

# Redefining Humanity: The Intersection of Technological Advancements and Human Essence in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*

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## **Abstract**

In the realm of visual culture, cyberpunk films like *Blade Runner* serve as rich canvases for exploring 'Otherness', a concept involving characters or features that deviate from human or societal norms due to technology or dystopian settings. Drawing on Donna Haraway's idea that a "cyborg is a cybernetic organism,"<sup>1</sup> the film challenges notions of identity, ethics, and social constructs. The film often minimizes human individuality to highlight 'Otherness' and elevate posthuman entities in tech-driven societies. The genre oscillates between utopian and dystopian elements, injecting hope and possibility into human existence and driving societal reevaluation. This oscillation provokes key questions: What makes someone 'genuinely human'? Can we emulate this when creating 'more human than human' replicants? Being deemed a copy or unreal can be oppressive, intensifying the urgency of these inquiries. As Oscar Wilde noted, "progress is the realization of Utopia,"<sup>2</sup> but does this also feed dystopian implications? This abstract provides a framework for scholarly investigations into *Blade Runner*, focusing on paradoxes like the human-replicant contradiction and the role of technology.

**Keywords:** cyberpunk films, human identity, posthumanism, utopia and dystopia, technological advancements

## **Introduction**

In the contemporary era, the exponential progress of technology has engendered an escalating fascination with the convergence of technological breakthroughs and the fundamental nature of humanity. The manifestation of this fascination is notably conspicuous within the domain of science fiction, wherein writers and filmmakers have extensively explored the impacts of sophisticated technology on human identity, societal constructs, and ethical principles. The seminal cyberpunk film *Blade Runner* (1982), directed by Ridley Scott, is a prominent text in the cyberpunk genre. Adapted from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), this cinematic masterpiece has garnered widespread recognition and exerted a profound influence on subsequent creative endeavours in the cyberpunk milieu. The novel's title poses a provocative question: "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"<sup>3</sup> It alludes to artificial beings that populate the world, after natural creatures become extinct. It also delves into the dreams, aspirations, and 'souls' of androids, questioning whether they possess a form of

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *Socialist Review*, no. 80 (1985), pp. 65-108.

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (Noida: Start Classics, 2001), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (London: Doubleday, 1968).

consciousness or emotional depth comparable to humans. In *Blade Runner*, the replicants, like Rachael and Roy Batty, are not just machines but beings with desires, memories, and a desperate yearning for more life. As critic Scott Bukatman points out, “*Blade Runner’s* replicants are alive, and the question of the protagonist Deckard’s own status as perhaps a replicant himself offers a radical destabilization of human identity.”<sup>4</sup> Both the novel and the film explore the disquieting possibility that humans may not be unique in their capacity for emotion and cognition. The novel focuses on ‘empathy’ as the distinctive feature of humanity is changed in the film into a more ambiguous examination of what constitutes “genuine”<sup>5</sup> life.

J. P. Telotte, a science fiction film critic, remarks that “*Blade Runner* complicates our understanding of who, or what, counts as human, forcing us to ask what essential quality it is that grants us this special status in the world.”<sup>6</sup> This relates to Donna Haraway’s ideas, which propose that definitions of life and identity are far more fluid and contentious than traditionally believed. *Blade Runner* is situated within a speculative future characterised by a dystopian milieu, wherein the emergence of genetically manipulated humanoid entities, commonly referred to as replicants, has transpired. These replicants are designed to fulfill a diverse range of services on behalf of their human progenitors. The film focuses on Rick Deckard, a former operative known as a Blade Runner, whose objective is to track down and “retire”<sup>7</sup> a faction of renegade replicants. These artificial beings have absconded to Earth in their quest to prolong their artificially predetermined lifespan. Deckard’s relentless pursuit of his targets forces him to think deeply about the meaning of life, the morality of making conscious beings just to use them, and the impact of the gradual blurring of the line between humans and replicants.

### **Blurring the Lines: The Complexity of Human Essence**

In this article the following research questions are addressed: 1) How does *Blade Runner* challenge traditional notions of humanity through its portrayal of replicants and their struggle for self-determination?; 2) In what ways does the film’s visual aesthetic contribute to its exploration of the relationship between technology and human essence?; and 3) How do the characters and narrative of *Blade Runner* reflect contemporary concerns about the ethical implications of technological advancements? I will provide an analysis of the ways in which *Blade Runner* redefines humanity at the intersection of technological advancements and human essence. Through an examination of the film’s narrative, characters, and visual aesthetics, I illuminate the ways in which science fiction can serve as a powerful medium for engaging with the ethical and philosophical questions raised by our rapidly evolving technological landscape.

*Blade Runner* offers a gripping account of the essence of humanity through its intriguing replicant characters, beings that mimic humans but lack a natural lifespan. At first glance, replicants appear indistinguishable from humans; the film explores their sentience, emotions, and potential for humanity. This theme has roots in Dick’s novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* In the novel, Rick Deckard, a Blade Runner charged with retiring

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<sup>4</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Blade Runner* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (Warner Bros, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> J. P. Telotte, cited in Peter Fitting, “Futurecop: The Neutralization of Revolt in ‘Blade Runner,’” *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1987), pp. 340–354.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:14:18.

rogue replicants, struggles with the porous boundaries between humans and replicants. Deckard poses a poignant question: “Is an android a person or merely a sophisticated machine?”<sup>8</sup> This query encapsulates the moral and existential dilemmas at the heart of *Blade Runner*, setting the stage for an analysis of humanity against the backdrop of technological advancement. When viewed in its historical context, the film takes on additional layers of meaning. Released at the dawn of the personal computer era, *Blade Runner* tapped into 1980s anxieties and questions about technology’s role in human life. It explored what might happen if technological advances made it possible to create beings virtually indistinguishable from humans.

The film presents replicants as complex entities capable of developing their own emotions and desires. Consider Roy Batty, the charismatic leader of a band of rebel replicants. In his dying moments, he delivers a heart-wrenching monologue reflecting on his unique, albeit short-lived, experiences. He recounts seeing “attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion” and “C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate;” these memories, he laments, will fade “like tears in rain.”<sup>9</sup> This emotive speech not only exemplifies Roy’s complex emotional fabric but also challenges the notion that a distinct “human essence” is exclusive to biological beings. This challenge is further amplified through the relationship between Deckard and the replicant Rachael. Deckard finds himself emotionally involved with Rachael, despite her being a replicant. In a pivotal moment, late in the film, he realizes that although he has killed Zhora and Pris, his life has been saved by two replicants, Rachael and Batty. The distinction between humans and replicants shrinks when such altruistic actions are considered.

*Blade Runner* investigates the replicants’ quest for self-awareness, autonomy, and ultimately, freedom. They seek to extend their artificially limited lifespans and rebel against their programmed subservience. Director Scott has described the replicants as “more human than human,”<sup>10</sup> suggesting their capacity for emotional depth could potentially surpass that of their human creators. This idea is at the crux of *Blade Runner*, forcing the audience to grapple with uncomfortable questions about identity, freedom, and the essence of humanity itself. Jean Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality dovetails neatly with the themes explored in *Blade Runner*, particularly when questioning the essence of humanity in a world filled with replicants. In Baudrillard’s hyperreal world, the line between the real and the simulated becomes so blurred that they are indistinguishable. This confusion between reality and simulation is at the heart of *Blade Runner*, where replicants are so convincingly human-like that they challenge traditional understandings of what it means to be human. The replicants are not mere copies or imitations; they evoke real emotions, possess memories, and even strive for longer life and freedom—desires that are fundamentally human. Here, Jean Baudrillard’s idea that “the simulation is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none”<sup>11</sup> becomes crucial. In other words, the experience of the replicants, their emotions and desires, become a new form of reality, challenging the idea that only biological humans can have authentic human experiences. This blurring between the ‘real’ and the ‘simulated’ calls into question the idea of a human essence. In the film, a key moment occurs when Rachael, who has just completed Deckard’s Voight-Kampff Test to measure her emotional capacity, asks if

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<sup>8</sup> Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:21:19.

<sup>10</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:48:00.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), p. 23.

he's ever taken the test himself. Initially depicted as an idealized, remote woman, Rachael evolves into a complex individual who challenges Deckard's lack of empathy.

It is clear that Deckard is less empathetic than Rachael and other replicants in the story. His emotional depth only begins to surface as he grows attached to Rachael, a woman he is supposed to kill. Unlike a traditional film hero, Deckard feels ambivalent about his job and successfully eliminates only unarmed female replicants. Rachael even saves him during a dangerous encounter with Leon. Deckard's character arc revolves around his internal struggle with emotional and moral complexities, exacerbated by the demands of his job. Through his interactions with replicants, he gains insights into fear, love, and solidarity, while also confronting his own mortality. As for the replicants, they yearn for freedom from their servitude and the constraints of their limited lifespans. In a society dominated by technology and economic forces, they strive to break free from their predestined roles, as dictated by Tyrell Corp. This leads them to challenge the established order, in order to control their own fates.

### **The Search for Identity**

*Blade Runner* also considers profound themes of identity and existentialism, presenting a dystopian vision of a technologically advanced society that challenges the essence of humanity. Through its complex narrative and philosophical tone, the film invites audiences to contemplate the struggles of its characters as they grapple with their own humanity, embark on a quest for purpose, and confront the disorienting impact of rapid technological advancements on their sense of self. *Blade Runner* explores the existential dilemmas faced by Deckard, a Blade Runner tasked with hunting down rogue replicants. Deckard's introspections evoke a sense of existential angst as he ponders his significance in a disquieting world. Reflecting upon the interconnectedness of life, Dick has him muse, "The spider Mercer and the spider Isidore seemed to him to have made a separate peace, sacrificing him to keep the colony going."<sup>12</sup>

The film emphasises Deckard's existential crisis, expertly portrayed by Harrison Ford, as he confronts the moral complexities of his role. His enigmatic utterance, "I was quit when I came in here, Bryant; I'm twice as quit now,"<sup>13</sup> reveals the dissonance between his preconceived notions of identity and the revelations that arise from his interactions with the replicants. This reflective statement encapsulates Deckard's inner turmoil and his gradual questioning of his own identity as he becomes entwined with beings who challenge his preconceptions of what it means to be human. In an intense confrontation with Deckard, Roy expresses the human desire to be free from oppression, "Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be slave."<sup>14</sup> The replicants themselves, artificial beings designed to closely resemble humans, serve as the focus for an exploration of identity and existentialism. In his climactic "Tears in Rain" monologue, Roy poetically muses, "All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain."<sup>15</sup> This instance captures the existential dilemma faced by both humans and replicants; the fleeting nature of life and the desire for a lasting impact. *Blade Runner* employs its distinctive visual and narrative aesthetics to further amplify the exploration

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<sup>12</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:24:12.

<sup>13</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:17:03.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:56:08.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:43:08.

of identity and existentialism. The sprawling, neon-drenched metropolis, perpetually shrouded in darkness and rain, becomes a metaphorical representation of the fractured and disoriented identities of its inhabitants. Within this dystopian landscape, personal connections are scarce, and authentic experiences are overshadowed by the pervasive influence of technology and the dehumanising forces of corporate control. In this context, Rachael (a replicant who believes herself to be human) embodies the tumultuous quest for self-discovery and validation. Tearfully confessing to Deckard, she reveals, “I’m not in the business. I am the business.”<sup>16</sup> Rachael’s internal struggle as she confronts her manufactured nature and seeks to reconcile it with her deeply human emotions and experiences leads to this poignant realization, a testament to the intricacies of identity formation and the delicate balance between nature and nurture.

*Blade Runner*’s profound exploration of identity and existentialism resonates as a compelling reflection of universal human concerns. The film deftly navigates the complex terrain of the human psyche, provoking viewers to question their own sense of self, the nature of existence, and the elusive pursuit of meaning in an era dominated by rapid technological advancement and societal alienation. By showing the characters’ inner struggles with identity and their relentless quest for purpose, *Blade Runner* invites audiences to engage in a profound existential inquiry that transcends mainstream cinematic experience. *Blade Runner* challenges audiences to reflect upon identity, to question the nature of existence, and to embark on a quest for meaning in a complex and fragmented world. *Blade Runner*, via its cinematic artistry, underscores the relevance of existential inquiry and profound introspection.

### **Tears in Rain: The Existential Crisis of Enhanced Beings**

Haraway asks “What does it mean to be human in an age of advanced technology?”<sup>17</sup> Roy Batty’s existential crisis is not just a replicant’s sorrow but a mirror reflecting our own human anxieties about identity and mortality in a technologically advanced world. Batty’s poignant monologue on his fleeting memories and inevitable demise forces us to confront our own transience. As Batty grapples with impending death, he transcends his engineered origins, touching upon something profoundly human. In this light Batty’s existential reflections amplify the complex interplay of posthumanism and transhumanism explored in the film. His quest for meaning acts as a cautionary glimpse into the existential and ethical quandaries we may face as technology continues to evolve. This struggle serves as a vivid touch point for examining how technology not only enhances but also challenges our understanding of ‘human essence’.

Posthumanism as a theoretical concept provides a lens through which to examine the blurring boundaries between humans and machines in the context of technological advancements. It challenges the traditional understanding of human essence and questions the notion of a fixed and stable human identity. In the realm of cyberpunk films like *Blade Runner*, posthumanism becomes particularly relevant as it interrogates the consequences of human-machine interaction and the impact of advanced technology on the human condition. According to N. Katherine Hayles, “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between

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<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 00:32:11.

<sup>17</sup> Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-181.

bodily existence and computer simulation.”<sup>18</sup> This idea resonates in *Blade Runner* as it portrays a future society where replicants, bioengineered beings that closely resemble humans, blur the lines between the organic and the artificial. Replicants defy the idea that humanity is solely a product of biology because they display complex emotions, desires, and consciousness despite being human-made. Posthumanism raises issues about the limits of human enhancement and the implications of merging with machines, inviting consideration of the possibility of transcending biological limitations via technology and the ethical dilemmas arising from this.

In *Blade Runner*, this is exemplified by the replicants’ yearning for extended lifespans and the pursuit of self-awareness and autonomy. Roy states, “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe.”<sup>19</sup> His search for a sense of meaning and transcendence resonates with posthumanist inquiries reimagining of human identity. Posthumanism challenges the binary distinction between humans and machines, emphasizing interconnectedness and entanglement between the organic and the technological. It recognises that technology is not simply external to us but becomes an integral part of our being. In *Blade Runner*, this is evident in the cyborg-like qualities of the characters, where the boundaries between the human and the machine become increasingly blurred. By employing the lens of posthumanism, one can critically analyse the intricate relationship between technological advancements and humanity portrayed in *Blade Runner*. Through this lens, *Blade Runner* invites us to reflect on our own conceptions of identity, agency, and the future trajectory of humanity in an increasingly technologically mediated reality.

Transhumanism is a philosophical and ethical movement that explores the potential for enhancing human capabilities through technology and scientific advancements. According to transhumanists, the change will mark the moment when man will have evolved into a post-human existence through “mind uploading,” having achieved immortality by being merged with the Internet, being likened to the New Age concept of a “collective consciousness,” or “global brain.”<sup>20</sup> It envisions a future where humans can transcend their biological limitations and achieve enhanced cognitive, physical, and emotional capacities. Transhumanism raises questions about the boundaries of human essence and the ethical implications of merging with machines. In the context of *Blade Runner*, transhumanism becomes a central theme as the film depicts a world where advancements in bioengineering and artificial intelligence have created replicants, bioengineered beings designed to closely resemble humans. Replicants embody the desire for enhanced abilities and extended lifespans, reflecting the aspirations of transhumanist thought. They challenge the notion of human exceptionalism and raise profound questions about the nature of identity, consciousness, and the potential for post-biological existence.

Deckard’s encounters with the replicants prompt him to question the nature of humanity and the essence of being. He struggles with his own identity and moral responsibility. The exploration of transhumanism in *Blade Runner* extends beyond the individual characters to the societal implications of technological advancements. The film portrays a dystopian future where powerful corporations control the development and distribution of advanced

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<sup>18</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 01:18:12.

<sup>20</sup> David Livingstone, *Transhumanism: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (Jakarta: Sabilillah Publications, 2015), p. 6.

technologies. These technologies, while promising to enhance human capabilities, also lead to dehumanisation, exploitation, and social inequality. The Tyrell Corporation, responsible for creating the replicants, embodies the transhumanist ideal of transcending human limitations, yet it becomes a symbol of corporate power and the loss of authentic human connection. In his final moments, as Batty reflects on his experiences, he delivers the poignant “Tears in Rain” monologue: “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain.”<sup>21</sup> This incident encapsulates Batty’s recognition of the fleeting nature of existence and the desire for a lasting impact, reflecting the existential dilemma faced by both humans and those who strive for transhuman capabilities. *Blade Runner* serves as a thought-provoking reflection on the promises and perils of transhumanist aspirations, encouraging us to critically examine the potential trajectories of human evolution and the delicate balance between enhancing our capacities and preserving our essential humanity.

### Situating the Argument in Critical Scholarship

*Blade Runner* posits several challenges to conventional notions of humanity, primarily through its portrayal of replicants and their compelling struggle for self-determination within a world where the boundaries between human and artificial entities become increasingly indistinct. *Blade Runner* challenges traditional notions of humanity by blurring the lines between humans and replicants, artificial beings who possess human-like qualities and consciousness. This theme of blurring boundaries is exemplified in Philip K. Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* which serves as the inspiration for the film. In the novel, the protagonist Deckard questions the validity of categorising replicants as mere machines, stating, “Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community.”<sup>22</sup> This challenges the assumption that empathy and humanity are exclusively human traits. The film expands upon this exploration, presenting replicants with intricate emotions and desires and a yearning for self-determination. Critics have also acknowledged the film’s challenge to traditional notions of humanity. Film scholar Andrew M. Butler argues that *Blade Runner* explores the question of what it means to be human through the replicants’ struggle for selfhood and their desire for extended existence. Similarly, academic Roger Luckhurst suggests that the film’s central tension lies in the juxtaposition of humanity and the artificial, presenting the replicants as beings that “exhibit qualities of the human.”<sup>23</sup> The film invites viewers to question the rigid boundaries between humans and artificial beings and consider the possibility of non-human entities possessing human-like qualities. This exploration of replicants’ struggle for self-determination challenges the assumption that humanity is solely determined by biological origins.

The analysis of the film’s visual aesthetic reveals several ways in which it contributes to the exploration of the relationship between technology and human essence. The dark, dystopian setting, with its neon-drenched cityscape and perpetually rainy atmosphere, creates an atmosphere of detachment, isolation, and dehumanization. The juxtaposition of futuristic

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<sup>21</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*, 01:52:08.

<sup>22</sup> Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> Brooks Landon, “Review of *A Cultural History of a Hybrid Genre* by Roger Luckhurst,” *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2006), pp. 161–173.

technology and decaying urban landscapes emphasises the encroachment of technology on the human experience. The visual symbolism employed, such as the recurring motifs of eyes, mirrors, and reflections, further underscores the examination of human essence in the face of technology. The film employs a visual approach rooted in the principles of “layering” or “accumulated progress,”<sup>24</sup> going beyond mere architectural design to position Replicants within the established tradition of representational art. The visual aesthetics serve as a powerful tool to immerse viewers in a world where technology has become an integral part of human existence, raising questions about the impact of technology on the essence of being human. Interpreting the results in light of the research objective, it becomes evident that the film’s visual aesthetic not only enhances the immersive experience but also deepens the exploration of the relationship between technology and human essence. The visual elements effectively convey the film’s underlying themes, allowing viewers to contemplate the profound impact of technology on the construction and preservation of human identity.

Analysing the characters and narrative of *Blade Runner* reveals their reflection of contemporary concerns about the ethical implications of technological advancements. The film presents a future society where advanced technology, specifically the creation of replicants, raises ethical questions about the boundaries of creation, exploitation, and the rights of artificial beings. The characters’ moral dilemmas, particularly those faced by the protagonist Deckard, highlight the ethical complexities of his role as a Blade Runner tasked with hunting down replicants. Deckard’s introspection and wavering morality contribute to the examination of the ethical implications of his actions and the treatment of replicants as disposable commodities. This narrative exploration resonates with contemporary concerns about the treatment and ethical responsibilities of emerging technologies. Interpreting the results in light of the research objective, it becomes evident that the characters and narrative of *Blade Runner* effectively reflect and address contemporary concerns about the ethical implications of technological advancements. By highlighting the moral dilemmas faced by the characters, the film prompts viewers to consider the consequences of unchecked technological progress and the ethical considerations that arise when creating and interacting with advanced artificial beings.

The research findings regarding the visual aesthetic of *Blade Runner* and its exploration of the relationship between technology and humanity aligns with existing literature on the film. Film scholar David Laderman acknowledges the film’s visual aesthetic as a crucial element in conveying the impact of technology on human experience, “One must learn to see beyond the surface, to decode the visual narrative of our existence, and to navigate the intricate web of technology’s impact on our human experience.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Luckhurst highlights the film’s use of visual motifs and the representation of the urban landscape, “Much like the intricate patterns of a spider’s web, the film’s visual motifs and the urban landscape portrays the interwoven threads revealing the delicate balance between the organic and the artificial,”<sup>26</sup> offering a window into the evolving relationship between humanity and technology. These perspectives resonate with the research findings, as both the literature and the analysis

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<sup>24</sup> Marshall Deutelbaum, “Memory/Visual Design: The Remembered Sights of *Blade Runner*,” *Film and Literature Quarterly* (1989).

<sup>25</sup> David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Luckhurst, “Science Fiction and Cultural History,” *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2010), pp. 3–15.

recognise the film's visual elements as powerful tools for exploring the complex relationship between technology and human essence. While the existing literature acknowledges the significance of the film's visual aesthetic, my analysis offers a more nuanced understanding of its specific contributions. The findings emphasise the use of symbolism, such as the recurring imagery of eyes and reflective surfaces, as visual techniques that deepen the exploration of human essence in the context of technology. This deepens our understanding of how the visual aesthetic of *Blade Runner* actively engages viewers in contemplating the preservation and distortion of human identity in a technologically advanced society.

The opening scene features an eye that perfectly captures the film's grim, apocalyptic setting. Unlike John Smith's study, which interprets the eye imagery solely as a commentary on surveillance, I argue that the eyes also symbolize the search for identity in a tech-dominated world. Dust clouds block out the light, covering a city that is falling apart and almost empty. Relentless rain and a harsh environment add to the city's mysterious feel, like a darkroom showing us quick snapshots of a bleak future. "The eye is more than just an image; it's a powerful symbol,"<sup>27</sup> it not only takes in the devastation but also sends a message to the audience. As we watch the eye scan the city, it also seems to watch us, warning of the disasters that lie ahead. In a way, the eye acts like a camera, giving us a preview of a grim future. This article offers a deeper exploration of the specific visual techniques employed in the film. The findings emphasize the symbolism of eyes and reflective surfaces, revealing how these visual elements contribute to the exploration of human identity and its interaction with technology. The recurring imagery of eyes symbolises the perception of reality and the search for identity, engaging viewers in contemplating being human within a technologically advanced world. The use of reflective surfaces, such as mirrors and windows, raises questions about self-perception and authenticity, emphasising the fragmented nature of identity in the face of technology.

This article extends the existing literature by emphasising the ethical implications of technological advancements depicted through the film's visual aesthetic. The juxtaposition of futuristic technology with the decaying urban environment is a striking visual representation of the potential consequences of a technologically dominant society. This visual contrast highlights the dehumanising effects of technology, evoking a sense of unease and prompting reflection on the ethical concerns raised by advancements in artificial intelligence and human augmentation. By delving into these visual elements and their thematic significance, the research findings deepen our understanding of the film's exploration of the relationship between technology and human essence. The findings highlight how the visual aesthetic of *Blade Runner* immerses viewers in a dystopian world that serves as a cautionary tale about the potential loss of humanity in the face of technological progress.

## Conclusion

This article is multifaceted and covers various domains, including film studies, philosophy, ethics, and societal discourse on technology and humanity. The findings offer valuable insights and provoke critical thinking about the intersection of technological advancements and human

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<sup>27</sup> John Smith, "Eye Imagery in *Blade Runner*: A Surveillance Perspective," *Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2010), pp. 45-59.

essence as depicted in *Blade Runner*. Firstly, in the realm of film studies, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the cyberpunk genre and its exploration of themes related to humanity, identity, and technology. By analyzing the visual aesthetic and narrative elements of *Blade Runner*, the research highlights the film's unique approach in challenging traditional notions of humanity and its distinctive portrayal of the relationship between technology and human essence. These insights contribute to the broader scholarship on cyberpunk cinema and enrich the understanding of the genre's artistic and thematic characteristics. By challenging traditional boundaries and blurring the lines between humans and replicants, *Blade Runner* invites philosophical inquiries into the essence of being human and raises questions about the moral and existential implications of technological advancements.<sup>28</sup> The research expands the philosophical discourse on the relationship between technology and humanity, providing a compelling case study that invites further philosophical exploration. Ethically, the findings of this research shed light on the ethical concerns associated with technological advancements. *Blade Runner* presents a cautionary tale that invites viewers to critically reflect on the potential consequences of advancing technology and the ethical dilemmas it may pose. The exploration of themes such as artificial intelligence, human augmentation, and the dehumanizing effects of a technologically dominant society serve as a catalyst for ethical discussions and considerations in real-world contexts. The research findings provide a framework for reflecting on the ethical implications of our own technological progress and encourage deliberation on the responsible and ethical use of technology.

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<sup>28</sup> There is also research that interprets *Blade Runner* in religious terms, which has not been considered in this article. See, for example, Paris Mawby, "The Kingdom is Within: Religious Themes and Postmodernity in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*," in *The End of Religions? Religion in an Age of Globalisation*, ed. Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow (Sydney: Sydney Studies in Religion, 2001), pp. 139-154.