

# ***A Look at Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep Through the Lens of Architecture on Cyborg Politics***

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**Abstract:** This article seeks to look at the current human society surrounded by technology and interconnected by social networking sites from the perspective of viewing humans as cyborgs through the lens of cyborg anthropology, with the necessity and effectiveness of such a lens analyzed in the article. It seeks to define the blurred boundary between humans and non-humans, investigates how the “cyborgness” of the world is brought with architecture, and how our interactions with machines and technology define our identity as humans. A unique look on the architectural representations in the book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and its film *Blade Runner* is provided with the article applying the analytical thinkings discussed. The article seeks to look at the representation of blurred boundaries between humans and nonhumans by inspecting the architectural structures through a literary/film analysis. The article engages itself in the wide discussion of cyberfeminism, challenging ideals that traditional anthropology is ill-equipped to do so, and tries to provoke further discussions.

**Keywords:** Cyborg anthropology, Hybrid Identities, Donna Haraway

## **1. Cyborgs and cyborg anthropology**

### **1.1. Donna Haraway introducing the concept of cyborgs**

It was Donna Haraway who first proposed the idea of cyborgs. Donna Haraway is an American philosopher and feminist researcher known for her work in feminist theory, science and technology studies, and cultural criticism. In her influential essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), she introduces the idea of the cyborg as a metaphor of the problems that accompany efforts of identification in the contemporary world while considering interrelations between gender, technology, and society. As Haraway postulates, a cyborg expresses the blurring of boundaries between nature and culture, between human and machine [1]. To be more exact, she asserts that rather than being a figment of imagination, cyborgs are real people, representative of the way in which technology is informing our identity and life. The notion of identity is challenged by conventions of identity through the rejection of fixed categories of gender, race, and class against the promotion of fluidity and hybridity. It allows for an extended concept of life beyond binary oppositions. According to her, a cyborg is a critical commentary on essential identities and the limiting capacities on individuals imposed by dominant social structures. She claims that adopting a cyborg identity might enable people to resist and negotiate oppressive systems, leading to the creation of new social structures and forms of solidarity. The metaphor of the cyborg pushes for a flexible, networked, and sensitive to the complexity of

modern existence, which calls for a reevaluation of feminist politics in a technologically advanced society. Haraway mobilizes the figure of the cyborg as rallying point in her affirmation of identity and agency with complexity within an age of technological definition. Thus, embracing the cyborg challenges the way in which we interact with technology and each other, and nurtures a vision for a more just and inclusive future [2].

## **1.2. Cyborg anthropology and why is it an important lens through which we analyze the world**

Then, we must be clear on what we mean when we say “cyborg anthropology”. The term “cyborg” was first used in science fiction and space exploration to describe organisms that were partially machine and partly human, although it is not limited to the realm of advanced technology. By studying ethnographically the boundaries between people and machines and our perceptions of the distinctions that make up these limits, cyborg anthropology draws attention more broadly to the cultural creation of human distinctiveness. Being a participatory exercise, it gives anthropology the ability to consider how culture influences scientific and technological activities and to think about how they can be different.

By importing and dramatically expanding activity of academic theorizing that linked accounts of knowledge and power, American cultural studies provided the non-activist humanities and social sciences with intellectual resources to resist the New Right as it rose rapidly to power during the course of the 1980s. That cultural studies have given both conceptual and political practices for legitimizing those academic activities that seek to articulate more explicitly their knowledge and political contents demonstrates that there is a politics in academic theorizing. Cyborg anthropology takes up this challenge by exploring the production of humanness through machines, looking for ways to critique, resist, and participate within structures of knowledge and power [3].

By critically analyzing the creative potential vested in the sciences and technologies of modern civilizations, cyborg anthropology makes investments in the creation of alternative worlds. Because anthropology presented alternate worlds and enlightened the imagination of profound distinctions, it previously became a source of information for popular thought. To understand the various ways that sciences and technology operate in our lives, cyborg anthropology provides fresh metaphors to both academic and popular theorizing. These metaphors begin with our participation in many of the processes that we wish were different [2].

We see that there is a blurring of boundaries between humans and non-humans when we touch on the concept of cyborgs. Note that a necessary first step in dissolving human-centered boundaries of anthropological discourse is to grant membership to the cyborg image in theorizing. That is, to follow in our writing those ways that human agents do routinely produce both themselves and their machines as part human and part machine. How are we to write, for example, without using human-centered language? And if writing is a coproduction of human and machine, who then is the “we” who writes? These have included reconceptualizing existing concepts in innovative ways—for example, considering the attribution of “agency” to machines—positioning new terms and concepts, such as considering humans and objects alike as “actants”, and refiguring the “objective” world of “fact” in various ways through the deconstruction of the neutral observer. At the same time, however, we must be sensitive to the fact that any effort to write culture without humanity as its exclusive vehicle runs the risk of reproducing commodity fetishism and including cyborg anthropology outside the present disciplinary confines of anthropology.

## **2. How does the film *Blade Runner* (1982) serve as a literary presentation of this discussion we have**

### **2.1. Characters in the film and the unclearness of their identity as humans**

The 1982 film *Blade Runner*, which is based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip Dick, is a revealing and thoughtful composition on the discussion of “what is human” and “what makes humans human”. Many of the characters in this novel are in this blurred boundary regarding whether they are human.

#### **2.1.1. Rick Deckard**

Rick Deckard is the protagonist and a bounty hunter assigned to "retire" rogue androids. However, Deckard is human and grapples with his emotions and identity, especially when surrounded by those androids he should destroy. As his journey progresses, he raises questions about what it means to be human, falls in love with Rachael Rosen, and develops empathetic attitudes toward the androids he hunts.

#### **2.1.2. Rachael Rosen**

Rachael is a sophisticated Nexus-6 android who at first appears indistinguishably human. Her character problematizes this distinction between the human and the nonhuman through her emotional depth and even her ability to love. Rachael's fight for self-identity and to find someone with whom she can relate blurs the lines between human emotions and programmed reactions, leading Deckard to question his assumption about empathy and, therefore, humanity.

#### **2.1.3. Pris Stratton**

Pris is a Nexus-6 android, personifying other qualities including being vulnerable and innocent. Having lived in such a broken apartment, she looks for security and contact in a world fully disposed of her form. Further, the humanity of Pris is accentuated through her relations with J.R. Isadore since she is afraid, is affectionate, and wants to be accepted-like any other human-being.

Isadore can be identified as a human character who is socially isolated and working in some menial job. The deep sense of emotional capacity that he shows with empathy and kindness, especially towards Pris, finds contrast in the world around him. That points toward how Isadore identifies with the androids, thus making him one of them as well. Emotional and ethical complexity in outsider status is a theme expressed. The Rosen Association

It is not really a character, but the Rosen Association-a company manufacturing androids-remains the opposing force to the corporate and technological forces within the story. They are producing androids who will act like, or very similar to, in essence, human beings. There are some ethical dimensions of this, of course, that would deal with the nature of consciousness and the commodification of life. The fact that an association participates in the story brings forth the tensions between creation and control and the possibility for emotional depth in the case of artificial beings.

#### **2.1.4. Batty and the other Nexus-6 androids**

Roy Batty, just like all Nexus-6 androids, represents his desire to survive and their identity given by a world that dehumanizes them. Most importantly, the character of Batty makes the strongest impression because he is most eager for life and experiences many emotions similar to those of human beings. At the same moment, his conflict with Deckard leads him to doubt whether he or anyone else

is alive, creating a bridge between humans and androids-that both can be afraid, can need something, and dream about things.

## **2.2. Cyborg anthropology and social norms**

Both the film and the novel raise the question of what is human and what makes a human human. It is essential to consider that in this era where technology is so omnipresent in our lives to the extent that we sometimes feel like they are inseparable from us, and even a part of us. Cyborg anthropology holds that machines and other technologies are attributed agency in the construction of subjectivities and bounded realms of knowledge. How does machine agency serve to contrast and maintain desires, rationalities, nationalisms, militarisms, races, genders, sexualities, and so on? How do machines come to adjudicate boundaries on realms of knowledge and competence, insanities, pathologies, and normalcies? In short, from computer visualization to mobile homes to fork technologies participate actively in every existing realm of anthropological interest [2].

Furthermore, the idea of cyborgs changes basic beliefs about gender norms and gender responsibilities. For instance, feminist studies across different cultures have shown that perceptions of human reproduction and other aspects are influenced by the intersection of social and biological technologies. Therefore, feminist examinations that highlight and question the power structures that are enhanced by the potentials of the new reproductive technologies reveal unconventional and surprising connections between women and technology. Additionally, lesbian examinations of social taboos and barriers concerning closeness, enjoyment, phallic shape, and virtual reality indicate that the empowerment of women with technology is what is truly innovative and enticing, rather than the technology itself. For cyborg anthropologists, this type of risk offers a lot of potential for developing theories and engaging in activism [4].

As a feminist, Haraway also disagrees with some views on the definition of vision. Interestingly, Haraway reclaims the metaphor of vision to reconceptualize objectivity. Haraway goes against the prevalent feminist belief that vision is the most important sense in patriarchal society, linked to separation, dehumanization, and surveillance. She highlights the importance of location and physical presence in regard to all perspectives. The rise of highly developed visualizing technologies in postmodern society allows us to go anywhere and discover even the most secretive and obscure locations. However, this is just a deception, a "god-trick." According to Haraway, every sight is unique and distinct. Common ideas about objectivity only provide misleading hopes of going beyond limits. Haraway argues that the moral is straightforward. "Objective vision is only guaranteed by a partial perspective."

## **3. The 'cyborgness' of the world is brought with architecture**

### **3.1. How architectures and their blurred boundaries help define our humanness**

From the characters, we see the blurred boundary between humans and non-humans. In the film and the novel, the characters all seek to define humans through empathy, for cyborgs are but replicants, and should not have empathy or the ability of feeling. This attempt to clear the boundary between humans and cyborgs had failed, though. Similarly, owning animals is a sign of being prestigious. However, what is real and what is unreal, what is living and what is artificial, is hard to determine, for the manufacturing of electric animals are so advanced that many people cannot tell them apart from real ones simply through eyes. Moreover, the architecture presented in the film also functions as a conveyance of the message of the blurred boundaries. Below is the analysis from an architectural standpoint on how the buildings, providing a sense of murkiness and the curving of boundaries, convey how the definition of humans is blurred and hard to determine.

### 3.1.1. Urban landscape

The urban landscape in *Blade Runner* typifies a dystopian vision of architecture and environment, neither of which is passive. The city features skyscrapers that are towering above, overwhelming density, and confinement. This verticality speaks to the oppressive nature of modernity, or so it would seem, in the way it dwarfs human beings. The architectural makeup-eclectic from Art Deco to Futurist conjures images of the postmodern condition in which the traditional boundaries of identity and meaning have broken down. The denser the urban fabric, the more fostered is anonymity, people moving through a labyrinthine environment that discourages personal connection. Neon signs and advertisements further proliferate the contribution to sensory overload, and blurred boundaries of reality into the manufactured. It is symbolic of the fragmented identity of the characters, especially Rick Deckard, as he moves around a world that really seems to blur the line between human and replicant. The oppressive architecture reinforces thematic alienation and existential anxiety; it delineates in bold strokes how the built environment shapes human experiences.

### 3.1.2. Layers of reality

The visual style of the film is marked by layering in its composition, where reflections, shades, and intersection induce disorientation. This layering itself indicates the postmodern function of identity. Architectural features commonly reflect and refract in an emotional sense of depth that transcribes to thematic development within the progression of the narrative. For example, Deckard's peregrination through the city exposes different levels of realities parallel from grimy street levels to antiseptic interior corporate spaces.

This layering indicates that reality in *Blade Runner* is not singular but plural. This can be further expressed through such architectural layering, which supports the ambiguous demarcation of human and replicant identity, hence pointing toward spectrums rather than clear-cut categories. The film invites viewers to consider environments shaping perceptions of self and other, pushing the limits on what constitutes authenticity.

### 3.1.3. Residential spaces

Specific forms of these spaces are depicted in *Blade Runner's* residential spaces, especially in Deckard's apartment and its presentation of emotional disconnection throughout the movie.

His place is a living space that holds the fossils of the past, in contrast with the sterile and impersonal environments building the part of the corporation. This contrast reflects the struggle for authenticity to exist in a commodified society. Although Deckard's apartment is messy, it feels almost a longing to touch something human, but it is draped in loneliness, expressed by architecture being used to escape into a fractured reality. Additionally, space is frequently devoid of any comfort and sustains the notion that personal spaces, too, are subject to greater currents taking place in society. This absence of comfort becomes reconfigured in the usage of dim lights and ice-cold materials, much like the psychological turmoil both humans and replicants endure. In this respect, *Blade Runner* comments on modern architecture failing to nurture real human relationships and even postulates that the physical setting condones and collaborates in alienating those who reside within it.

### 3.1.4. Pyramid Tyrell Corporation

The pyramid of the Tyrell Corporation became this powerful symbol of technological ambition and pride. Monumental scale and geometric precision in architecture evoke a sense of power and control. In our minds, the pyramid has always been connected with ancient civilization and authority-setting the organic nature of life against the cold mechanics of artificial creation. This building represents



the god-like position of the corporation, placing it in the role of a creator of life while questions of ethical responsibility arise. The sterile environment of the pyramid itself starkly contrasts with the emotional depth of the replicants it creates. The tension reveals that life has been commodified: beings created for labor and service have deficits in empathy and depth traditionally part of humanity. Thus, the pyramid Replicates a microcosm of larger themes in the film, reflecting what may go wrong when technological advancement takes over moral considerations.

### 3.1.5. Replicant spaces

The actual dwellings of the replicants are industrial-looking spaces, with strict minimalism underscoring their marginality. Uninhabited space-not warm or touched by the presence of life as seen in human dwellings-further the notion that replicants are no more than products and not agents in their own right. In this fashion, the bleak utilitarian aspect of their habitats underscores the fact that their being is defined through subservience and domination.

Conventionally, these are architecturally sterile spaces devoid of any personal touch and serve as a bold juxtaposition with the complicating emotions and yearnings of the replicants. Settings bring into focus the critique of the movie, that there is a society dehumanizing its creations, showing how architectural choices support societal hierarchies. With *Blade Runner* placing replicants in settings that deny them individuality, one is forced to deal with the moral implications of creating life without empathy and recognition.

### 3.1.6. The spinner

The flying vehicles, or "spinners," are an architectural and technological breakthrough that needs to be emphasized within the movie. The smooth, futuristic design of the spinners makes for the thematic elements of progress and the merging of human and machine that is realized within the film. And while negotiating this closely crowded urban setting, these spinners begin to assume a metaphorical function-the fluidity of identity that flits problem-free through many layers of reality.

It is upward architecture-itself able to ascend vertically. The spinner reflects a desire to be free from the oppressive constraints of the urban environment.

Still, this mobility creates some fundamental questions as to what the real meaning of freedom is in a world dominated by technology. The omnipresence is a telling hint that even while humans seek to transcend their limitations, they too remain chained to structures they have themselves built. This duality reinforces the play on identity and proposes liberation as complex and mostly illusory. Final Confrontation The final confrontation atop the pyramid of the Tyrell Corporation serves as a climactic investigation into the blurred boundaries that have come to define human and replicant. The architectural setting-a high-rise enveloped in rain-echoes the emotional intensity of this scene. The high-rise signifies that this is a confrontation not merely of beings with a physical entity but one in which existential questions pertaining to identity and mortality are also being confronted.

This verticality speaks to themes of power and frailty, where Roy Batty threatens Deckard, a human, in this place of technological triumph. The surroundings soaked in rain embellish the sense of desolation and epiphany, as if the mutual humanity reigns above the differentiation of the characters. At this moment, the architecture is a reflective surface that points to the shared experiences and emotions between the humans and the replicants and makes the viewer rethink what it actually means to be alive.

### 3.1.7. Deckard's place

Deckard's apartment seems almost a microcosm of the movie's themes, with the tension existing between isolation and connection. Cluttered inside, filled with relics of a bygone era, it feels like a

monument to nostalgia and longing. This space really reflects the internal turmoil Deckard is having with his role as a blade runner: hunting replicants engineeredly designed to mimic the race of humans-yet none of the authenticity thereof.

Architecturally, Deckard's apartment gives insight into the struggle for identity in a world that commodifies life. The overall tone of the lighting is so somber, coupled with the meager decoration, evoking a feeling of loneliness, whereas outside, the whole city is alive, pulsing with lights. Such a contrast shows how architecture can paradoxically provide shelter as much as it reinforces loneliness. With Deckard battling his emotions, his personal space becomes symbolic of the generalized existential crisis that all the characters must experience in this movie, where the difference between what a human and an artificial creation is, are successfully blurred.

### 3.1.8. The artificial sun

The artificial sun, primarily used within the Tyrell Corporation, symbolizes the fabricated nature of *Blade Runner's* existential condition. It gives a semblance of life and warmth, distorting the staunch coldness that characterizes the replicants' everyday living. This architectural feature points to the film's exploration of authenticity versus artificiality, as light would represent a constructed environment bereft of real life.

The cold artificial light that casts its glow on the faces of its characters enlivens sharp contrasts between the warmth of human emotion and the sterility of technological creation.

This dichotomy furthers questions about the nature of empathy and connection in a world increasingly defined by artificial constructs. It is here that *Blade Runner* confronts viewers with the implications of living in an environment engineered to the extent that even the sun-a perpetual symbol of life-has been synthetically reproduced. This further reiterates the theme of alienation and the search for meaning in a post-human world.

### 3.1.9. The street

The *Blade Runner* streets of Los Angeles are riotously painted, revealing the investigation the movie goes through in respects to blurred identity. This chaotic urban environment is in a state of mixed cultural elements, neon lights, and advertisements; this calls for a sensory overload. It becomes symbolic of how identity has fragmented within the confines of a world where both humans and replicants coexist, architecturally described by the tapestry. The streets are not only a backdrop, but they epitomize the postmodern condition where the boundaries collapse. People move around in a setting both familiar and strange underlining the complex nature of the human experience in an increasingly inauthentic world. That setting sustains the very idea that it is context which creates identity when characters interact with one another in a setting thought of at once as public and private. This metaphorically makes the streets a great representation of how lives combine, showing architecture as a metaphor, playing to the ever-blurring lines of what is real and what is fake. Taking into consideration these components from an architectural-philosophical perspective, *Blade Runner* really allows for a look at how environment shapes identity and existence and questions conventional definitions of humanity within a complex and interwoven reality.

One thing to note is that organic architecture also symbolizes the complications of human experience within the pinnacle of technology. Together, light and darkness create a strong reflection of the struggles of authenticity and identity. The characters interact within intimate spaces that are designed to conceive human bonding, but they are required to face an uncomfortable presence of artifice gnawing at the definition of human beings. Organic spaces take on subtle nuances of architecture, rooted in human scale but distorted through the bright light of technology, calling for further consideration of what it is to exist in a world with boundaries on all sides. In this sense, Dick

challenges readers to consider how the consequences of living in a world defined by the tension between the organic and the artificial are greater.

In conclusion, from the author's description and the representation in the film, we see how the author and the filmmaker communicate feelings with architectural boundaries. Humanness comes from architecture. Take the example of two people conversing in a building. If the place were to be a public setting, even if there were to be just the two of those people, they would feel as if the matter of the conversation is public; On the other hand, if they were to be talking in an intimate setting where the architecture takes a smaller space, they would feel as if the conversation is more personal and private. In this post-modernist setting, architects mix and cook things together. The cities, world, and how the world is organized, how they are described; even public spaces, the street. We see how humanness is demonstrated through architecture from the following examples.

#### Urban Decay and Isolation

The post-apocalyptic Earth, once ravaged by World War Terminus, consists of bleak and desolate cities, which are crumbling slowly. Architectural decay complements alienation and the loss of privacy; a mirrored approach continues to show how physical or environmental settings condition the human experience. This is strikingly opposed to the way in which life in the off-world colonies was conceptualized, far from the sordid truth of humankind's desires.

#### Empathy Boxes

The use of "empathy boxes" allows these characters to transcend into a world that is not as hard as their real world. It is an experience shared in great need of human contact within an overall environment that is isolating. It is indicative of how technology mediates human interaction and emotional experience, depicting a mixture of physical and virtual spaces representative of postmodern themes dealing with mixed realities.

#### Humans versus Androids

The architectural setting of the world speaks to what constitutes humanity. Androids are designed to closely resemble human beings, questioning further the humanness aspect; both empathy and privacy are not just biological but also environmental in nature. The interplay between the human and the machine treads thin lines between authenticity and artificiality-a key factor in postmodernism.

Living spaces-the house and personal environments the characters live in-convey something of their emotions and values, like Rick Deckard's apartment and the descriptions of other people's living conditions. On the contrary, sterile and regulated environments of androids and disordered decaying of human space hint at fragile human identity and privacy in a world where authenticity is questioned continuously.

Cultural artifacts, the presence of artificial animals, and the obsession with the ownership of real ones further illustrate that even the environment itself represents a combination of real and synthetic. These are the artifacts that signal a deep urge to relate and empathize in a place which has commodified even the most basic elements of life, underlining how architecture and design reflect the values of society.

#### Street Life and Interaction

The streets of the cities in the novel frequently act as places of surveillance and control, where privacy might be compromised. The manner in which characters traverse those spaces shows how architecture mediates their interactions and emotional experience a postmodern blurring of separations with thresholds between public and private life.

#### Mixed Realities

The novel explores virtual experiences with the other salient physical and brutal realities that generally come under the discipline of postmodernism. Merging states of being-for instance, actual and electric sheep, as well as multiple layers of social contact predicts a complex notion of identity and humanness determined by the environment.



In summary, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* effectively demonstrates how humanness and privacy are mediated through architecture and environment. We see how the entire environment is a cyborg, a hybrid of humanness and technology, and the fact that we interact with it gives us humanness. The novel's world illustrates the complexities of identity in a postmodern context, where the mixing of the real and artificial, the private and public, challenges traditional notions of what it means to be human.

The practice of cyborg anthropology has the aim to make room for a relationship with the world - social and natural - which will not attempt to attain mastery over and domination of it. Instead, the world may be seen "as a coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse" [1]. For this reason too, all "semiotic politics of representation" are rejected by Haraway. For what the real effect of the well-meant strategy of "speaking for" an object is, is to exclude those who are closest-like the pregnant woman to the fetus or like the local people to the rain forest. These actors come to be perceived as threatening to the objects that are to be preserved and protected. They are reduced from knowing and caring subjects into antagonistic environments. As Haraway views it, the scientist acting as ventriloquist for nature adopts an apolitical, ethically suspect stance. She is also convinced that "nature" and "reality" are, at the end of the day, unrepresentable. Quoting Gayatri Spivak, she says somewhat enigmatically that, although nature is one of the things we cannot desire, we must at the same time acknowledge that we cannot possess it and thus we also cannot represent it. Contrary to the pretension to speak for, we had better try to articulate with the natural, social and technical worlds we study.

#### 4. Conclusion

We then bring to question, what are cyborgs? In the post-modern period, when technology day after day penetrates into human life, by cyborg we understand hybrid generation – the one melting in one body the biological and technological component, thus embodying the threshold between human and machine. This approach, strongly rooted in Donna Haraway's ideas, underlines fluidity of identity and complex relations between humans and technology [5].

The cyborg is, therefore, considered here not as a purely physical hybrid but one inclusive of persons whose identities and experiences are mediated through digital interactions, social media, and virtual realities. As people increasingly incorporate technology into their everyday lives, their smartphones, wearables, and smart home devices make them growing cyborgs, exhibiting activities in both spatial and virtual environments.

The integration opens anew the meaning of what it means to be human. Cyborgs complicate identity anew, signaling how technology could enhance, change, and even complicate human experiences. They raise questions about autonomy, agency, and the ethical implications of merging human consciousness with artificial intelligence.

The metaphor of the cyborg allows us to consider how we navigate the pervasive issues of surveillance, data privacy, and the commodification of human experiences. As technology evolves with each passing day, the divide between human and nonhuman becomes increasingly blurred, and the relevance of that concept in making sense of our collective identity in this technology-integration-defined age becomes gigantic. Humans are unaware of the fact that we and use the world as a great playground and view it as an interactive app, without really having feelings for it. We view the other earthly things as less than. Machines help us change this point of view.

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