

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep and Blade Runner

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Abstract: This analysis looks primarily at the ethical and moral messages of the two works, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep by Philip K. Dick, and Blade Runner directed by Ridley Scott. Each work is interrelated to each other and other topically similar works.

INDEX

INDEX	2
AUTHOR'S NOTES	3
INTRODUCTION	4
DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP	5
INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS	5
<i>Mercerism</i>	7
<i>Deckard and Isidore – The humane humans</i>	9
<i>The Androids – The Artificial People</i>	10
INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIPS	11
CONCLUSION.....	12
BLADE RUNNER	13
INTERPRETATION & ANALYSIS	13
<i>From Book to Movie</i>	13
<i>Los Angeles 2019</i>	16
INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIPS	17
CONCLUSION.....	19

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Thank you for taking the time to look at this essay/analysis/paper or whatever you prefer to think of it as. I hope that you by reading it will either learn something new or at least bring some things you already know into a clearer light.

The origin of this paper can be found in 2001 when I was attending school back in Denmark. It was mandatory that the language of the final piece was Danish even though the subject in which I wrote it was High Level English.

With the advent of my website at <http://www.binarybonsai.com/> from where you're likely to have downloaded this pdf, I finally had an outlet for my writings and computer graphics, though it took me a little time to get this thing online simply due to the fact that I had to gather up momentum to get the darn thing translated.

Should you end up using this for a school report, an essay, a paper, your website or a forum/newsgroup post, I would be delighted to hear about it. Just like I would like to hear from you, should you make it out alive in the other end.

Should it be of any importance to you, this paper earned me an 11 in the Danish grading system, which I believe roughly translates to an A in the equivalent US grading system with which most people are at least vaguely familiar.

Let me lastly just express regret for not going over every inch of the book and the movie, I was restricted to along the lines of 15 pages of content when I wrote it. Quite ridiculous as I felt as if I could have filled a small book. his version is in some places cut shorter and in some places lengthened. I have taken out the synopsis sections for the book and the movie but put in longer and more fulfilling quotes where I found it necessary. I apologize also for my lack of Oxford style references; maybe a new revision will find its way online eventually. Until then if you need to know something you're free to e-mail your questions to me at eudaimic@binarybonsai.com or eudaimic@hotmail.com.

Happy reading,
Michael Heilemann

INTRODUCTION

In 1968 when Philip K. Dick wrote the novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep", he probably wasn't aware of the effect his literary work would have, not just within the written science-fiction world, but to a great extent also within the silver screen sci-fi genre, thanks to Ridley Scott's 1982 adaptation, Blade Runner.

I have split this paper into two distinct sections, of which the bulk will be spent on my analysis, interpretation and thoughts on P. K. Dick's novel Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep.

In the first part of the essay I will have a close look at the book and bring out some of the themes/issues and intentions that Philip K. Dicks might've had when writing the book. Are they still relevant today? What other works, modern as well as classical treat the same subjects, and how do they relate to each other?

I will then move into the movie and look at what the changes were from book to movie and try to shed some light into why these choices might've been made, and what effect this has had on the original story. I am also going to look at what visual techniques the movie uses, among these, especially religious imagery. At the end of this section I will compare the movie to other works, in particular movies, that share themes with Blade Runner.

Finishing off the paper I will have a quick look at one of the subjects that both the movie and the book share, the ethics of artificial life and intelligence. How should/can we treat artificially created beings? How do we define an artificially created being and is there any chance that you'll be chatting with your toaster within a foreseeable future?

This paper has been written in such a way that for it to not be entirely gibberish, the reader should ensure that he or she has read Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep and Blade Runner – Director's Cut. After the Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep section you will find a small partial conclusion that gathers up and reflects upon that section. At the very end you will find an overall conclusion that rounds up the entire paper and relates the two works to one another.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP

"My major preoccupation is the question, 'What is reality?'"
– P. K. Dick [Gale Research 1996]

Interpretation and Analysis

One of the central themes in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and in this essay, is that of dehumanization. With few exceptions, none of the people in the book are anything but a programmable insensitive shell striving only for the next 'high' through their empathy boxes or a 'call' on their Penfield Mood Organ with which they can acquire "The desire to watch TV, no matter what's on" [p. 9] or "Long deserved peace" [p. 182].

The Penfield organ is pretty a pretty interesting device, in that it puts the people that use it down to the same level they normally view the androids as being on. Their reactions, mood and behaviour end up being nothing more than their programming through the organ. Emotions are reduced to numbers (for instance 481), and that in itself is pretty ironic seeing as emphasis is normally places on what differentiates man from android, which is that man has feelings; compassion and empathy.

That empathy is very important to mankind in Dicks novel is also seen very clearly in the Voigt-Kampf test, which builds on the idea that emotional reactions let them selves be known through the window to the soul: the eye. But when that's said, it seems somewhat ironic that 9 of the 10 questions asked refer to animals and not people. The animals represent, despite the fact that they're mostly electric, the original primal man, untouched by its technological 'progress'). Humanitarian compassion has been replaced with compassion towards animals. Compassion that often 'only' exist toward synthetic animals, for instance the electrical sheep Rick and his wife Iran own in the beginning of the novel. This lack of empathy in-between mankind is well exemplified by Rick and Iran.

All the while Rick is in Isidores building, where he one last time does his dirty work as a bounty hunter Rachel Rosen comes by his apartment. Here she kills his newly bought, genuine goat as payback for him killing the ones she cared about. The only thing Iran can do is watch. Emotionless. After the incident she's sitting in front of the Penfield organ, considering whether or not to take upon herself the responsibility of emphasizing. She even considers 'calling' the renowned "the desire to watch TV, no matter what's on". She

abandons this idea however when Rick comes home with a toad, which he at first believes to be real. More about this a little later on.

Irans attention is never properly directed towards Rick, as one might believe with them being married and all. Rather she exists in her own little world, a world consisting of her compassion for Wilbur Mercer, the Penfield organ and first the sheep, then the goat and lastly the toad. Her compassion, representative for the rest of humanity, towards the animals seems to be rather fleeting. Although she seems at first crushed over the loss of the goat, her attention immediately moves onto the toad as soon as Rick walks in the door with it. And here it's worth noting that the toad is synthetic, contrary to the real goat.

Irans lack of emotions towards other people is seen mirrored in Resch the bounty hunter whom Rick meets when he is dragged into the Mission Street station, an andy hangout. Phil Resch is a cold and distanced man who views the androids as nothing more than intelligent toasters; technological consumer items to be thrown out when they no longer have any use.

In the light of Resch, who he first suspects might be an android due to his apparent lack of emotion; Deckard suddenly finds that he himself might not be quite so distanced from his work as he would like to think. Maybe he's closer to being "(...) a murderer hired by the cops" [p. 7] than he used to believe.

Rick said, 'I'm capable of feeling empathy for at least specific certain androids. Not for all of them but – one or two.' For Luba Luft for example, he said to himself. So I was wrong. There's nothing unnatural or unhuman about Phil Resch's reactions; it's me. [p. 109]

Suddenly Deckard finds himself in no-man's-land. If he begins to develop feelings to what he's hunting, then how can he justify his job to others, least of all to himself?

'An android,' he said, 'doesn't care what happens to another android. That's one of the indications we look for.'

'Then,' Miss Luba said, 'you must be an android.'

That stopped him; he stared at her. [p. 79]

Who's right? How can you know if you yourself is an android or not? "What is reality?". Precisely that question represents the core theme of many of Dick's books. Deckard's reality is that androids are the enemy of society and the feelings are something you get through Mercer and the organ, not something that spontaneously arise, and especially not toward androids.

In an attempt to project his tabu feelings onto something else and prove to himself that he's still worthy of the title as human, he goes out and invests in a living goat. This is simultaneously an attempt to get together with Iran again and perhaps rediscover true love, something that according to Iran has existed between them at some point in time. Iran is however more occupied with sharing this, to her unique feeling of newly found 'love' with others through Mercer, than she is in sharing it with her husband. The goat fails to accomplish the peace that he sought and reality as it used to look for him slowly starts to crumble.

But just as things look the bleakest, Mercer appears before him.

Mercerism

"How can I save you," the old man said, "if I can't save myself?" He smiled. "Don't you see? There is no salvation."

"Then what's this for?" Rick demanded. "What are you for?"

"To show you," Wilbur Mercer said, "that you aren't alone. I am here with you and always will be. Go and do your task, even though you know it's wrong." (...)

The old man said, "You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity. At some time, every creature, which lives, must do so. It is the ultimate shadow, the defeat of creation; this is the curse at work, the curse that feeds on all life. Everywhere in the universe."

[p. 135]

Infinitely wandering up a mountain with stones raining down over him, the figure of an old exhausted man walks day after day, hour after hour receiving never-ending punishment from unseen stone throwing enemies. For most people Mercer represents the last contact they have with their humanity. Through the empathy box millions of people are fused ever day with Mercer to take part in the shared Sisyphus walk up the mountain side. The 'high' is a feeling of forward movement despite the pain of the stones and the ever continuing mountain. This

forward movement represents humanities role in this universe as Dick sees it: to continue forward despite the conditions of life. And in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, most of the conditions of life are somewhat depressing...

Mercer is also for mankind a way to separate themselves from the androids, seeing as their lack of empathy disables them from using the empathy box. Because of this, the three remaining androids find it rather amusing that Buster Friendly and his Friendly Friends in front of millions of viewers on worldwide TV reveal that Mercerism and the empathy box is a hoax.

After in an anti-climax Deckard kills the remaining androids, he set off home. Here much to his dismay he finds that Rachel as an act of vengeance has killed his newly acquired goat. Lost and confused he flies out into the nuclear desert, away from all civilization. Maybe to find answers to how his life has become what it is and why suddenly everything turns out to be more complex to him than to everyone else.

Here he goes on his own Mercer-like walk up a mountainside, and all of a sudden he realises that he has become one with Mercer. And that he, like Mercer must continue his aimless wandering, forever 'followed by stone throwing enemies'.

'I had the absolute, utter completely real illusion that I had become Mercer and people were lobbing rocks at me. (...) The difference is I wasn't with anyone; I was alone.'

'They're saying now that Mercer is a fake.'

'Mercer isn't fake.' He said. 'Unless reality is a fake.'

[p.176]

On his way back to his car Rick by accident finds a toad which he at first glance believes to be a genuine specimen. He hurries home to show it to Iran, as the survival of the toad in the abandoned nuclear wilderness gives him new hope for the future of humanity. But despite the fact that the toad turns out to be artificial he realises that:

"[It] doesn't matter. The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are."

[p. 181].

In spite of their fabricated bodies and implanted memories, androids are fundamentally just as living as their creators, and the lives they live as sub-creatures do not constitute worthy existences.

Note: Philip K. Dick had at a time in his life what he himself explains as a religious revelation that he spent the rest of his life trying to explain. That Buster Friendly at first writes Mercerism off as a hoax and Deckard at last finds Mercer within himself can very well have a duality-meaning to it. “Don’t think you know everything there is to know.”

Deckard and Isidore – The Humane Humans

In Do Androids the ‘normal’ people are represented by Deckard. He lives with his normal wife, has normal neighbours (though not all that many) and works as a bounty hunter. A job that to us might seem a bit nasty, but in the world of Do Androids it’s not looked down upon in the slightest. In fact it’s seen as something of a community service that the androids are disposed of when they no longer feel like obeying. Beneath the surface however, Deckard isn’t quite like everyone else. He doesn’t know this himself until after he witnesses the murder of Luba Luft. “I’m getting out of this business’ – ‘she was a wonderful singer. (...) The planet could have used her. This is insane.” [p. 104-105].

Slowly Deckard starts breaking free of the norms and in the end, although he might not accept himself, at least he accepts his position in the world. However, this disturbance inside Deckard might’ve existed longer than one thinks at first glance.

‘481. Awareness of the manifold possibilities open to me in the future; a new hope that’

‘I know the 481,’ he interrupted. He had dialled out the combination many times; he relied on it heavily.

[p.9]

In one hand we have Isidore who, rejected by society as he is, is the only human in Do Androids who shows any interest or emotion towards his fellow humans. Even when he later learns that they turn out to be androids he doesn’t have any problems with that: “You’re androids,’ Isidore said. But he didn’t care; it made no difference to him.” [p. 125]

The Androids – The Artificial People

To help you feel at home when you go to live on the Marsian colonies, you're given an android servant. With 'given', it's understood that you own it and thus can do with it what you will. Anything from hazardous work to sex. Androids are in other words treated like a piece of property no better than the slaves once brought up from Africa to serve the same purpose in the white mans lands. They were also shot down like mad dogs if they were to try escape or if they broke any of the rules laid down before them. It is worth noting that mankind doesn't seem to be divided into racial differences anymore in the book.

But are the androids 'good' or 'bad'? On one side they torture in Isodore apartment an innocent spider by one after one chopping its legs off of it while they with a good amount of schadenfrohe listen to Buster Friendly's revelation Mercerism being a hoax. (With that, empathy to them is thought to be a hoax as well, making mankind no better than their machine creations). On the other hand they are often depicted as victims to first Deckard, and later to cold people like Phil Resch.

So what is the point? Are they victims to a cruel world? Probably. Are they emotionally decrepit? Certainly.

But even though the majority of characters in Dicks novels are depicted as pieces of a puzzle they do not themselves understand and master, you shouldn't draw from that that they are innocent victims. Though all are victims, at the same time almost everyone is guilty as well.

Intertextual Relationships

Of the many novels Philip K. Dick wrote in his lifetime a few have made it onto the silver screen. And I think it's safe to utter the by now clichéd words, that his authorship has probably had more than an average amount of influence on not only movies, but modern storytelling in general. I'll spend a few paragraphs looking at books and movies that might have received influence, or perhaps even influenced Dicks authorship.

One of the first science fiction novels to ever appear, back when science fiction as a genre had yet to manifest itself, was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. A novel that despite the 150 year gap between the two has a lot in common with *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

Philip K. Dick and Mary Shelley both agree that humanity is a trait that can be both gained and lost. It's not necessarily conditioned by one's creation. In Shelley's novel we encounter this in Victor Frankenstein's lack of attention towards his friends and family. All his time is used to create his monster. A monster that in spite of its lack of a 'normal' birth and upbringing is more in contact with its inner humanity than Victor Frankenstein its creator is.

Frankenstein is here the mad classic mad scientist who, no matter the consequences is always striving to break free of nature's bondage. In *Do Androids*, we find his equal in the Rosen Association, which likewise, despite the problems known in regards to the androids, continue to make them more and more human-like. A likeness the androids themselves will never benefit from.

Dicks obsession with what reality is, and what reality isn't has gained a new audience within the latter years. Movies like *Thirteenth Floor*, *The Matrix*, *Fight Club*, *Total Recall* (which by the way is based on Dicks book "We Can Remember it for You Wholesale"), *The Truman Show*, *The Game*, *Twelve Monkeys* and so on all present you with a reality which slowly breaks apart as the story progresses.

Not all that odd then that Philip K. Dick ended up being schizophrenic then.

Conclusion

On the surface, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* is about Rick Deckard, his sad life, his hunt for the androids and how he in the end succeeds in finishing his assignment despite the problems he meets underway. Underneath it however larger questions of lost humanity and the individuals perception of reality lurks.

The immediate impression I got from the story, was that it was about androids trying to be human due to their current condition lacking any kind of freedom. And while that holds true as well, I think upon more reflection that it's probably more about the opposite. Humans turning into androids. Stupidified by 23 hours of moron-TV every day, unable to provoke emotions except through a mechanical device and blinded by their devotion to their new religion. A religion which no one really understands or even makes an effort to understand, it's merely accepted as yet another possibility of total escapism.

And among these 'normal' people live the so called chickenheads. They're banned from society because they're not 'normal', not worthy enough to enter mankind's new and self-build heaven: the colonies. One is undeniably steered onto Hitler's devotion to the creation of the master race, the superman; Nietzsche's übermensch. Things have gone so awry on Earth that it is common for people to wear codpieces of lead to protect future generations.

For every passing day it seems, the themes of the book become more and more pressing. Thanks to the Internet, and the general progress of technology, the world is made smaller day by day but even so, there's a fear of people becoming more and more lonely. And though we don't have any androids or chickenheads today, racism isn't exactly an unknown word in modern society.

I took a cup from the cabinet, a cup I rarely use. I found a spider in it, a dead spider. It was dead because it had found nothing to eat. Apparently it had fell in the cup and had then been unable to come up again. But the point is this: it had spun a net in the bottom of the cup. As good a net as it could under the circumstances. When I found it – dead there in the cup, with its thin, pointless net – I thought: it didn't have a chance. If it had waited until eternity, a fly would never have appeared. It waited until it died. It tried to gain whatever it could from the situation, but it was hopeless. I wondered if it knew how hopeless it was? Did it spin its net knowing that it was hopeless? "On of every days little tragedies", the robot said, "there are billions of them, unseen, every day. Only God notices them (...)."

- *The Galactic Pot-Healer* (This quote has been translated from a Danish version of the book. Though it might differ slightly from the book itself, the meaning stays intact.)

BLADE RUNNER

Interpretation & Analysis

It was never fairer to use the good old onion analogy than with Blade Runner, Ridley Scott's film version of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep. The layers seem to go on forever. The visual side of Blade Runner in and by itself is almost enough to make it an instant classic, admired and copied ever since its release in the mid-80's.

Though it differs greatly in many respects from Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep, they both share the trait that you can choose to read them in two ways. Either you read the surface, in which case Blade Runner appears to be a thriller / drama / action movie. Or you peel off the layers one by one, and new depths are revealed underneath each layer. But that's almost where the comparison between book and movie end.

From Book to Movie

During the filming of Blade Runner, Ridley Scott (the director), chose to change and ignore a good part of the things that the book put a good deal of time into. Neither Mercer, Buster Friendly, the Empathy box or the Penfield organ are for instance even mentioned in the movie. Why is that? While this is all based on my assumptions, I'd say that it all comes down to the economics of the whole thing. Writing a book is one thing, all it takes is time and patience. While the same is true when it comes to movie making, there's a lot more resources involved, crew, sets, actors and so on, all of which makes the price skyrocket. This allows books a lot more leeway in terms of experimentation. It was probably decided that a more mainstream path had to be taken for the movie to be financially viable.

Other than that, actually taking some of the elements from the book and placing them on the silver screen is not always quite as simple as it might seem. Deckard for instance spends a lot of time in the book thinking about his situation and the difference between androids and people and what that means to Mercer. That in and by itself could have taken the better part of the movie to pull off.

Despite these cuts, the movie still holds the basic search for humanity by both mankind and the androids. Though other means are instead brought into use.

Ridley Scott was before *Blade Runner* mostly known for his first major motion picture, *Alien*. Not only did it scare the living daylights out of its audience, it also masterfully merged horror and science fiction. The same tendency is seen in *Blade Runner* where the classic style of Film Noir is mixed beautifully with the dystopian futuristic visions of Science Fiction. Dystopian visions that *Blade Runner* partly echoed from earlier Sci-Fi ventures; in particular *Metropolis* to which it owes a great deal.

As it is with most genres, there are certain stereotypes that can be seen repeated over and over. On one side we have the hero. The hero is often, in spite of his (or her, though I will use him from now on, please take no offence, it merely sounds more natural as the hero most often is indeed a man. I might write an essay about that whole subject some time, as it is indeed rather interesting) title, not all that heroic. Most often, he is actually more of an anti-hero, as is the instance in *Blade Runner*. When we in the original 1982-release version of *Blade Runner* meet Deckard, we hear him in the voice over tell us how his wife used to call him “sushi... cold fish”.

Typically, the sf movie hero does not have much psychological depth. He is “generic,” a typical, workaday American. (...) The protagonist has to be normal enough for the audience to identify with. (...) The reason is that the protagonist merely is supposed to be representative, not psychologically or otherwise interesting. (...) A protagonist who’s too colourful, too interesting in himself would take away from the real protagonist: science gone bad.

[Schelde 1993, p. 28]

‘Science gone bad’ is exactly what the opposite end of the spectrum is in the shape of Dr. Tyrell. Sitting in the marble-plated hall, decorated with gold at the very top of his immense pyramid. As the centre of the *Blade Runner* universe, he is as distanced from his creations as he can get. The God-imagery of Tyrell is repeated quite a bit in *Blade Runner*. He is the classic science-fiction scientist who plays God unwilling to stand face to face with the consequences of his actions. He won’t accept that there are places you shouldn’t go, apples you shouldn’t eat. As a modern Victor Frankenstein he looks beyond the doubt, fear and the moral scruples. As a manifestation of Nietzhes “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him...” he has placed himself in Gods place as a creator of life.

From *Frankenstein*:

Henry (Victors Friend): Prometheus was punished by the gods for bringing fire down to man.

Victor Frankenstein: Prometheus was a fool. The gods were jealous, greedy and possessive.

[Ibid, p. 35].

Besides Tyrell's considerably larger role in Blade Runner, a good deal of the other characters parts have been partially or entirely changed. J. R. Isodore has become J. F. Sebastian, a genetic designer who works for Tyrell. His link to the androids has changed from being a chickenhead, and thus an outcast, to suffering from an illness that cuts his lifespan short, just like the replicants.

Especially Rachel's role has been changed. In the book she went to bed with Deckard to force him away from his bounty hunter profession, where as in the movie, she's just as much a part of Tyrell's God experiment as everyone else. And also Rachel and Deckard end up together in the movie, as opposed to the book.

Where in the book it is up to the reader to decide if Deckard is an android, the movie has been specifically engineered to draw associations to such a link through among other things, a dream sequence featuring a unicorn. The unicorn imagery is later replicated (get it?!) by Gaff as Rachel and Deckard flee together. Perhaps Gaff is the real blade runner using Deckard as a buffer of sorts?

Los Angeles 2019

From beginning till end the Los Angeles of 2019 plays just as big a role as the leading role actors. They feed off of it, it feeds off of them and both are juxtaposed against each other. A wide industrial flame bathed landscape eerily reminiscent of the biblical references to Hell. Above it without purpose or hope lost souls flicker aimlessly about, irrelevant in comparison to the greater forces at work. Far away in the distance the God sits in his temple, his pyramid, untouched and uncaring of the world around him, consumed only by his creational abilities.

In the depths below him in the smog filled dank streets flanked by the corporation buildings of mega corporations the immense multi-cultural masses go claustrophobically about their business. And business is the order of the day; there is no social interaction unless it has to do with the buying or selling of some form of goods. Despite their numbers, everyone is lonely.

And to top off this miserable life, enormous airships with huge monitors mounted on the sides and loud speaker systems slowly make their way through the city, announcing:

"A new life awaits you in the Off-World colonies. The chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure. New climate, recreational facilities... absolutely free. (...)"

"This announcement is brought to you by the Shimato Dominguez Corporation - helping America into the New World."

And at the top of this omnipresent commercialism/capitalism we find The Tyrell Corporation.

"Commerce is the goal here at Tyrell. 'More human than human' is our motto"

Interesting to note that Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep was originally placed in San Francisco, but in the scripting process it was instead moved to Los Angeles, the city of angels. And how appropriate for the story of a fallen angel that refuses to accept his mortality and after confronting his maker kills him.

Intertextual Relationships

In James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1985) and its sequel *T2: Judgement Day* (1991), a vigilante artificial intelligence network sends a cyborg back through time to kill a woman who is later going to give birth to the future leader of mankind in the battle against selfsame AI network. The Terminator is here described by its human opponent, Kyle Reese. A description which is very like that of Philip K. Dick's description of Deckard:

"Listen! And understand! That terminator is out there. It can't be bargained with! It can't be reasoned with! It doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead!"

And

"You still don't get it, do you? He'll find her. That's what he does. That's all he does! You can't stop him! He'll wade through you, reach down her throat, and pull her fucking heart out!"

Several parallels can actually be drawn between the Terminator universe and the Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep/Blade Runner universe. Here we also find an invention which was originally meant to be servicing humankind, but ends up gaining consciousness and attacks its creator. The Terminators (and through the Skynet) however do not show any sign of an emotional aspect. They are as opposed to the androids *only* machines. Their neural net however allows it to understand 'empathy':

"I know now why you cry. But it is something I can never do..."

Another movie dealing with the artificial creation of life is Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993). A billionaire sponsors development in the field of genetic technology, which allows scientists to bring dinosaurs that have been extinct for 65 million years back to life. To approve his new 'zoo' 3 scientists are brought to the island. One of these scientists are used by Michael Crichton to voice the 'moral' of the movie/book, in among others this quote from the movie:

"Your scientists were more preoccupied with whether they could; that they didn't stop to think if they should!"
– Dr. Ian Malcolm [*Jurassic Park* 1993]

A general sentiment in the science fiction genre. A less known (though very well known in some circles) animated movie build on a Japanese comic book, *Ghost in the Shell* also treats humanities stance in a technologically dysfunctional society. In *Ghost in the Shell* cybernetic replacements for limbs, bodies and even brains are more or less an everyday thing. Almost

the entire body of the main protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi is prosthetic; the only thing left of her original body is her 'ghost', her soul. Though the presentation of the story and the story itself is very different from Philip K. Dick's novel, both protagonists are searching for a sign of what it means to be human in a world where everything is artificial.

From a surveillance network, administered by the government, a spontaneously grown consciousness spawns. The man in charge of the project tries to cover up the incident, but it is too late.

Puppet Master: You will not find a corpse, because I have never possessed a body.

Nakamura - Why are his sensors on? What the hell is this?

Computer Engineer - All external controls are turned off. The body's using its own power source.

Puppet Master - I entered this body because I was unable to overcome section sixes reactive barriers. However what you are now witnessing is an act of my own free will. As a sentient life form I hereby demand political asylum.

Aramaki - Is this a joke?

Nakamura - Ridiculous, it's programmed for self preservation

Puppet Master - It can also be argued that DNA is nothing more than a program designed to preserve itself. Life has become more complex in the overwhelming sea of information, and life when organized into species relies upon genes to be its memory system. 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.

Nakamura - Nonsense this babble is no proof that you're a living thinking life form.

Puppet Master - And can you offer me proof of your existence? How can you, when neither modern science nor philosophy can explain what life is.

Aramaki - Who the hell is this?

Nakamura - Even if you do have a ghost, we don't offer freedom to criminals. It's the wrong place and time to defect.

Puppet Master - Time has been on my side, but by acquiring a body I am now subject to the possibility of dying. Fortunately there is no death sentence in this country.

Aramaki - What is it? Artificial Intelligence?

Puppet Master - Incorrect, I am not an AI. My code name is project 2501. I am a living, thinking entity that was created in the sea of information.

Conclusion

Despite the planted seed of hope for the individual that you'll find in Blade Runner, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep and science fiction in general, don't let it get to your head. The people in Dick's novels remain insignificant, regardless of their apparent greatness or lack thereof.

Holding a white pigeon, the symbol of life, Roy Batty slips silently away, and through Deckard we realize that he has finally achieved what he wanted. By saving Deckard from certain death and then making him understand his thoughts, who he is, he has become as human as anyone can become. More so than most 'normal' human even. Tyrell, Gaff, Bryant are all emotionally dead towards other people, which is personified in Bryant's threat against Deckard.

"If you're not cop you're little people" – Harry Bryant [Blade Runner, 1982]

Roy Batty, the son of God dies, with his hands pierced by nails, hunted by humanity and without his God, and his soul in the shape of a pigeon flies into the sky. No religious motif has been spared. And like Jesus, Batty dies for the sins of humanity, the sin of being human.

It can be argued that this use of traditional Christian imagery and reference almost necessarily makes Blade Runner a movie better suited for Western audiences where Christianity is more widespread and it can more easily hook into the teachings that even non-religious people automatically pick up in life. An interesting observation when you look on the eastern influences abound in the movie, often tying neatly into the late 70's early 80's fear in the western world of being overrun by the eastern market, as the large Japanese corporations gained a stronghold based on their effective, cheap reliable products.

A thought that has been projected into its extreme outcome in Blade Runner where we see a chaotic mesh between both eastern and western cultures and a wide variety of religions and beliefs.

Even though Blade Runner differs a great deal from Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep, both works maintain the same themes and ideas. In both we find people who in one way or another are underdogs to something they themselves have no influence over. Their struggle against this system, however insignificant it might be, represents to Deckard that there is hope yet. And through Deckard we're handed the message that however futile our struggle might seem, we have to take control. However that's merely one aspect of the book, another is that of artificial intelligence and life, and the ethics and problems arising from their (imminent?) coming.

Artificial Intelligence - n. Abbr. AI

The subfield of computer

science concerned with the concepts and methods of symbolic inference by computer and symbolic knowledge representation for use in making inferences. AI can be seen as an attempt to model aspects of human thought on computers. It is also sometimes defined as trying to solve by computer any problem that a human can solve faster.

Examples of AI problems are computer vision (building a system that can understand images as well as a human) and natural language processing (building a system that can understand and speak a human language as well as a human). These may appear to be modular, but all attempts so far (1993) to solve them have foundered on the amount of context information and "intelligence" they seem to require.

The term is often used as a selling point, e.g. to describe programming that drives the behaviour of computer characters in a game. This is often no more intelligent than "Kill any humans you see; keep walking; avoid solid objects; duck if a human with a gun can see you".

Source: Dictionary.com – February 23rd 2003

(<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=artificial%20intelligence>)

In 1968 the world was introduced through the book/movie 2001: A Space Odyssey to HAL, an artificial intelligence onboard the shuttle Discovery on par if not above the human mind in most respects.

When 2001 was made between 1965 and 1968 the cold war was fully underway (As a side note, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep was actually written in 1968 as well). NASA was determined to launch humanity into space, and it might've seemed at the time that the prospect of artificial intelligence was good. Today we (think we) know better.

Now while the opinions on whether or not we will ever see AI are as varied as there are people, let us assume that humanity succeeds in the creation of as such. Now what?

Well the first realization that we have to come to terms with is the fact that an AI isn't a program. It's not a better version of your Word Processor. An actual artificial *intelligence* is self-aware, it can learn and it can think and it can emote. That's the kind of level we're dealing with. It has to be thought of as an actual living entity. One could even go as far as to say that it has a soul. In fact you might as well call it an artificial consciousness.

What rights does such an artificial consciousness have? Will it be the 'property' of the creator? Fundamentally what would be the difference between an artificial consciousness and a human being without a body?

Though entirely speculative, the discussion rages today. Opponents of AI (or maybe rather critics) remain undecided in relation to the future of AI. If we *do* make an AI more intelligent than ourselves which eventually ends up viewing us as nothing more than a leftover from the days of natural evolution, then what?

Arthur C. Clarke expressed in an interview on CNN his opinion on this, and I agree with him.

“Neanderthals were gotten rid off by evolution. We, Homo Sapiens, were put in their place. So maybe it’s merely a question of evolution. Maybe we, as people, are too primitive for the future. We do have a past, and probably a future as self-destructive, so wouldn’t it be for the benefit of other races if we were no longer a threat?”

- <http://europe.cnn.com/2000/TECH/space/12/27/part.four/index.html> (As of translation time, the link is no longer working properly, so this quote is a translation of a translation. I have however made sure to retain the original point)

Quite that drastic it probably won’t be for a while according to Dr. Marc Rayman, chief mission engineer for Deep Space 1, the first space probe with an AI system that in certain areas resemble HAL.

"Now, if you've built a really good artificial intelligence system, maybe it's making the right decision. On Deep Space 1, it made some decisions different from what we expected, but they were the correct decisions because it had more information than we had.

"At some point you have to develop confidence in it. And I suppose it's like people with children who at some point you have to say, I'm sending my children out into the world. I've taught them the best I can and now it's up to them to make the right decisions."

- Dr. Marc Rayman [CNN 2001]

Reliance on true AI’s will be very much dependent on their conditioning if we want to make sure they stay loyal to us, in other words we need to brainwash them. Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep and Blade Runner deal with the consequences of the AI’s figuring out that they have been conditioned. Like the African slaves coming to terms with their existence and life under the oak of their western masters.

A universal theme that makes Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep and Blade Runner just as relevant today as back when they were created and probably equally relevant a good

distance into the future. A trait I must add that you'll find in most of Philip K. Dicks works, which is probably why he has such amazing lasting value.

The message isn't that of fear of the future, but of an open mind. It would seem that there often is a tendency to forget about the consequences of our actions, and instead focus on the actions themselves; the use of the nuclear bomb over two Japanese cities being a prime example. In its own way, the fission of atoms is in many ways comparative to artificial intelligence. Used in the right way, there is great gain to be found, used in the wrong way the consequences can be disastrous.

Speaking subjectively I consider Blade Runner to be one of the most influential science fiction movies I have ever seen. The script alone is poetical and moving in ways that few modern science fiction movies have been able to match. I consider the immense visual and contextual layering is unmatched even in its closest modern equals, which for the visual aspect is saying a lot considering the vast increase in technology available to filmmakers. I believe a huge part of this is attributable to Ridley Scott's directorial abilities, even if it is a once in a lifetime feat.

I wish I could have spent more time pondering the qualities of Blade Runner on its own, but space and time restrains kept me from doing that presently. Perhaps sometime in the future I'll return and once again delve into it.

I hope the time spent with the material I did choose was beneficial to you even if it primarily covered the ethical and moral facets of the works. I close with a quote that I find appropriate for science fiction, and in particular the two pieces that I have treated in this essay.

"Art at its most significant is a distant early warning system that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen."

- Marshall McLuhan