. Because of this threat, the human characters actively seek to find a difference between them and the replicants; the difference, they claim, is the ability to be empathic.

For Freud, the cognitive dissonance experienced by a person confronted with a doppelgänger often leads to a total rejection. However, the anxiety evoked by replicants in *Do Android's Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner* manifests itself in two different ways that will be further explored in the rest of this chapter. The first is the obvious dehumanization by humans of others in an attempt to sustain a sense of superiority: the replicants, as actual replications of humans, are deliberately ascribed evil motives and inhumane intentions. The second consequence is uncertainty amongst the characters and possibly amongst spectators concerning the question whether empathy is solely a human trait and whether humans are truly empathic to begin with.

2.4 Empathy in *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

In *Against Empathy* (2016) Paul Bloom gives several definitions of the notion of empathy: “Some people use empathy as referring to everything good, as a synonym for morality and kindness and compassion” (11), and: “the act of understanding other people, getting inside their heads and figuring out what they are thinking” (11). However, the notion of empathy that he is more interested in is the act of “feeling what you believe other people feel—experiencing what they experience” (11). Bloom specifically argues against this notion of empathy because:

Empathy is a spotlight focusing on certain people in the here and now. This makes us care more about them, but it leaves us insensitive to the long-term consequences of our acts and blind as well to the suffering of those we do not or cannot empathize with. Empathy is biased, pushing us in the direction of parochialism and racism [...] It can spark violence; our empathy for those close to us is a powerful force for war and atrocity toward others (Bloom 19)

In my analysis of *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, I follow Bloom's idea that empathy can be biased and can be a powerful force for atrocity towards others. First, in this section I will look at how these narratives represent the idea of empathy as an attempt to secure human mastery over nature and technology that is based on a hierarchical distinction between humans, animals, and replicants. At the same time, I argue that empathy as a synonym for "morality and kindness and compassion" (Bloom 11) is found in the replicants and 'specials', rather than in the human characters.

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the perceived superiority of the organic, authentic human over artificial and other beings first becomes apparent in Deckard's mixed feelings towards his electric sheep. Deckard takes care of it as well as if it were a real sheep, but he cannot feel affection for it precisely because he feels the sheep is inauthentic and does not have any feelings: "We couldn't go on with the electric sheep any longer; it sapped my morale" (Dick 134). In the novel, not taking care of an animal is seen as immoral and "anti-empathic" (Dick 9); yet owning a flesh-and-blood animal is primarily perceived as the ultimate status symbol. In the narrative animals are thus seen as something to be owned; something less than human. However, because organic animals have become so incredibly rare, murdering and consuming them is seen as an immoral, criminal act. Paradoxically, then, all animals – even bugs and frogs – are seen as something more than food or objects, but also

as something to be owned, taken care of and domesticated. From the get-go, Deckard's perspective relates to the idea that only humans can be masters over nature and technology, and that they should be because it would be immoral not to. In this sense, Deckard's perspective on his relationship with his electric sheep reveals the social value set on the capacity for empathy and domination. Indeed, this capacity is also represented as a major distinction between humans and replicants, for the replicants may show a certain interest in animals, but supposedly lack the emotions to take care of them and keep them alive.

Deckard has a very distinct view of empathy that informs his idea that replicants are disposable, un-feeling objects:

Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the arachnida [...] the emphatic faculty probably required an unimpaired group instinct; a solitary organism [...] would have no use for it (Dick 24)

It is obvious that Deckard's notion of empathy is indeed "biased" (Bloom 19); biased in the sense that he only feels empathy towards humans and to some extent animals, but also in the sense that he uses empathy as a criterion to distinguish humans from replicants: "Empathy [...] must be limited to herbivores or anyhow omnivores who could depart from a meat diet. Because, ultimately, the emphatic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim, between the successful and the defeated" (Dick 24). From this perspective, Deckard claims: "Evidently the humanoid robot constituted a solitary predator" (Dick 24), a solitary predator that is not capable of empathy and thus threatens humanity. For Deckard, the escaped replicants have no regard for animals and thus possess "no ability to feel empathic joy for another life form's success or grief" (Dick 25). Even some replicants, such as Garland,

confirm Deckard's belief: "I think you are right; it would seem we lack a specific talent you humans possess. I believe it's called empathy" (Dick 98).

In this way, emotion, but empathy in particular, is represented as a key measure of human distinctiveness. Deckard believes in the idea that there are certain qualities that cannot be learned, but that are the property of organic humans, and that place humans above all other creatures. However, by juxtaposing the human characters with artificial life-forms, these narratives simultaneously explore how these boundaries are constituted and how they negatively influence relationships between different groups of beings.

2.5 Humanity's Inhumanity

In *Blade Runner* and *do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, replicants are denied human attributes such as empathy as a way of self-preservation by the human characters. According to Nick Haslam in "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review" (2006) there are two distinct "senses of humanness" that lead to two "corresponding forms of dehumanization" (Haslam 257). The first sense of humanness, human uniqueness, relates to characteristics involving morality, civility, refinement and rationality (Haslam 257). The second, human nature, relates to faculties such as agency, individuality, emotional responsiveness and interpersonal warmth (Haslam 257) as it did for Fukuyama. Haslam argues that when the characteristics of human uniqueness are denied to others the latter are perceived as lacking what distinguishes humans from animals; the human perception of others as animals. He refers to the resulting form of dehumanization as "Animalistic Dehumanization" (257). When characteristics of human nature are denied to others Haslam calls this "Mechanistic Dehumanization" (258). The mechanistic form of dehumanization involves emotional distancing while the other is represented as cold, passive and lacking in depth; the perception of others as machines. This mechanistic dehumanization implies a form of indifference rather

than outright disgust (Haslam 258). Haslam further argues that the phenomenon of dehumanization does not necessarily occur under conditions of conflict or extreme negative evaluation. In my case-studies, however, dehumanization is strongly related to more obvious practices of racism.

My position on dehumanization and the conceptualization of the human is also informed by Rosi Braidotti's argument in *The Posthuman* (2013) where she states that "The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about 'human nature'" (26). She emphasises that "The human is a normative convention" (26) which is not inherently negative, but "highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination" (26). She adds that the reduction to sub-human status of non-Western others "is a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social de-humanization" (28). This notion of practices of exclusion and discrimination is an obvious framework for reading the figure of the replicant and the figure of the 'Special' in both the novel and the film.

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner* we find Haslam's two forms of dehumanization represented by different characters. The first involves the mechanistic dehumanization – the representation of the other as cold – as explicitly embodied by the figure of the replicant. The replicants are intentionally depicted as 'monstrous' by Deckard as I will demonstrate later. Elaine Graham argues that: "monstrosity has long been a trope for invasion, contamination, assimilation and loss of identity, the ascription of monstrous and subhuman traits serving to rationalize xenophobia and prejudice" (53). Monstrous figures, like the replicant in my case studies, are thus intentionally depicted as "inhuman, disposable and dangerous" (Graham 53). These figures can be read as personifying a threat to "purity and homogeneity" (53), and they are "designated inhuman by virtue of their non-identity to the white, male reasoning, able-bodied subject" (Graham 53).

In the novel, Deckard prefers to think of replicants in this way because it makes his job easier: “In retiring – i.e. killing – an andy he did not violate the rule of life laid down by Mercer³. You shall kill only the killers...” (Dick 24). The term ‘killers’ here reflects Deckard’s view of empathy as not being a property of ‘solitary predators’ like the replicants. Meanwhile it should be noted that in the novel, it is not just the replicants that are denied autonomy, but the insistence on human distinctiveness has consequences for other characters as well, as I will argue in the next paragraphs.

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, there is a saying that dominates the government sponsored television ads, posters and government junk mail: “Emigrate or degenerate! The choice is yours!” (Dick 5). ‘Degenerate’, here, refers to the effect of the radioactive material left behind after World War Terminus on the survivors on earth; an effect which “deranged minds and genetic properties” (5). However, the idea that “the choice is yours” to emigrate is a false proposition. Firstly, some people cannot leave earth for economic reasons: Deckard, for example, cannot leave because of his job. Additionally, the humans left on earth are submitted to monthly medical check-ups in order to check whether they are ‘regular,’ meaning: “a man who could reproduce within the tolerances set by law,” (5) or whether they are to be classified as ‘chickenhead’ or ‘special’, terms used for human beings whose DNA and mental capabilities have deteriorated from exposure to the nuclear fallout. Once classified as a ‘special’, individuals are deemed unfit to emigrate from Earth to human settlements on other planets. Not only are they deemed unfit; they are explicitly referred to as inhuman:

³ Mercerism is a religious doctrine in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, that is based on the life and teachings of the character Wilbur Mercer who advocates two main thoughts: 1. Be empathic and 2. Work for the wellbeing of the community. Followers of Mercerism enter into a virtual world, a collective consciousness or shared hallucination, where everyone is connected through a device called the ‘empathy box’.

Loitering on earth potentially meant finding oneself abruptly classified as biologically unacceptable, *a menace to the pristine heredity of the race*. Once pegged as a special, a citizen, even if accepting sterilization, dropped out of history. He ceased, in effect, to be part of mankind (Dick 12)

There is an obvious reference to racism here that shows it is not only the replicants that are denied humanity, but some human characters as well. Here, we find a form of animalistic dehumanization – perceiving others as lacking what distinguishes humans from animals – as represented by the character John Isidore. John R. Isidore (re-named Sebastian in *Blade Runner*) is an example of a ‘special’. He lives an isolated life in a huge empty apartment building, and despite remaining on Earth he has survived and managed to get a job with a false-animal repair firm. He appreciates his boss because he “accepted him as human” (Dick 14). Isidore’s body is affected by the ‘dust’, and because he has failed the IQ-test that allows people to emigrate to Mars he is evaluated as a ‘chickenhead’. The use of the term ‘chickenhead’ highlights the animalistic type of dehumanization and racism at work in denying individuals human uniqueness. Isidore, too, functions as the ‘monster’, the abject posthuman, whether his ‘handicap’ or ‘defect’ is natural or the result of bio-technological meddling. In the novel, people with a disability are viewed as a burden even if their disability is the direct consequence of the misuse of technology by a government that deems some people worthy and others unworthy. In the novel those in power try to justify their mistreatment of specials by way of this animalistic type of dehumanization. In this way, the novel critically evokes the eugenics movement, which likewise discouraged empathy towards certain groups such as black people, people from lower-classes, women, Jews, and many more, and which tried to eliminate human diversity and perceived disability. The novel does not only represent a terrifying future, but it links this future to a horrible past shaped by

dehumanization and racism by underscoring the idea that “The circle of beings to whom we attribute Factor X has been one of the most contested issues throughout human history” (Fukuyama 150).

In his own way, the character Isidore is posthuman – which in the diegetic world of the characters is considered to be sub-human – because of how his genetic makeup has mutated. Furthermore, Isidore does not believe in the same kind of hierarchies as others do, even though he more or less accepts that he himself is considered a ‘chickenhead’. Like Wilbur Mercer, the creator and symbol of the fictional religion Mercerism, Isidore believes that all lifeforms, even the artificial, are equal and valuable. Nonetheless, while animals are highly appreciated and cared for in the novel, Isidore is not treated with the same respect.

While the term ‘special’ is used in a derogatory way it can have different meanings for different groups: it is used to categorise some individuals as sub-human, yet the replicants Isidore befriends see him as a different kind of special. The replicants, who understandably are not keen on the humans’ insistence on empathy as a quality exclusive to humans yet admire Isidore for his empathic abilities. The replicant Pris states that: “you’re a great man Isidore [...] you’re a credit to your race” (Dick 130). Pris’ comment underscores how humans, from the perspective of the replicants, are definitely not seen as empathic and good. Roy Batty, the leader of the rebelling replicants, similarly states: “I’m overwhelmed with admiration [...] And we imagined this would be a friendless world, a planet of hostile faces, all turned against us” (Dick 130). Isidore shows a lot of empathy for the replicants’ situation and tries to help them even if they do not always have the best intentions with him, because: “I’m a special; they [humans] don’t treat me very well either...” (Dick 129). As a result of the dehumanization of both replicants and specials, both categories are able to empathize with each other. Seen thus, I would argue that the term ‘special’ can refer to precisely the ability to form “networks and alliances which emphasize shared interests” (Graham 130). Isidore is

the most empathic character in the novel – here, I use empathy as a synonym for “morality and kindness and compassion” (Bloom 11) – a quality that is usually valued highly in the characters’ world except when this empathy is directed towards unwanted replicants.

In this sense, Isidore is a character that functions in opposition to Deckard; the differences between them highlight Deckard’s characteristics of a less empathic, cold bounty hunter. In fact, the character Isidore functions in a similar way as the replicants do; however, instead of justifying the humans’ feelings of superiority, this character functions to explicitly reveal the inhumane side of humanity itself. Presenting empathy and an active engagement with others as requirements for overcoming dehumanization and discrimination, both the novel and film raise the question whether all humans are still truly capable of being empathic, or if they ever have been. For example, Isidore does not know what a bountyhunter is, but after Roy’s description he imagines Deckard as “A thing without emotions, or even a face; a thing that if killed got replaced immediately by another resembling it [...] until everyone real and alive had been shot” (Dick 125). From Isidore’s perspective Deckard is a cold ‘thing’, not even human, while the replicants belong to ‘everyone real and alive’. I argue that from this perspective Deckard is not only represented as a thing, but as an instrument of racism and violence that, when ‘killed’, gets ‘replaced immediately by another resembling it’.

Replicants are supposed to lack empathy, but the replicant Roy Batty is more expressive about his fears, his desire to live, and his anger and grief about losing his replicant friends than Deckard. This is obvious especially in *Blade Runner*’s most famous scene, where Roy reaches the age most feared by humans and replicants alike; the time where replicants develop a subjectivity that makes them completely indistinguishable from humans, but that simultaneously signals their pre-determined death. This scene is commonly referred to as the ‘Tears in the Rain Monologue’ and has been described by Mark Rowlands as “the most

moving death soliloquy in cinematic history” (*The Philosopher at the End of the Universe*, 235). Here, the character Roy explicitly invokes the loss of subjective android experiences that are purposefully denied and destroyed by humans:

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attacked 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. [01:46:24 – 01:47:11]

Roy’s dying speech, which reveals the supposedly monstrous replicant as a feeling individual, puts him on a par with Frankenstein’s monster, with the Tyrell Corporation as an exaggerated, corporate version of the evil scientist Frankenstein. This replicant creature is not only a symptom of the threats and anxieties triggered by his creation, but, like Frankenstein’s creature, Roy is also “the very agent of his creator’s punishment for transgressing the laws of nature” (Graham 63). This punishment is not only represented on a personal level, when Roy murders the scientist that created him; in a broader and more incisive sense, he interrogates what Graham calls “the fault-lines by which exemplary humanity is set forth” (Graham 63); an interrogation that eventually exposes humanity’s inhumanity.

Indeed, in the novel, after many encounters with the replicants, Deckard senses a change in how he views himself: “What I’ve done... that’s become alien to me. In fact, everything about me has become unnatural; I’ve become an unnatural self” (Dick 182). His interactions with the replicants, expose himself and humanity as acting out the same coldness which humans ascribe to replicants. Roy’s emotional expressions in particular provide a contrast to the coldness with which Deckard deals with retiring replicants. As mentioned before, Deckard does not feel any guilt about killing replicants because they are dehumanized by the very language that describes them. The word ‘retire’ already creates a distance: while Deckard simply kills the replicants, the euphemism ‘retire’ clears him of any specific moral

transgression. In relation to this notion, some replicants raise the question whether Deckard may be a replicant himself. In the novel, when Deckard tells a replicant which he is about to retire that: “an android... doesn’t care what happens to another android” (Dick 80), she simply retorts: “Then, you must be an android. [...] Because, your job is to kill them, isn’t it?” (Dick 80). The replicant attempts to confuse Deckard even further: “Maybe there was once a human who looked like you, and somewhere along the line you killed him and took his place” (Dick 80). While Deckard is presented as a human in the novel, the replicant’s questions are obviously targeting humanity’s lack of empathy and outright inhumanity.

In *Blade Runner* there is a similar conversation in the final battle between Deckard and Roy, when Roy tauntingly exclaims: “Not very sporting to fire on an unarmed opponent. I thought you were supposed to be good. Aren't you the good man? Come on, Deckard. Show me what you're made of” [01:35:35 – 01:35:59]. Again, this comment is directed at humanity’s obvious inhumanity and mocks Deckard’s insistence on his empathic, good nature. In the final scene, where Roy saves Deckard from his death, he confronts Deckard about his feelings: “Quite an experience to live in fear isn’t it? That’s what it is to be a slave” [01:45:15 – 01:45: 23]. By way of Roy’s question the film comments on the inequality, slavery and racism to which he and his fellow replicants are subjected. Roy explicitly reveals that, while humans may have attempted to overcome their anxieties before by way of their discriminatory practices, this may no longer be the case now that replicants are revealed to be capable of empathy while humans are not.

In the novel, Deckard realizes the discrepancy between the nature of his job and his notion of empathy as a defining characteristic of human nature, and he explicitly comments on his intentional racism as a way of self-preservation: “When my conscience occasionally bothered me about the work I had to do, I protected myself by thinking of them [replicants] that way but now I no longer find it necessary” (Dick 99). Apart from revealing Deckard’s

empathy to be very biased, both the novel and the film destabilize the opposition between human and replicants even further by incorporating narrative aspects that raise the question whether humans are truly empathic to begin with.

2.6 “So much for the distinction between authentic living humans and humanoid constructs”

In my previous section I have deconstructed the opposition of human / replicant by showing that the characteristics ascribed to replicants really belong to humans and vice versa. In this section, I will destabilize the opposition even further by showing the impossibility, both in the novel and the film, of a firm distinction between humans and others based on the criterion of empathy.

In the novel, human nature as an exclusive property of humanity is also problematized by the idea that feelings, emotions and human behavior are always-already directly influenced by technological innovations and belief-systems. In the novel, this idea is symbolized by fictional technological inventions such as the ‘mood organ’ and the ‘empathy box’, but also by the fictional religious doctrine of Mercerism. The mood organ is a device on which a number can be dialed in order to regulate the user’s emotions. The device can be attuned to various settings that correspond to different emotions such as settings for “abolishing a mood of rage” (Dick 2), “despair” (3), or the “desire to watch TV” (4). It is suggested that the use of the mood organ has become habitual and even addictive for some of its users. Deckard, for example, uses his device even when he does not need it, for “such was his habitual, innate approach” (4). He dials for a “creative and fresh attitude towards his job” (4) and regularly depends on dialing for “awareness of the manifold possibilities open in the future” (3). In a similar way, the ‘empathy box’ allows its user to “fuse with Mercer in gratitude” (Dick 136) and be “spiritually together” (136) with everyone else on earth. In the diegetic world, this device allows its users to transmit their current mood to others and share

their happiness and pain.

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, 'human' is thus represented as being both in and outside of technology and nature; human is both machine and not-machine. With the characters depending highly on their mood organs, these narrative elements evoke the question if human emotions and relationships can be seen as authentic. In this sense, both the film and the novel incorporate an anxiety which, according to Fukuyama, involves humanity's move towards a "[...] median personality" that is "self-satisfied and socially compliant" (Fukuyama 52). This idea is reinforced in the novel when the fictional religious doctrine of Mercerism is exposed as being fake by the replicants in an attempt to get people to doubt and question the only thing that united the human survivors on earth. In the novel, empathic connections established through the empathy box and Mercerism lead to some sense of community amongst the survivors on earth. Because replicants are shut out from this community they try to destroy it. This narrative development reveals that for the characters' belief in empathic connections and sense of community it does not really matter who Mercer is or whether Mercerism is real. Mercerism, as a symbol for empathy and human relationships, is only real because people like Deckard believe in it. It only exists as a belief-system that shapes the human world and human identity. This discovery suggests that other doctrines about an essential, authentic human nature, such as that of Fukuyama, might be similarly based on false pretences.

In my analysis of the character Roy I already discussed how, in *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, we find a world that challenges concepts such as human nature and human uniqueness. The use of the word 'replicant' instead of 'robot' or 'android' implies that they are purposefully created in the image of the human; there are no distinct physical characteristics that set them apart. Furthermore, despite being artificially

manufactured, the replicants are made up of a combination of organic and technological enhancements, which becomes clear in a conversation between Deckard and the replicant Rachael: “[...] but really you are alive. Biologically. You’re not made out of transistorized circuits like a false animal; you’re an organic entity” (Dick 155). Additionally, some of these newer, better-developed replicants have been given false memories in an experiment by the Tyrell/Rosen Corporation⁴ to make them more accurate replicas of humans. This notion further complicates the distinctions between human, animal, and replicant that are based on dualisms such as biological/artificial and with/without memory.

Because they have been given memories about their past these replicants are able to move into a space of familial origin; a space that – as I have discussed in Chapter 1 – is usually reserved exclusively for humans. In this respect, I argue that these replicants cannot be seen as ‘solitary’. Rather, they function in connection (though false) to other beings, such as parents, because they have been given a sense of authenticity and origin. In the novel, this familial relationship is represented as a way to develop emotions and personal connections. The Tyrell/Rosen Corporation is aware of the potential risks involved in the implantation of false memories, as it allows the replicants to develop emotions and subjective awareness. The company fears the possibility of a more or less autonomous evolution of the replicants (some of which do not even know they are replicants) so they have put a limit on the replicants’ life span of only four years. Besides, replicants remain the property of the company and consequently are prohibited to act on their own needs. In this respect, the novel and film both relate to Graham’s idea that “artificial intelligence might be capable of expressing a form of consciousness or reasoning that is, ultimately, incomprehensible to human minds [...]” (129).

⁴ In *Blade Runner* the company in charge of manufacturing replicants is called the Tyrell Company, while in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* it is called the Rosen Association. Despite the difference in name it represents the same capitalist and controlling institution.

This ‘incomprehensibility’, here, is better understood as an outright rejection of the idea that robots and replicants can express emotions and consciousness.

This form of consciousness and reasoning as incomprehensible to human minds becomes obvious in a conversation between Deckard and the character Phil Resch. After Deckard finds out that the replicants have developed empathic relationships with each other in a collective just as humans have, he learns that humans can also be devoid of empathic abilities. Phil Resch, whom Deckard (and the reader) find it hard to classify as replicant or human, represents this idea of a lack of empathy in humans even more than Deckard, who only has empathy for his own kind. Resch, being a bounty hunter like Deckard, has the same coldness and distance with regard to his profession and his victims as Deckard. Consequently, he is initially accused of (or exposed as) being a replicant with false memories by Deckard and Garland. Resch himself doubts his humanity, but he argues he must be human because he takes care of his pet squirrel, something replicants supposedly cannot do.

The novel remains intentionally inconclusive about the results of the Voight-Kampff test on Resch, thereby successfully sustaining the ambiguity about Resch’s nature. It is suggested that Resch has passed the test, but this leaves Deckard in doubt and in shock nonetheless, for all he can tell Resch is: “There is a defect in your empathic, role-taking ability” (Dick 112). Even if Resch should turn out to be human, the way he practices his profession causes Deckard to suspect that some humans may not possess empathic qualities: “You don’t kill the way I do; you don’t try to [...] you like to kill. All you need is a pretext” (Dick 109). Resch advises Deckard to develop a new ideology that will explain the place of humans like himself among the human race: “If I test out as android [...] you’ll undergo renewed faith in the human race. But, since it’s not going to work out that way, I suggest you begin framing an ideology which will account for –” (Dick 111). Account for what? An ideology which will include human beings such as Resch, whom Deckard and his society

deny a human nature, in the realm of humanity. Furthermore, this newly proposed ideology would have to include (empathic) replicants in the realm of humanity and androids may have a different subjective experience from humans, or a subjectivity that is “incomprehensible to human minds” (Graham 129), but they should be included nonetheless.

In the novel, it is thus suggested that humans may not understand android subjectivity precisely because they lack the ability to form empathic connections with those considered to be different; or else they deliberately avoid to do so because of their anxieties. As is obvious from my previous analysis, the novel presents humans as inherently racist. However, as a consequence of his confrontation with Resch Deckard senses a change in his perspective: “he had assumed that throughout his psyche he experienced the android as a clever machine [...] And yet, in contrast to Phil Resch, a difference had manifested itself” (Dick 112). The question Resch asks Deckard will occupy the rest of the novel: “You realize what this would do. If we included androids in our range of empathic identification, as we do animals?”. To which Deckard responds: “We couldn’t protect ourselves” (Dick 112). Deckard’s reply, here, explicitly names society’s anxiety about a loss of control and superiority that forms the basis for discriminatory practices used to ‘protect’ humanity. However, Deckard seems to accept that humanity’s sense of supremacy and authenticity begins to crumble further when he realizes that not only can replicants feel empathy, but: “I’m capable of feeling empathy for at least specific, certain androids” (113). After which he concludes: “So much for the distinction between authentic living humans and humanoid constructs” (Dick 113).

In *Blade Runner* and *Do Android’s Dream of Electric Sheep?* the eventual impossibility to determine what is human and what is non-human, what is authentic and what is artificial according to pure distinctions, inevitably leads to Deckard’s admission that humans are not unique and thus not superior to non-humans. I read this conclusion as an admission by Deckard that the human imagination might embrace an “ethic founded on

hybridity”, and relinquish its preference for an “organic humanism” (Graham 106). Eventually, both the film and novel undermine the dream of a human essence. However, Deckard’s eventual realization only further emphasizes the violence and cruelty with which he initially dealt with the replicants. This is why I conclude that in *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the truly monstrous and uncanny is thus represented by the human characters rather than in the replicant characters. Paradoxically, it is the replicants and Deckard’s interaction with them that eventually makes him feel less human according to his own standards. As stated, in *Blade Runner* it is suggested that Deckard himself may be a replicant, but the film remains inconclusive on this point. Earlier I mentioned Freud’s view that in storytelling one of the most successful devices for creating uncanny effects in the readers is to leave them in uncertainty about whether a character is a “human being or an automaton”. In *Blade Runner* it is not so much the replicants that evoke this particular uncanny feeling in the viewer, but Deckard himself. Until the very end *Blade Runner* and *Do Android’s Dream of Electric Sheep?* sustain the anxieties evoked by the fragile status of humanity, deliberately avoiding a clear answer to the question: what is human?

3. The Fear of Totalitarian Control

Power is inflicting pain and humiliation.

Power is tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing.

O'Brien (*Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley, 1932).

In my previous chapters I have analysed how bio-conservatives like Francis Fukuyama and Leon Kass use the concept of posthumanism to warn their readers about a dystopian future marked by the absence of humanist values, the transgression of moral boundaries, and a lack of human nature. In “Posthumanism: A Critical History” (2007) Andy Miah argues that Fukuyama is concerned about medical enhancements in general, but about the politics of those who would argue on their behalf in particular: “It is evident that he considers the ethics of biotechnology as inextricable from the broader political economy of scientific research” (4). Miah argues that Fukuyama’s analysis combines the language of politics and ethics in a manner that often “appears as moralising on the subject” (4). Nonetheless, Miah suggests that the result of these mixed discourses is interesting, for it reveals the interconnectedness of different struggles: “[...] how concepts that arise as theoretical investigations within philosophy are then instrumentalised by the requirements of policy making” (4). Miah explicitly points out what I have analysed in my previous chapters: namely, that Fukuyama’s ideas on human nature, humanity and technology are related to political interests and control.

In relation to this notion of control, and most important for this chapter, Fukuyama argues that in order for human enhancement not to end in disaster “we should use the power of the state to regulate it” (Fukuyama 10). However, as I will argue in this chapter, it is precisely state regulation that is represented as a main concern in fictional narratives about a potential future of humanity. Perhaps the most famous examples of such narratives are Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell’s *1984* (1949). In these works, state regulation of technological innovation is aligned with extreme forms of totalitarianism. In these novels state regulation and control are represented as intentionally enforcing a loss of Fukuyama’s so called ‘Factor X’; a ‘loss’ that seems necessary for these political regimes to remain in control of its population.

Reminiscent of *Brave New World* (1932) and *1984* (1949), my last case-study, *We Happy Few* (Compulsion Games, 2016), also presents a world where technological enhancement and innovation are employed not so much to improve humanity’s capacities, but to explicitly repress any unwanted, un-controlled development of society. To some extent this notion was also present in my previous case-studies. However, I argue that in *We Happy Few* (2016), the aspect of total(itarian) control and forced social conformism is an explicit theme that structures the narrative as well as the gaming experience. In this chapter, through an analysis of the narrative elements and digital games’ medium-specific structure, I will present an answer to the following question:

In what way do the figure of the posthuman and the game-rules in Compulsion Games’ *We Happy Few* (2016) foreground concerns about control and agency?

First, I will briefly elaborate on the fear of totalitarianism and state regulation in relation to technological enhancement as reflected on in the novels mentioned above. Then I will

analyse the way Dystopia is represented in my case-study as an alternate history by relating it to notions proposed by Michael Gordin, Hellen Tilley, and Gyan Prakesh in “Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time” (2010) and Karen Hellekson’s *Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (2001). Finally, I use Gonzalo Frasca’s idea that ideology can be expressed by games rules as proposed in his “Simulation Versus Narrative (2003). Doing so, I argue that *We Happy Few* (2016) emphasises the theme of extreme state-control and forced conformism through its rules; rules which convey a sense of restriction and limitation to the player.

3.1 The Fear of Total(itarian) Control

Andy Miah mentions that the underlying narrative of classic texts such as Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Orwell’s *1984* recurs frequently within contemporary discussions about genetic and technological innovation: “The ideas within these works continue to characterise technological change in terms of warning and alarm, reminding of how easily the use of technology can lead to disaster” (14). Leon Kass, whom I mentioned in my first chapter, explicitly mentions Huxley’s novel as sketching a potentially dystopian future for humanity in his “Preventing a Brave New World” (2001). Fukuyama, too, mentions that “For any person growing up as I did in the Middle decades of the twentieth century, the future and its terrifying possibilities were defined by two books, George Orwell’s *1984* [...] and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*” (3). Indeed, it is in these fictional narratives that we can see how Fukuyama’s and Kass’ fears are related to a more specific political context.

About Orwell’s novel, Fukuyama states: “It is easy to see what is wrong with the world of *1984* [...] This is the world of classical tyranny, technologically empowered but not so different from what we have tragically seen in human history” (5). Orwell’s novel famously presents a world governed by extreme public manipulation, manipulation of

recorded history by a totalitarian state, and omnipresent government surveillance. While *1984* presents a world of obvious evil, Fukuyama notes that *Brave New World's* nightmare struck him as “more subtle and more challenging” (5). In Huxley’s novel, the evil is not so obvious because nobody is explicitly hurt. However, as I have mentioned earlier, what worries Fukuyama is that the people in *Brave New World* may seem happy, but “They have ceased to be human beings [...] Their world has become unnatural in the most profound sense imaginable, because human nature has been altered” (6).

In *Brave New World* (1932), traditional values and concepts such as love, the family, art and literature no longer exist, but freedom of choice and individuality are similarly lost. In his foreword to the second edition of the novel published in 1946, Huxley writes: “The people who govern the Brave New World may not be sane [...] but they are not madmen, and their aim is not anarchy but social stability” (n.p.). However, by the time Huxley writes this foreword the idea of authorities who govern the Brave New World for the sake of “social stability” has acquired more negative connotations. After the events of the Second World War, Huxley’s dystopian vision of the future has become more charged:

The immediate future is likely to resemble the immediate past, and in the immediate past rapid technological changes, taking place in a mass-producing economy and among a population predominantly propertyless, have always tended to produce economic and social confusion (11)

Huxley stresses that in dealing with this social and economic confusion: “it is probable that all the world's governments will be more or less completely totalitarian” (11, 12). What Huxley fears is that the negative effects of technological advances and scientific innovation may only become stronger under totalitarianism, because a really efficient totalitarian state

would be one in which “slaves [...] do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude” (12). He fears that totalitarian governments may continue to encourage technological change and consumerism in order to reconcile their subjects “to the servitude which is their fate” (14): a vision that shapes his *Brave New World*. It is from this dystopian worldview that Compulsion Games’ *We Happy Few* (2016) departs.

3.2 Case Study: *We Happy Few*

Setting

Compulsion Games’ *We Happy Few* (2016) is set in the retro-futuristic, 1960’s, drug-fuelled, fictional city of Wellington Wells. The game presents an alternative history of the Second World War in which Great Britain is attacked by German airplanes and Germany succeeds in occupying the British empire. In retaliation against the occupation, the residents of Wellington Wells had to do something they now only refer to as “the very bad thing” (Compulsion Games, 2016). As a consequence of their actions, the residents became overwhelmed by guilt and depression. To counter the threat of massive social instability, the fictional government invented a hallucinogenic drug called Joy (an obvious reference to the drug Soma in Huxley’s *Brave New World*). By taking this drug, the ‘Wellies’, as the residents of Wellington Wells are named, become immensely happy and instantly forget their dark past.

The isolation of Wellington Wells, which is located on an island, has led to the development of singular technological innovations, including specialised weapons, home security systems, and Joy-detectors; that is, machines used to check if someone has taken their Joy. The aesthetic of the city revolves entirely around Joy, superficial happiness, and forgetting the past: the cobblestone streets all have psychedelic, bright colours and everywhere you can find Joy-related propaganda. Furthermore, everyone wears a ‘Happy

Face'-mask as a symbol for their supposed happiness. However, this world is not all rainbows and Joy pills. When travelling to different areas, such as the wastelands, it becomes clear that the city of Wellington Wells is a false utopia: there are food shortages, extreme censorship, an impending societal collapse by overwhelming feelings of guilt, and doctors that do not know how to cure or treat people anymore apart from administering Joy. The widespread use of the drug has led to the island's transformation into a dystopian, superficial society. Those immune to Joy have been forced out of the city into the wastelands, becoming "Wastreles" who slowly go insane from guilt and the inability to forget their past. Those who refuse to take Joy are named "Downers" and upon being found out are persecuted by the Wellies and the city's police who will try to reintegrate the Downer in society by force-feeding them Joy, that is, if they do not beat them to death first.

Gameplay

The aim of the game is to try to survive long enough to complete a personal quest undertaken by the playable character, all while trying to escape Wellington Wells and the impending social collapse. The game is played from a first-person perspective and starts from an interactive prologue that explains the events happening to the character after it stopped taking its Joy and had to escape to the wastelands outside of the city. After the prologue, the player has the 'freedom' to explore Wellington Well's open-world environment and the different districts that make up the city. Wellington Wells has been created procedurally, so every time the player has to restart the game, for example because the character has died, the city and smaller quests are different.

Surviving in the game involves exploring the environment and buildings to acquire items, weapons and sustenance. Furthermore, the player has to complete tasks like repairing machines, assisting locals, collecting documents and books, and investigating suspicious

events. Doing so often means having to fight off hostile non-playable characters (NPC's), becoming hungry, tired and injured as a result, and being forced to rest, eat, or craft medicine when possible. Items found in the game can have various uses such as healing, self-defence, unlocking certain areas, or trading for other necessary items. However, the number of items that can be carried is limited, forcing the player to constantly make a decision on which items to keep.

Exploration in the game is hardly ever safe, as the character/player must continuously ensure that the locals in each district do not detect that he is not one of them. When discovered as a Downer, locals will attempt to kill the character, forcing the player to choose to fight them with various weapons, run away, or attempt to hide, often resulting in more suspicion towards the character upon visiting the place the next time. The dangers of being discovered are heightened in the districts where the streets are full of police; not only are the police more dangerous and hostile, they must especially be avoided during night-time due to the enforced curfew in the narrative which will immediately lead to the character being attacked.

3.3 Alternate History: Utopia or Dystopia?

In "Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time" (2010) Michael D. Gordin, Hellen Tilley and Gyan Prakesh argue that

Whereas utopia takes us into a future and serves to indict the present, dystopia places us directly in a dark depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now. Thus the dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare [...] beg for inclusion together (2)

Additionally, they claim that the opposite of dystopia seems to be utopia, but “the converse does not hold” (2); while utopia is a seemingly better world compared to our current one, dystopia, for the authors, seems to be a particular kind of (negative) utopia and not its direct opposite. The authors propose that dystopia is often a utopia gone haywire, or one that benefits one particular part of society: “planned, but not planned all that well or justly” (2). This leads them to the idea that in Dystopia: “There is rather a triangle – a nexus between the perfectly planned and beneficial, the perfectly planned and unjust, and the perfectly unplanned” (2).

The makers of *We Happy Few* (2016) present a world that confirms Fukuyama’s and Kass’ fears about the dehumanizing aspects of (bio-)technological human enhancement. Like Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the in-game city of Wellington Wells is either a happy utopia, or a scary dystopia, depending on your perspective: The Wellies are happy, wealthy, and free from worries, though in a way that many people, including Fukuyama and Kass, find unacceptable and worrisome. However, In *We Happy Few*, the dream and the nightmare of human enhancement and technological innovation also beg for inclusion together. Initially, according to the narrative, Joy was not used with the goal of being deliberately evil. However, the game’s narrative stresses that not all side-effects of the drug had been taken into account, such as addiction and the complete loss of individuality by inhabitants forgetting to take their Joy (because Joy intentionally affects memory) and consequently taking more Joy. These negative side-effects ‘incidentally’ fit the government’s goal of avoiding societal collapse, and they are now deliberately used to exercise more control, turning the desired utopia into a dystopia for the inhabitants; a dystopia in which ‘the perfectly planned and unjust’ and ‘the perfectly unplanned’ are more prominent than the ‘perfectly planned and beneficial’. The tensions between these aspects evoke the idea that

humans cannot always fully control the outcome of events, or cannot control it in a way that is beneficial to everyone, despite their desire for complete control.

I argue that the game's narrative context relates the loss of 'human nature', not so much to the technologies themselves, but to the idea that this loss of human nature happens *especially* under the circumstances that Fukuyama proposes as a solution (more state regulation). By saying this I do not mean to suggest that Fukuyama proposes totalitarianism as a solution against his idea of a dystopic posthuman future. However, in *We Happy Few* the idea of 'using the power of the state to regulate' (bio-)technological innovation and administration is connected to concerns such as: What kind of a political regime will be in place? Who will be in control of (bio-)technological innovation? To what extent will technology be regulated? And to what end?

The game's representation of an alternate history proposes a possible and worrisome answer to these questions. While other narratives, such as those mentioned above, often represent the posthuman in a near-future scenario, *We Happy Few* places the posthuman characters in an alternate history. In "The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time" (2001) Karen Hellekson discusses the way in which alternate histories combine the imagined with actual historical events. Furthermore, she argues that alternate histories shed light on 'what could have been', foregrounding the notion of cause and effect through this focus on events that may have occurred differently: "The alternate history directly addresses the concerns of history and the concerns of cause and effect on events" (22). Additionally, the alternate history "tends to focus on the role of the individual and his or her role in shaping history" (20) and makes readers "rethink their world and how it has become what it is" (254).

The biggest change in *We Happy Few* in relation to history, is that Britain and larger parts of the world have been taken over by nazi Germany. This framework foregrounds concerns about state-regulated bio-technological innovation and administration in relation to

real-life historical misuses of technology, such as the eugenics movement, the use of nuclear weapons, and mass genocides enabled by technological advances of the time. The game makers' choice to present the potential of devastating effects of technological innovation in the form of an alternate history, is a specific comment on how this dystopia may come into existence. Another concern that is incorporated in the game are the attempts of the in-game government to erase 'the very bad thing' from the memory of its population. Indeed, Wellington Wells is governed by the idea that "happy is the country that has no history" and "It's never too late to have a happy past" (Compulsion Games, 2016). In this sense, by showing 'what could have been', the game's narrative foregrounds the dangers of forgetting and erasing a particular part of history (though from the different perspective of 'what could have been'), thereby explicitly highlighting the downsides of state regulation combined with technological innovation.

One of the goals set by the game-makers for the player is to uncover the parts of history thus obscured in order for the character to reach the goal of escaping this dystopian world. The task of slowly gathering information about the events that led to the dystopian situation of the characters, increases the player's awareness of how utopia may transform into dystopia. By incorporating narrative and game-play aspects that lead to questions about the role of the individual, playing the game explicitly raises questions such as to what extent an individual or a political regime may control the outcome of events, and to what extent they are being controlled.

The game establishes a horrific scenario in which very few individuals are still capable of agency. These characters, the 'playable characters', contrast sharply with the mass of zombie-like creatures either too superficial and drugged-out to function (Wellies), or too overwhelmed by guilt and grief to do so (Wastrels, Downers). The 'heroes' in *We Happy Few* are often flawed and weak; Compulsion Games describes them as "moderately terrible people

trying to escape from a lifetime of cheerful denial”. Presently⁵, the only playable character is Arthur Hastings, who from the very start is introduced as someone controlled by others. Arthur’s job as a ‘redactor’ means he merely follows orders from his supervisor and the in-game government. He occupies his days by scanning old newspapers and checking them page by page either approving articles, or “restoring” (read: censoring) anything that has got to do with the war and the ‘very bad thing’.

In the prologue to the game, Arthur stumbles upon an article that mentions him and his long-lost brother. He starts having auditory flashbacks of something distressing and quickly reaches for his bottle of Joy pills, exclaiming: “When life annoys top up your Joy”. Arthur seems to follow the in-game slogan that “Happiness is a choice”, though in this game, as will become obvious, unhappiness is not a choice. When the auditory hallucinations continue, Arthur wonders whether he should continue taking Joy. At this point the player gets the choice to take Joy, or to “remember”. However, the choice to take Joy is not a valid option as it results in the game immediately starting over again. When ‘choosing’ not to take Joy, Arthur remembers something about his brother Percy, but as a player you do not get to find out what. All that can be heard is a boy screaming Arthur’s name while a steam train departs. After this, Arthur’s supervisor walks in, finds his discarded Joy pill on the floor and immediately inquires if he has “taken his Joy”. Arthur stammers that he has, of course: “snug as a bug on a drug”. His supervisor takes the pill herself and orders Arthur to join the party they are having for a colleague.

As soon as you guide Arthur to the party (again, there is no choice not to), there is a scene where his co-workers are happily hitting a piñata and stuffing themselves with the candy that falls out (see fig. 10). At this point, Arthur’s Joy fully stops affecting him. By way of a Arthur’s focalization it is revealed to the player that this happy world really is not what it

⁵ We Happy Few is currently (this thesis is written in July 2017) in an Alpha state of the game, meaning that the full game is not yet finished.

seemed to be. The room turns dirtier and less bright, while the piñata on the table turns out to be a dead rat (see fig. 11). Disgusted by this scene, Arthur gets sick and his co-workers immediately start panicking: “Call security! We’ve got a Downer!”. At this point, Arthur is chased by his co-workers and the police who attempt to beat him to death while the player is forced to guide Arthur out of the office.



Fig. 10. Piñata party (*We Happy Few*, Compulsion Games, 2016)



Fig. 11. Dead rat piñata (*We Happy Few*, Compulsion Games, 2016)

In the game, the contrasting perspectives of the superficial Wellies (“A happy face means a happy place”), and the depressed Downers and Wastrels (“We’re all rotting, like the food”) are visually represented from Arthur’s (changing) focalization. By narratively and visually presenting the diegetic world through a character’s focalization, the shifts in which

heavily influence how the world influences the character's well-being (either colourful and happy, or dark and depressing), the player is forced to navigate through this world by finding a balance between the utopic and dystopic perspectives. These two perspectives are often accompanied by Arthur's commentary, which changes according to how much Joy he has used. For example, while on Joy Arthur can claim: "this feels entirely too good", while his vision of the world when he is off Joy is more negative and doubtful: "Is there such a thing as false happiness?". These changing perspectives are often the cause of the player's actions and can effectively make the player reflect on his or her impact on this world as well. While watching the tube-systems that spread letters and articles through Arthur's office, he asks: "Do you think the canister wonders what life's like outside of the tube? Of course, he'd have to break the tube to get out. And that would break it for everybody". This comment is, of course, inspired by Arthur's own doubts. It seems as if there is a choice here: a dilemma between conforming to the fake, but happy utopia of a drug-fuelled world, or seeing the presented world for how sad it is and trying to escape it (ruining it for everybody). However, is there really a choice?

As soon as the player gains control over Arthur's movements a voice from a loudspeaker booms: "There is now a curfew in effect at night. Any civilian on the streets between 6 at night and 6 in the morning without written authorization from Occupation Authority will be shot immediately. Repeat...", again reminding the player of how restricted the world of the characters actually is. Such narrative elements occur throughout the entire game. For example, the character Uncle Jack (reminiscent of *1984*'s Big Brother) is a tv-personality who is broadcasted non-stop, always talking about happy things and encouraging the characters to forget the past and take Joy. While playing, Jack's voice can continuously be heard from the television screens and loudspeakers that are spread throughout Wellington Wells, exclaiming: "Did you brush your teeth today? Did you take your Joy?", or "We all

know what to do about the ‘blahs’ don’t we? If you’re feeling a little bit blue there’s an easy fix! Pop another Joy!”. In this respect, Jack represents (and presents) the ideology of the characters’ world in which taking Joy is as common as brushing one’s teeth. He serves as a continuous reminder that without bio-chemical and technological assistance, the character/player will not fit into the diegetic society.

This theme of social conformism is made more obvious when Jack’s commentary breaks the fourth wall, seemingly addressing the Wellies directly through their television screens, but, as I argue, the player in particular. At some point, Jack asks “Are you doing what you’re supposed to be doing? Of course, you are!”, and:

What exactly are you doing? Yes, you there. This is Uncle Jack talking directly to you. Are you where you belong right now? Are you supposed to be doing that? These are very important questions for all of us. [...] you don’t just look after yourself, we look out for each other. And that means asking ourselves these questions every day.

I argue that Jack is an important character who represents the game-world’s ideology that extends to the player. This idea is further emphasized by the fact that he is the only character that is visually portrayed by a real-life actor (see fig. 12). His visual and narrative embeddedness into the digital game-world in this manner – by showing him on television-screens which justify his looking at the player directly – connects the diegetic world of the characters to the world outside of the game. While Jack’s comments are aimed at the inhabitants of Wellington, they also serve to direct the player to question the act of game-playing itself.



Fig. 12. "Are you supposed to be doing that?" (*We Happy Few*, Compulsion Games, 2016)

In relation to Jack's commentary, Arthur can similarly comment: "It's not my fault, I'm being controlled by someone I've never even met!", or "I don't even want to be here!". These narrative aspects do not only underscore the injustice and inflexibility of state-regulation and control as represented in the narrative; the *illusion* of immediate agency of the player, combined with these narrative instructions, actually foregrounds the lack of freedom and raises questions of control for the player in relation to the outcome of events ("are you doing what you're supposed to be doing? *Of course, you are!*").

3.4 The Structure of a Game-World

Apart from digital games' similarities with more conventional narratives, games are also described as rule-based systems. In "Simulation versus Narrative" (2003) Gonzalo Frasca states that games have the potential not only to tell a story, but to simulate, "to create an environment for experimentation" (225). He argues that simulations are more complex than traditional narratives in that they are about "which rules are included in the model and how they are implemented" (231). According to Frasca, ideology can thus be represented within the structure of the game. He distinguishes three different ideological levels that can be manipulated to convey a particular ideology:

The first level is one that simulation shares with narrative and deals with representation and events. This includes the characteristics of objects and characters, backgrounds, settings and cut-scenes [...] The second level is the one of manipulation rules: what the player is able to do within the model. [...] The third level is the one of goal rules: what the player must do in order to win. (232)

The player's behaviour is shaped by the game's rules and mechanics; he can only act within the rules that govern the game world. These rules determine what is necessary, possible or impossible regarding the goal of successfully playing the game (meaning winning). By building in rewards and punishments in relation to certain actions, such as the use of violence, the game-rules manipulate the player's supposed freedom of choice.

In my previous section, I have already argued how the game's ideology is represented by the background and characters of the game. Following Frasca, I argue that in *We Happy Few*, the theme of injustice and inflexibility of state regulation and control is also reflected in the game rules themselves. The main objective of the game is to escape from Wellington Wells. However, this game goal serves a critical purpose. The game's narrative and manipulation rules underscore how very little agency can actually be gained by the player. From my earlier description of the prologue, for example, it is obvious that the objectives of the game force the player to use Joy in order to fit in, which contrasts with the Arthur's expressed desire to quit his Joy-use. The manipulation rules regulate this use even further: for example, using too much Joy, or eating contaminated food will often have a slightly positive effect, but will result in long-term negative effects, such as getting hungry even faster.

The night-time curfew mentioned in the prologue of the game similarly influences the player's freedom of movement, and so does the toxic gas that 'mysteriously' appears in the

night. Another restriction to the player's freedom of movement is related to the fact that every district of Wellington Wells has its own aesthetic, which the player is continuously forced to adapt to by using disguises or small amounts of Joy. For example, Arthur has to wear a 'proper suit' when entering districts inhabited by Wellies, or the player has to deal with Wellies that will approach Arthur negatively if he does not. Apart from being confronted with operational choices such as where to go, or which weapons to use, the player is also confronted with moral choices. In order to survive, one is expected to steal, break into houses, and at times, to fight or kill. However, stealing and killing too much will raise suspicion or cause injury, and increase one's chance of being caught (and thus having to restart the game).

The game-rules thus force the player to practice conformity, but within a narrative framework that presents that conformity as instrumental rather than as the main objective (which is ultimately to not conform by escaping). The combination of both conformist and violent actions, then, is presented as necessary for the success of the player, but as negative from the moral perspective of Arthur. In the game, conformity and rebellion (escaping), superficial happiness (Wellies) and incapacitating depression (Downers), Utopia (though false) and Dystopia are intentionally contrasted. Such stark contrasts and tensions manipulate the player to find a middle-ground; a more relational way of manoeuvring through the in-game world. In this sense, the game revolves around the question "What would you do given these circumstances?". However, it heavily influences the answer to this question, given that it is made almost impossible to either fully conform, or to fully reject the in-game ideology.

In this respect, the game rules contain a statement about the feasibility of morally desirable behaviour in the specific context of a world dominated by a totalitarian regime and state regulation. In the world of the characters, strictly sticking to traditional humanist values does not lead to a successful and enjoyable experience of the game. The characters' frequent

comments during morally questionable behaviour emphasize the idea that while one may be against the misuse of bio-technological enhancement and unacceptable moral behaviour, certain circumstances leave no other choice; there is no other choice offered by the game. If the role of alternate histories is to question the role of the individual in the shaping of history (Hellekson), this particular representation of a dystopia built on social conformism and state regulated drug-use suggests that there may be no role, or one that is extremely limited, for the individual. This is the most frightening aspect of this particular Dystopia. Humans, here, are represented as beings always-already entangled in an ambiguous relationship with technology and power, while technology is represented as both a cause of dystopia and a tool to get out of it. These tensions incorporated in the game show that there is a fine line between utopian or dystopian outcomes of (bio-)technological enhancement. Here, in any case, Dystopia is presented as the most likely outcome of strict regulation and total(itarian) control over technological innovation.

Conclusion

My thesis is inspired by the continuing posthumanist debate whether human enhancement should be considered a desirable supplement to human life, or a radical displacement of what constitutes humanity. In order to show how non-artistic responses such as those of Francis Fukuyama and Leon Kass simplify notions of human nature and humanity's essence – which they fear will be lost as a result of radical human augmentation – I focused on several representations of the posthuman figure that explicitly undermined an essentialist conceptualization of humanity.

My analysis of the figures of the posthuman revealed how there is no such thing as a universal essence of humanity; indeed, my case studies showed that the term human is increasingly irreducible to a clear-cut definition. Building on this conclusion, I argued that the anxieties about posthumanity do not so much stem from human nature or humanity that is changing, but from the fear of a loss of power and control falsely justified by the use of fixed categories and conceptualizations. The figure of the posthuman, then, should be read as an extension of human desires, but even more of human anxieties. Furthermore, I examined the figure of the posthuman as a way to express feelings of discontinuity and refracted identities.

In the next stage of my argument, I attempted to achieve a better understanding of the social, political and economic influences that shape different representations of humans and posthumans. To this purpose I asked the main research question:

How and why do representations of the posthuman in popular culture address anxieties about the impact of present-day social issues and technologies upon our understanding of human identity in a posthuman future?

In my research, I concluded that there are three dominant anxieties surrounding human identity in a posthuman world: the fear of disembodiment; the fear of a loss of human uniqueness; and a fear of totalitarian control in relation to technology's dehumanizing potential.

In my first chapter I examined how the representation of the figure of the female cyborg in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) questions and undermines the body/mind dualism that commits to an idea of a strictly rational human nature. My first sub-question involved perceived problems with this relationship between mind and body as theorized from a tradition that stems from René Descartes: *In what way does the figure of the cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's Ghost in the Shell (1995) express anxieties concerning the representation of body and mind, and why are these Cartesian dichotomies and assumptions fundamental to the preservation of male control?* In order to answer this question, I presented a close-reading of the representation of a female cyborg. I aimed to uncover the effects of male control and anxiety on representations of the female cyborg specifically. My analysis of the representation of the female cyborg character unveiled societal expectations and power structures that intentionally (re-)position the female character in dichotomies such as woman/man, nature/technology, and mind/body; dichotomies that are fundamental to the existence of male control.

In the second chapter I showed how the anxieties expressed in *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) involved the fear of a loss of human distinctiveness. My second sub-question involved notions of human uniqueness and human superiority as based on human's perceived empathic abilities: *In what way does the figure of the posthuman call into question categories of 'human uniqueness' and 'human nature' which we use to define what is distinctively human?* In these case-studies, the figure of the

posthuman android, or replicant, inspires fear because it challenges the fixity of human nature and thus threatens a concomitant sense of human superiority and distinctiveness. In my analysis, I followed Rosi Braidotti's conceptualization of the human in *The Posthuman* (2013), in which she argues that the human is a normative convention that is "highly regulatory and hence instrumental to the practices of exclusion and discrimination" (26). I argued that in my case-studies, the essentialist concept of human nature as being defined by empathy, too, is represented as an artificial construct used to sustain control based on the dehumanization of those whom are considered to be other. I concluded that in *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the truly monstrous and uncanny is represented by the human characters, most of whom are racists and incapable of empathy, rather than by the replicant characters.

My third chapter, focused particularly on fears concerning the potential of technology to manipulate social conformism and complacency. It revolved around the question: *In what way do the figure of the posthuman and the game-rules in Compulsion Games' We Happy Few (2016) foreground concerns about control and agency?* This chapter was informed by the idea, already present in my previous chapters, that essentialist ideas on human nature, humanity and technology are all related to societal and political interests and desires for control. In this chapter I began by observing that extreme state regulation of technology, presented as a main concern in my case study, is not a new topic but was already present in narratives such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). I argued that *We Happy Few* (2016) emphasizes the theme of extreme state-control and enforces conformism through its implemented rules; rules which instil a sense of restriction and limitation in the player. The game rules express a statement about the likelihood of morally desirable behaviour in the specific context of a world dominated by a totalitarian regime and state regulation. The tensions between the goals and rules set by the

game-makers show that there is a fine line between utopian or dystopian outcomes of (bio-)technological enhancement; however, Dystopia is presented here as the most likely result of total(itarian) control over technological innovation.

My research was determined by my main focus on the representation of posthuman figures in relation to the three anxieties discussed above. I focused primarily on anxieties as expressed by bio-conservatives such as Francis Fukuyama. In doing so I did not specifically address certain desires and more utopian imaginations that can also play an important role in the genre of science fiction and speculative fiction. Similarly, I chose to refrain from including aspects of religion, that were also present in my case studies, although this aspect could certainly yield an interesting addition to my analysis. Further research into the representations of posthumans could benefit from a comparative analysis showing how these figures can also be read as an expression of human desires.

Secondly, a cross-cultural analysis of anxieties and desires surrounding posthumanity would be useful. My research was limited by my theoretical framework and background as well as my own perspective, which is based largely on European and American theorists and philosophers. While I briefly discussed a different cultural background and perspective on posthumanism and technology in my analysis of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), further research into the representation of the figures of the posthuman and could definitely benefit from bringing in perspectives from different cultural backgrounds.

Finally, apart from my analysis of Rupert Sander's *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) and *We Happy Few* (2016) I focused mainly on an analysis of case studies that may be considered 'old' in the context of technological innovation and contemporary anxieties. When discussing my thesis topic with others, many suggested I should analyse more contemporary television shows such as *Black Mirror* (2011 -) and *Westworld* (2016 -). Because of the limited scope

of this thesis I was not able to do so. Therefore, despite my claim that fears about technological enhancement and posthuman creatures are not new, further research into anxieties surrounding human enhancement in more contemporary representations of fictional posthuman worlds would definitely be interesting.

To conclude, as long as the world has not been able to put an end to social inequality and crimes against humanity, the question of what it means to be human will continue to haunt us. I have demonstrated that one radical form of such a spectre is the uncanny figure of the posthuman, which confronts us with our deepest fears and desires. For this reason, the posthuman demands to be studied in each of its different cultural and historical manifestations – a project to which my research offers a modest contribution.

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