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The Simulacrum in the Age of AI: What Do Androids Feel? From Philip K. Dick to Ridley Scott

Abstract: This study investigates how the notion of the *human* can be redefined and reinterpreted in relation to a bioengineered humanoid, the android, whose ontological status increasingly approaches that of an autonomous being endowed with the attributes of personhood. Drawing on Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and Ridley Scott's film adaptation *Blade Runner* (1982), the analysis focuses on the paradigmatic *human-machine* confrontation, a *face-to-face* encounter that exposes and problematizes the boundaries between human and artificial forms of life. The discussion engages with Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation to frame the android as a site where authenticity, imitation, and emotion intersect.
Keywords: Science Fiction; Androids; Artificial Intelligence; Simulacrum; Simulation; Empathy; Philosophy of Emotions; Cognitive Studies.

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Of Humans and Monsters

Both Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner*, released in 1982 – the year of the American writer's death – belong to the realm of pop-cultural iconicity characteristic of cult works. Denis Villeneuve, with *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), was fully aware of this legacy, and his film remains faithful to the stylistic and imaginative universe established by Ridley Scott. Both directors recuperate the exuberant imaginary of Dick's fictional world, recomposing it into the spectral image of a post-apocalyptic, post-human urbanity. The novel, Scott and David Webb Peoples' film adaptation, and Villeneuve's sequel form a complex unity that must be examined through the lens of their reflection on the human condition in the age of artificial intelligence. Two fundamental questions lie at the heart of the novel and of the two films. 1. How can one distinguish between a human and an android – the foundational difference between what is "begotten, not made" and what is "made, not begotten"? Let us recall the exceptionalism of

another creation "begotten, not made" in the divine order: the Incarnate Christ, of flesh and spirit.

The android, in turn, claims a dual nature. First, a technological one: the android is a product of cutting-edge technology, synthetic, manufactured, *made*. It incorporates what we today call artificial intelligence (AI). Second, through its design, its very concept, it asserts "in our image, after our likeness" of its creator – in particular, of humanity as a whole – an expression of human intelligence. From gesture to voice, features, and behavior, the android constitutes an almost perfect replica of the human type, individualized through distinctive traits such as physical form, age, sex, and so on, to the point where the difference becomes imperceptible. The ontological scandal generated by this deep resemblance, and the moral problem that accompanies it lies at the core of Philip K. Dick's novel.

The second fundamental question is a reformulation of the first and has long been a central subject of philosophical inquiry: *What is humanity, and how can it be defined?* What is of interest here is not so much the answer itself as the new circumstances under which the question is posed, circumstances that shape new perspectives. To grasp the novelty of this context, one can turn to a similar situation retrievable from the cultural and civilizational history of ancient Egypt and Greece, particularly from their mythologies. A paradigmatic example is dramatized in Greek tragedy, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, later reimagined in modernity by playwrights such as Joséphin Péladan in *Œdipe et le sphinx* and Jean Cocteau in *La Machine infernale*.

We know that Oedipus becomes king and fulfills his tragic destiny – one he seeks to avoid – through a confrontation with the Sphinx, a monster that demanded an annual human tribute from Thebes in the form of sons and daughters. The cessation of this bloody tribute depended on the correct answer to a riddle posed to anyone who dared to confront the creature. This "life-and-death" confrontation was an intellectual one: it unfolded within a hermeneutic space, where the challenger had to discern a hidden truth encoded in figurative, symbolic, and parabolic language. Yet the challenge posed by the Sphinx is laden with ambiguity, for its riddle targets the very nature of the human condition. In accordance with the Delphic injunction "Know thyself" (*gnōthi seauton*), the Sphinx holds up a mirror before the challenger, a mirror of self-knowledge. The ultimate aim of this knowledge, and its highest stake, is the meaning of humanness itself, and, through it, the meaning of life (which is forfeited through failure to solve the riddle).

To decipher the meaning of life, what Horia-Roman Patapievici calls the "theme of life"[1] in *Despre viață, destin & nostalgie* (*On life, destiny & nostalgia*), is to approach, philosophically, the proximity of death. The riddle's formula may be simplified, but it captures something essential. The human being is inexorably inscribed within time, not merely biological time, experienced as the succession of life stages, but also psychological time, the lived perception of temporal flow. Beyond these instances lies historical time, the broader temporal context that defines the individual's relationship to their world, to their epoch, and the history they inscribe through their own existence. This history remains, however fragmentary or imprecise, preserved within memory: a deep form of temporal relation

that incorporates affects and the complex life of emotions. The Sphinx's riddle thus reveals humanity as a trajectory unfolding through biological stages – childhood, adulthood, and old age – corresponding to the ages of man, in fact ages of civilizations as depicted in Hesiod's *Theogony*: the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, The Heroic Age and the Iron Age, in an inexorable order of decline. The human being has a past because they remember it; in other words, they do not merely live *within* the flow of time we call history, but they *possess* a history of their own becoming and decline, unveiled through a particular kind of memory, an affective memory.

However, another dimension becomes perceptible in the context of the Oedipal confrontation. The one who poses the question is not a human being, but a non-human entity that appears across mythological traditions: a monster, unique in its kind and not part of any species. The Sphinx is a hybrid, its body composed of animal parts drawn from different kingdoms: avian (the wings of an eagle), mammalian (the body of a lion), and an unmistakably human "interface": the bust of a woman. This human element is not merely visual; it is also expressed through intelligence, which the Sphinx deploys in its intellectual duel with human minds.

This creates a striking situation: a monster addresses a human a question about human nature itself. In European painting – from Ingres and Gustave Moreau to Jacek Malczewski and Gustav Klimt – this encounter has been repeatedly thematized precisely because it reveals the depths of human nature when confronted with the monstrous[2]. The challenge posed by this meeting concerns the act of drawing boundaries: delimiting the human from the non-human *within* humanity itself.

The monster and the monstrous, as categories, are inscribed into the symbolic space of humanity as its boundary – an *outside* that is reconsidered as *inside*. Fate ultimately projects Oedipus into a "monstrous" situation, opened by his act of parricide and irreversibly closed by incest with his mother. The deed he commits – or, more precisely, is destined to commit – is itself monstrous. The monstrous, assimilated by the Greeks into the sphere of mythology, and the human monstrosity are thus placed in a revelatory face-to-face encounter – an emblematic situation that can be retrieved across multiple contexts, including Philip K. Dick's novel. Human and android observe one another, confront one another. If, in this metaphorical operation, we substitute animal corporeality with technology while preserving the human-like interface perfected to the point of indistinguishability, we achieve the modern expression of the monster in the age of AI: the android. Both the novel and its cinematic adaptations stage this fundamental confrontation between human and machine, whose ultimate stake remains the question of the human: its limits, its essence, and its definition.

Simulacrum and Emotion

In his 1981 book *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard tried to imagine, like a science fiction author, a world similar to those proposed by Philip K. Dick, whom he invokes many times: a world of simulacra, or what Baudrillard calls third-order simulacra. In fact, he dedicates a chapter in his book, "Simulacra and Science Fiction",

to how science fiction literature imagines a world in which everything is second-hand, a world of simulacra. In this imaginary, dystopian world, the boundary between the fictions proposed by the American writer and reality no longer exists. "In fact, science fiction in this sense is no longer anywhere, and it is everywhere, in the circulation of models, here and now, in the very principle of the surrounding simulation"[3].

Here are the three types of simulacra Jean Baudrillard considers:

> Simulacra that are natural, naturalist, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit, harmonious, optimistic, aiming for the restitution or ideal institution of nature made in God's image;
> Simulacra that are productive, productivist, founded on energy, force, its materialization by the machine and the whole system of production – a Promethean goal of continuous globalization and expansion, of an indefinite liberation of energy (desire belongs to the utopias related to this order of simulacra);
> Simulacra of simulation, founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game – total operationality, hyperreality, the aim of total control[4].

The first type of simulacra have a referent to which they relate and which exerts full authority over the copy; they still belong to the Gutenberg galaxy. The second type belongs to the industrial age, with its machinist momentum. The third belongs to a different post-industrial age, the age of cybernetics and AI, supercomputers and neural networks, virtual reality, etc. – whose full scale Baudrillard could not imagine in 1981. Still, he intuited it through science fiction literature, particularly that of Philip K. Dick, where science fiction acts as a form of anticipation, representing the author's visionary predictive capacity.

The ontological and ethical challenge posed by the android lies in the capacity to transfer the human and its contents into a synthetic, non-human vessel that simulates humanity almost perfectly, to the point of confusion. From Baudrillard's point of view, the android is a simulacrum. For Philip K. Dick, it is a bioengineered humanoid, blending biological and technological, who has gained autonomy through self-awareness, consciousness of individuality and uniqueness, sort of Promethean emancipation. The issue of representing the human is central because the android presents the human as Flemish painters did with *still lifes*, *trompe l'oeil*, creating the illusion of reality by descending to the infinitesimal detail in making the perfect copy. When transformed into a bug, in Franz Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa retains intact cognitive and affective contents, while sensory ones change. In other words, the core of his humanity remains intact, but the form changes. In this case, the form, the representation, is perfectly simulated, the cognitive contents, especially intelligence, are superior, but the affective contents are diminished, restricted. For example, fear is present, but not empathy. Baudrillard conceived the simulacrum in relation to representation, which initially refers to a referent, communicates it one way or another, but in the case of the simulacrum, the referent is lost and representation becomes autonomous as the unique reality.

> Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum[5].

Simulation leading to simulacrum nullifies not only the relationship with the referent, the "sign", but also its value system, tending to become autonomous, to gain an independent existence. Baudrillard continues this logic of representation by transferring it to the image in its relation to the real it represents:

> Such would be the successive phases of the image:
> it is the reflection of a profound reality;
> it masks and denatures a profound reality;
> it masks the absence of a profound reality;
> it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.
> In the first case, the image is a good appearance – representation is of the sacramental order. In the second, it is an evil appearance – it is of the order of maleficence. In the third, it plays at being an appearance – it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer of the order of appearances, but of simulation[6].

The android as simulacrum fits within this dynamic of stages: it points toward a profound reality which it simultaneously denatures, trying to fill it with content but ultimately unable to metabolize affective contents, so that it gains autonomy, referring to itself as a new Adam, a being of another order. In any case, simulation enters the usual behavior of androids to the extent that they must camouflage themselves to avoid detection, exposure, and "withdrawal", destruction. To claim humanity, to copy it in its generic forms such as sociability, reflection, gregariousness, etc. becomes a self-reflection of gestures of humanity, because there is, simultaneously, an awareness of otherness, a consciousness of being something else, someone else, an acute consciousness encapsulated in Rimbaud's phrase: "Je est un autre" ("Myself is Another").

A cognitive perspective bordering philosophy on emotions is offered by Michelle Maiese in *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition. New Directions in Philosophy and Cognitive Sciences*. Maiese reviews numerous approaches to emotions – passive affect theory, drive-based or motivation theory, behaviorist theory etc. – which she finds reductive, but also nuances cognitive theories, among which her approach situates itself by placing conscious desire as the common denominator of any emotion. "In my view, the essential factor in all emotion is conscious desire, or the consciously felt need for something"[7]. Following the path opened by Peter Goldie's theories, especially his book *The Emotions:*

A Philosophical Exploration[8], some observations are essential for this study's subject. Emotions are connected to emotional episodes of past experiences, to dispositions of thinking, feeling, and acting; they are dynamic, able to increase or decrease in intensity. Crucially, emotions have their own history, personal narrative, and these histories prescribe, dictate a certain emotional behavior. In other words, personal history, life story, and character shape an emotional experience and imprint a specific mark on a person's emotional behavior. Maiese is categorical regarding affective contents, which not only define, particularize a person but constitute them as a human subject: "To put it another way, the one thing that creatures minded like us necessarily are not is emotional zeroes – conscious creatures without conative affect and thus without the ability consciously to desire something or another in some way or another"[9].

In *Brouilards de peines et des désires*, Georges Didi-Huberman refers to the distinction Emmanuel Kant makes between emotion (*Affekt*) and passion (*Leidenschaft*) in his study *Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*. For Kant, both emotions and passions exclude control by reason, affirming their own subjective power; "to be subject to emotions and passions is always a disease of the soul"[10]), according to Kant. The two differ in that passion is an "inclination" (*Neigung*) that needs time to root itself, like resentment which turns into hatred, whereas emotion is a "precipitation" (*Übereilt*), an intensification leading to suspension of reflection. The philosopher compares passion to a slowly diffusing poison, while emotion is likened to a temporary state of intoxication. Both fall under pathology; someone gripped by emotion – whether exuberance or sadness – behaves like an "alienated" person, endangering their life. In conclusion, emotions are generally "pathological accidents": "Emotion taken by itself is always devoid of wisdom; it renders itself incapable of pursuing its own goals; it is therefore unwise to allow it to grow voluntarily"[11]. From the Kantian philosophy perspective, emotions/passions, regardless of duration or stability, fall into a pathological dimension, block reason, are dangerous, and even represent a form of alienation. From this point of view, the android, by suppressing emotions and ruling with reason, achieves the perfect condition of a balanced, liberated, fulfilled humanity – the opposite of alienation. I have deliberately pushed Kant's conclusion to note that we might have a model of fully realized humanity in the absence, or rather by excluding, the affective dimension or at least by greatly diminishing it. It should be said that the German philosopher does not think this distinction outside humanity but, invoking pathology, places emotion and passion in a deficient humanity.

The New Adam: The Android – The Oedipal Complex

Philip K. Dick's science fiction novel is also a detective story set in a post-apocalyptic society, after a nuclear war that destroyed all animal life forms except humans. Rick Deckard, portrayed in the film by the iconic actor Harrison Ford, is part of a special police unit with some autonomy, whose members seen as "bounty hunters" are tasked with identifying androids and "withdrawing" them from circulation, in other words, destroying them. Their non-human status, their simulacrum

nature – the attributes of a person are not recognized in them – and the fact that they have freed themselves from the control of the companies that own them as property make this intervention necessary. The bounty hunters are authorized and obliged to perform a standard test meant to validate or invalidate the human status of the subject, if that subject does not evade testing.

How can we distinguish a human from an android, a thinking machine, a simulacrum that meticulously mimics human appearances? The first to consider this possibility was Alan Turing, and the Turing test is the first of its kind that tries to distinguish between a human and an intelligent non-human entity, an artificial intelligence. The tests proposed by Philip K. Dick in his novel, such as the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test, do not appeal to psychology but rather to reactions based on empathy, recorded at the level of the ocular muscle and capillaries. The test invented by the novelist is based on recording infinitesimal retinal reactions caused by a series of questions that place the subject in a variety of socially uncomfortable and tense situations, many of them involving animals. The first gestures of empathy from a child are directed towards animals or towards their simulacra represented by toys, which childhood animism invests with sensations and emotions. Mimicking affects, simulating standardized reactions, rationalizing behaviors are detected by the apparatus monitoring pupil reactions. Empathy constitutes the cardinal trait that distinguishes the human from the non-human. It generates compassion, an affect that could block the capture and killing of prey in the animal world, which is subject to instinctual directives necessary for survival. The brief ethology lesson the novel reveals allows an analogy where the difference between human and animal, revealed at the level of empathy and not intelligence, is similar to that between man and android – without placing the latter in the realm of bestiality as with the Sphinx:

> Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout very phylum and order including the arachnida. For one thing, the emphatic faculty probably required an unimpaired group instinct; a solitary organism, such a spider's ability to survive. It would make him conscious of the desire to live on the part of the prey. Hence all predators, even highly developed mammals such as cats, would starve[12].

Another test mentioned in the novel, the "Boneli Arc-Reflex Test," is based on the reaction of the superior ganglia in the spinal column:

> The reflex-arc response taking place in the upper ganglia of the spinal column require several microseconds more in the humanoid robot than in a human nervous system. (…) We use an audio signal or a light-flash. The subject presses a button and the elapsed time is measured. We try it a number of times, of course. Elapsed time varies in both the andy and the human. But by the time ten reactions have been measured, we believe we had a reliable clue[13].

There is also an invasive test involving spinal puncture performed under difficult

conditions for the patient, whose analysis clearly reveals the synthetic or not nature of the subject. Likewise, the Boneli reflex-arc test has no relation to psychology. Like the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test, it targets the nervous system's behavior to stimuli. The Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test seems more complex as it introduces a series of stress factors, provoking emotions and empathic reactions. There is no other way to distinguish with certainty an android from a human being, and the testing relates to the legal aspect of precisely identifying the difference between human and non-human. As can be seen, intelligence is not a criterion dividing human from non-human, and I do not refer strictly to abstract intelligence but also to social intelligence, adaptive mechanisms, social reflexes.

Only outside the tests, in this volatile, subtle dimension of perception, does the difference become perceptible. The non-human subject reveals a certain "coldness", probably generated by a lack of empathy, sensitivity, and sociability. This perception does not involve intelligence but that space of proximity that two people share even temporarily, which activates both sensory and affective faculties. Fear is a human reaction, but once it dissipates, nothing remains in its place; calm indicates an absence.

> The girl shook off the request effortlessly, and he noticed that, perceived it without understanding it. Now that her initial fear diminished, something else had begun to emerge from her. Something more strange. And, he thought deplorable. A coldness. Like, he thought, a breath from the vacuum between inhabited worlds, in fact from nowhere: it was not what she did or said but what she did not do and say[14].

Sociability, the need for aggregation, the inherent gregariousness of the human being are absent from the social horizon of the android, even if they associate in a small group to face the danger of their elimination. The profound or even circumstantial attachment of those who face a threat together is missing in the novel, but Ridley Scott is tempted to highlight it in the film. The strength of the human being's instinct for self-preservation, love of life, and self-consciousness are also diminished in the case of androids. Nevertheless, the resemblance to the human being is disturbing and generates empathy, a restraining effect in the face of destroying a simulacrum that convincingly and unsettlingly possesses the attributes of a person. Rick confronts an android, Luba Luft, an opera singer, and is moved by her voice that conveys emotion, an emotion echoed by the bounty hunter. At the same time, the same voice that has lost its melody, evolving on another tone assigned to social interactions, makes "the other cold", the total absence of affect, perceptible.

The situation repeats in the film with Rachel, whom the director endows with all the affective content of a human being, going as far as nuances, intimacy, modesty, melancholy, what Michelle Maiese calls conscious desire, and above all, love. But the essential remains the test of putting human and android "sensitively present in the same space". This generic situation is considered by the philosopher Georg Simmel in *Sociology. Études sur les formes de la socialisation*[15], which opens the suggestion of

what, in *La Fabrique des émotions disjointes*, Didi-Huberman calls "the philosophy of alterity" (*philosophie de l'alterité*) doubled by a "history of affectivity" (*histoire de l'affectivité*). This presence in the same space occasions "a sensitive approach" (*approche sensible*) where sensory impressions shape the relationship with the other based on an affective value, generating instinctive or intentional knowledge.

Sensitive presence in the same space reaches a moment of intensity in the face-to-face gaze, where the gaze is both a social and sensory gesture, "a gesture of the eyes" (*un geste des yeux*). The sensory relationship becomes social or ethical insofar as it becomes a reciprocal gesture. And this gesture exposes a field of affectivity, which is the face; the face tells an inner behavior, becomes the medium of what "always presents itself under the particular nuance of a mood … [giving] the tone of all our knowledge"[16]. This putting-in-presence summons a series of "powers" that emotion conjugates: "A double power is unleashed: that of looking (and moving); that of being looked at (and being affected)"[17]. Thus the gaze becomes a "sensitive sharing open to the dimension of alterity, that is to say to the ethical life – and to the face – of the other"[18]. This face-to-face always reveals an absence: of affect, of a history, of the experience of humanity ultimately, because if androids have access to something, it is the experience of humanity with their own body, in social space, in society, in the relationship with those who resemble them, but from whom they are separated by something essential: "'Who are you?' Her tone held cold reserve – and that other cold, which he had encountered in so many androids. Always the same: great intellect, ability to accomplish much, but also this. He deplored it. And yet, without it, he could not track them down"[19].

However, there is a proximate gender, a zone of convergence with humanity beyond what simulacrum logic assumes, near a limit of the human. The closest an android comes is to a deficient, "defective" humanity of psychopathologies. Unlike Emmanuel Kant's perspective, deficiency does not lie in the presence of emotions and passions but in their absence, obliteration. Take schizophrenics or sociopaths, for example, in whose case empathy is greatly diminished if not entirely absent. The observation regarding this closeness is repeatedly thematized in the novel, being stated and "consciousized" as a diagnosis even by an android named Pris: "'Roy Batty is as crazy as I am,' Pris said. 'Our trip was between a mental hospital on the East Coast and here. We're all schizophrenic, with defective emotional lives – flattening of affect, it's called. And we have group hallucinations'"[20].

Certainly, psychopathology borrowed from mythology and literature, see sadism or masochism proposed by Kraft-Ebbing in his book *Psychopatia sexualis*, a terminology embodying cases considered emblematic. Entering the dimension of epistemes, monstrosity receives a label and is classified, losing its sacrality. Nonetheless, the android assumes not only a pariah condition but that of abnormality, emphasizing its status as a limit of the human and simultaneously a transgression of the human toward something else. The test targets humanity, the certification of humanity, what blocks the android, what is unacceptable for a bionic mind, an absurd history that is not quantifiable because absurdity is not explainable, rational, or assertive. Here is

a human characteristic: inconsistency and absurdity, the immense contradiction of the human being. What reveals the android is the inability to manage the absurd.

The android is not so much a copy as an artificial creation, a simulacrum or in Philip K. Dick's terms, "a replicant", a bioengineered humanoid, which does not possess a history, does not possess the history of its becoming: childhood, adolescence, youth, old age, as in the riddle of the Sphinx, with all that these stages imply in an evolution. There is one exception in the novel, Rachel, one of the androids who has all the stages of a fictitious becoming loaded into memory, a life story that serves to consolidate self-identity. Unlike Philip K. Dick, Ridley Scott accentuated the humanization of this android, almost obliterating the difference, loading false memory with a sensitivity that stems from the very situation of uncertainty, from the ambiguity of a creature without a past.

But what does a being without a past, without history look like? We know that serious illnesses can block access to the past, to certain parts of memory, or generate gradual forgetting up to complete obnubilation. Even so, affect compensates for the lack of content. For an android, there is no notion of becoming, change, the passing of time, aging. Life depends on battery duration; death represents a shutdown and is programmed from the start. All these androids have their Creator; maternity is not part of their experience, nor is family a familiar environment. An android has no childhood, adolescence, and does not age; it does not internalize this passage of time, the slow passing through ages with the transformations it causes. Philip K. Dick did not explore the consequences, the field of possibilities of such programming of pseudo-humanity. Something probably still stimulates reflection about the past: Rick notes the androids' interest in photographs, reflecting a need for a past, any past, this vast domain of all identity fictions, an absent part of their lacunar biographies. The act of collecting photographs as deposits of some past, of the Past, represents a reflex of humanity, here of its recovery.

What is the Human?

The final episode of Ridley Scott's film does not exist in the novel. Simply put, Rick Deckard "withdraw" the android Roy Batty after a shootout that is not spectacular. The novelist does not give much space to the confrontation itself, but rather to the moments leading up to it. Screenwriters Hampton Fancher and David Webb Peoples, with a contribution from Rutger Hauer, radically change the final moment. They also introduce a confrontation between Roy and his creator, Dr. Eldon Tyrell. Both are emblematic in clarifying the filiation of an android and the "humanity" it possesses. In the film, the meeting with Dr. Tyrell is mediated by his collaborator, Sebastian, who suffers from a rare disease, progeria, Werner syndrome, which causes accelerated aging. The director's and screenwriters' intention were to find a bridge of communication between the one programmed for a short life by molecular design, the android, and the one genetically programmed by pathology for a drastically reduced existence. The Oedipal conflict is clearly underlined in the film: the "prodigal son", the alpha android, kills his "father" in the order of creation, not procreation – the one who made him, who fabricated him, who brought him forth from his mind.

The final episode of the confrontation between the bounty hunter and Roy Batty is spectacular in Ridley Scott's film. The android physically dominates Rick Deckard, defeats him. On the contrary, witnessing Deckard's agony, hanging from the cornice of a baroque building's roof, he saves him before he falls into the void. The last words he addresses to him form almost a poem, which I reproduce here. Again, this text is not found in Philip K. Dick's novel but belongs to the two screenwriters: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die"[21].

Roy Batty's message condenses the answer to the question at the heart of both the novel and the film. How do we define the human? The one who offers an answer at the margin of the human is a non-human entity, but one that imitates humanity to the point of confusion without identifying with it: the android. Fear of death does not exist for Roy Batty, but it is present in other androids, and this "frees" him from the "slavery" of the human being. For the android, there is no posthumous existence, no transcendence, no "other life" awaiting him, just as he does not place himself in an ethical dimension. The ending contains several suggestions that this otherness of man-machine proposes for reflection. How does the android Roy Batty define himself as an individual?

First of all, through his life experience, however short it was. The importance of the gaze, which Georg Simmel emphasized in relation to the other, returns as the importance of a sensitive gaze addressed to the world. Roy is partly the gaze that has seen images inaccessible to humans, images of cosmic space hostile to life, but not to these artificial beings. This perception is not ordinary or photographic but sensitive, sensing not the ordinary but the extraordinary, not just beauty but the sublime as the grandeur of beauty becoming spectacle. To look does not mean to see, a photographic recording, but an expression of its transcendence, a vision. This sensitivity is aesthetic, recovering a dimension of humanity. The spectacle is worthy of the sublime in Wagner's work, of his astonishing, flamboyant stagings, and Wagner is evoked by the name of a famous overture, the Tannhäuser Overture, which here gives the name to a cosmic space area.

There is also something else here, the uniqueness of the experience that evokes the uniqueness of the individual, especially since this experience exceeds humans' possibility to witness the magnificent spectacle of the brilliance that cesium rays create in cosmic space. To this consciousness of uniqueness is added another, of the fragility of the memory-image, of the loss of a world that is the self's world, concentrated, metonymized in a few images. This memory-image is about to dissolve, to be lost like "tears in rain", a comparison that also senses the present moment. The man and the android stand on a rooftop over which rain pours. The comparison is not innocent; the tear is a predilect, emblematic expression of affect, of emotion. The tear here does not express physical pain, the android does not feel it, but sadness that defines humanity in a profound sense.

The last gesture seems unintelligible because it is profoundly human. The android saves precisely the one who came to "retire" him, to destroy him. He has no "rational" reason to do so. Also, there is no affect that would mobilize him in this

direction: compassion, empathy, pity etc. The final gesture of this android is contradictory, unpredictable, even absurd, and therefore human. It is perhaps an affirmation of a power to protect life in the other, "*la vie nue*", as Giorgio Agamben calls it, pure life, which feeds on itself, which wants to endure despite any resistance and limitation. Perhaps the need to communicate this impression to someone, the need to share experience, to impart it, all of these belong to the human.

Therefore, here are three forms of awareness: an aesthetic one, of beauty in its maximal expression of the sublime; one of the uniqueness, the unrepeatability of experience and implicitly of any existence; and one of memory with the irreversible loss of everything that experience of a life implies, its form of sensory-mediated living. All these forms of awareness can exist without empathy, without moral consciousness, but are they sufficient to homologate humanity, to build an individual? Do they constitute an incomplete repertoire, yet sufficient, of gestures of humanity? Could the human function only with these?

To think life, to feel its greatness and fragility, to have an overview of it – aren't these the essential data of the human? The individual is in this tension; the moment of ataraxia, of resignation, is proper to a release from objectives, stakes, desires, a retreat into pure contemplation. Detachment from the world, but also from the social self and its roles and somehow from the impositions of the biological self – doesn't this represent a moment of elevation of the human to the dignity of its creation? The here and now of plenary life: without residue, without past, without future – about to be realized in this project of otherness: the android.

To humanize androids and integrate them socially, to ensure them a convenient chameleonism, some were implanted with false memories, thus creating the illusion of a life once lived. There is a Proustian perfume in Ridley Scott's film, where affective memory and emotion become essential conditions of the human being. Melancholy, not of lost time but of the time that underlies the fiction of an alternative existence, also spreads in the continuation of Scott's film through Villeneuve and his post-apocalyptic world.

There is something else, a feeling proper to human beings, melancholy. The emotion impregnating the android Roy Batty's last speech is melancholy, whether it belongs to him or is only a derivative of his words, of his final poem. Melancholy is the emotion that declines all this lived experience under the sign of loss, of a consciousness of fragility and unrepeatability; it accompanies the apogee moment of self-awareness, of a becoming proper to the human through a series of unique experiences.

In Philip K. Dick's book, humans obsess over growing and owning a living animal. The nuclear catastrophe, war, destroyed almost entirely the environment and what is alive. Owning a living animal – a sheep, a goat, an owl – is more than a hobby or a matter of status; it is a form of human legitimation in a world of simulacra. Man was deprived of this entourage of manifest empathy, the presence of the companion animal that accompanied him throughout his ontogenesis. Androids do not feel the need to have an animal, a living being near them. Do they dream of mechanical sheep? Or simply: do they dream?

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Notes

1. Horia-Roman Patapievici, *Despre viață, destin & nostalgie*, Humanitas, București, 2022. All the translations from Romanian and French into English are mine.
2. Angelo Mitchievici, *Simbolism și decadentism în Arta 1900*, Editura Ideea Europeană, Iași, 2011.
3. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 126.
4. *Ibidem*, p. 121.
5. *Ibidem*, p. 6.
6. *Ibidem*.
7. Michelle Maiese, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition. New Directions in Philosophy and Cognitive Sciences*, Palgrave McMillan, New York, 2011, p. 52.
8. Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000.
9. Michelle Maiese, *op.cit.*, p. 52.
10. Emmanuel Kant apud. George Didi-Huberman, *Brouilards de peines et des désires. Faits d'affects 1*, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2023, Paris, p. 97.
11. George Didi-Huberman, *Brouilards de peines et des désires. Faits d'affects 1*, p. 98.
12. Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Orion Publishing Group, London, 2022, p. 24.
13. *Ibidem*, p. 95.
14. *Ibidem*, p. 53-54.
15. Georg Simmel, apud. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Fabrique des émotions disjointes. Faits d'affects 2*, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2024, Paris, p. 47.
16. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Fabrique des émotions disjointes. Faits d'affects 2*, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2024, Paris, p. 45.
17. *Ibidem*, p. 44.
18. *Ibidem*.
19. Philip K. Dick, *op.cit.*, p. 79.
20. *Ibidem*, p. 127.
21. The story of how this part of the script developed can be found here: Scott Myers, "'Blade Runner' dialogue analysis", online since December 3rd, 2009, https://gointothestory.blcklst.com/blade-runner-dialogue-analysis-ff0e306a7630 , accessed on 26.09.2025.