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Contemporary Cyberpunk in Visual Culture

Identity and Mind/Body Dualism

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Abstract

In this world of increasing integration with technology, what does it mean to be human and to have your own identity? This paper aims to examine representations of the body and mind related to identity in contemporary cyberpunk. Using three examples of contemporary cyberpunk, *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), *Blade Runner 2049* (2018), and *Altered Carbon* (2018), this paper focuses on identity in cyberpunk visual culture. The three entries are part of established cyberpunk franchises helped launch cyberpunk into the mainstream as a genre. The three works are important as they represent contemporary developments in cyberpunk and garnered mainstream attention in the West, though not necessarily due to critical acclaim. The paper uses previously established theory by Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway and expanding upon them into contemporary theory by Graham Murphy and Lars Schmeink, and Sherryl Vint. We make use of the terms posthumanism, transhumanism, dystopia, Cartesian mind/body dualism, embodiment, and disembodiment to analyse our works. These terms have been collected from a variety of sources including anthologies, books and compilations by established cyberpunk and science fiction theorists. A literary review compares and accounts for the terms and their use within the paper. The paper finds the same questions regarding identity and subjectivity in the three works as in older cyberpunk visual culture, but they differ in how they are answered. This paper compares the answers and provides a discussion regarding identity and mind/body duality in cyberpunk visual culture. Using the concepts of transhumanism and posthumanism we relate them to the different representations of the human body and its potential replacement. The circumstances of these transhuman and posthuman futures and the representation of the body closely relate to the previously mentioned terms of embodiment, disembodiment, and mind/body dualism. Additionally, we focus on the works' settings, as they are important for contextualising the circumstances of the bodies and identities presented within their respective universes. The paper discusses that

Contemporary Cyberpunk in Visual Culture: Identity and Mind/Body Dualism

contemporary cyberpunk visual culture, like its predecessors, reflect the worlds' social problems, such as automation of work labour or environmental problems, within the given decade of their release. Furthermore, the paper briefly explores European cyberpunk, which shares many similarities with Western and Japanese cyberpunk. The most significant difference stems from the idea that there is no hope that technology can improve human life. For all three works, this paper finds that identity originates in how one identifies with themselves, whether this is the body, the mind, or both. Unlike older cyberpunk works that focused on inhabiting virtual spaces, the paper finds that a recent trend returns the body as the focal point. Cyborgs, androids, and body modifications impact the ways we view and identify with our bodies. The paper concludes that cyberpunk remains a progressive genre, retaining visual and narrative elements of the genre, but a drastic change in the representation of the body and identity is occurring in contemporary cyberpunk. Likewise, trends of rebooting and adapting influential and classical works of cyberpunk are appearing, which allows for new angles of analysis in a changing genre that represents present circumstances.

<i>Introduction</i>	1
Posthumanism/Transhumanism	7
Dystopia/Utopia	14
Embodiment/Disembodiment	18
Body modification	27
Cyborg	32
Android	35
<i>Ghost in the Shell: A Sense of Self in the Shell</i>	38
<i>Do Androids Dream....?: Identity and self-sentience in Blade Runner 2049</i>	63
<i>Altered Carbon: Sleaving your identity</i>	79
<i>Contemporary Cyberpunk: Identity in Recent and Retrospective Cyberpunk and its</i> <i>Variants</i>	106
<i>Conclusion</i>	123
<i>Bibliography</i>	128

Introduction

Cyberpunk as a genre emerged in the early 1980s. In 1982 the feature film *Blade Runner* was released and became a cult film. In 1984 William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was released to critical acclaim. These two works kickstarted the cyberpunk-era of visual culture and literary works, respectively. Before cyberpunk was agreed upon as a genre, the authors had mainly been known as "The movement", the reason for why many of the first works of cyberpunk are called "Movement-era works" by scholars such as Graham Murphy, Sherryl Vint, and Lars Schmeink. Precursor works to cyberpunk were considered science fiction, with cyberpunk being categorised as a subgenre of sci-fi. For this paper we are interested in cyberpunk as a visual culture phenomenon, however, the literary traditions and works are an influence in visual culture and contributed to cyberpunk's rise into the mainstream.

Upon its release, *Blade Runner* did not receive critical praise, only years after its release (and after the release of *Neuromancer*) has it been praised as an influential work within the genre, visual culture, and socially. Cyberpunk is now a well-established genre within visual culture, with works being released in almost every format: graphic novels and manga such as *Transmetropolitan* (2009-2011) and *The Surrogates* (2006), and a variety of graphic novel adaptations of both *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) by Philip. K. Dick (A precursor work to cyberpunk); video games such as *System Shock* (1994), *System Shock 2* (1999), and the *Deus Ex*-series (2000, 2003, 2011, 2016); table top and pen-and-paper games such as *Cyberpunk* (1988) and *Cyberpunk 2020* (1990), feature films such as the aforementioned *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix* (1999), and more recently *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019); TV series and anime such as *Ghost in the Shell*-series (2002-2003, 2004-2006), and *Westworld* (2016), these are just a few examples among many other works.

As previously stated, our focus is on the visual culture aspect of cyberpunk, more specifically films and series produced in America. Again however, it must be mentioned that we acknowledge other cyberpunk works within visual culture and from other regions - such as Japan and Europe - and refer to them when applicable. Cyberpunk is also a genre that has been claimed “dead on arrival” by Claire Sponsler (as cited in Vint & Murphy, 2010, xi). Likewise, it has been described as able to “[...] go only so far before self-destructing under the weight of its own deconstructive activities” by Veronica Hollinger (as cited in Vint & Murphy, 2010, xi). Furthermore, Lewis Shiner and Bruce Sterling believed cyberpunk’s demise surfaced at nearly the same moment at it emerged, epitomised in Shiner’s New York Times editorial “Confessions of an Ex-Cyberpunk” and, later, Sterling’s retrospective “Cyberpunk in the Nineties.” (Murphy & Schmeink, 2018, xxi).

What binds these cyberpunk works together is a series of tropes and traits that are common between them, whether it is literary or visual culture. To set the stage for this paper, we will expand upon what these tropes and traits are, a few of these we will go into detail within the next section, as those terms serve as key points for our paper. In their book *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* (2018), Murphy and Schmeink posit that cyberpunk is an “[...] extrapolation of the developments of late capitalism and of postmodernity with its commodification of all aspects of life, especially reflected in the products of visual culture” (xxii). This can be applied to both the visual aesthetics and to key plot points in cyberpunk, the extrapolation of late capitalism and postmodernity appears in the way that most cyberpunk is set in a “distant” future (*Blade Runner* is set in the year 2019, a distant future in 1982) where almost every aspect of human life has become commercialised. A common aesthetic in cyberpunk is the neon-lit, advertisement-riddled cityscape caked in grime and filth accentuated by the greedy corporations responsible for these neon-lit advertisements.

This aspect we will delve into in more detail, as we explain how a dystopian setting is an invaluable trait of cyberpunk in visual culture. Likewise, Murphy and Schmeink (2018) bring into view another invaluable trait of cyberpunk, and another key term in this paper, the aspect of the “[...] shifting boundaries and changing makeup of the human body itself” (xxiv). The concept of the “human” in cyberpunk is a fleeting idea, often being replaced and overcome by cyborgs, androids, virtual bodies, godlike figures, or the macabre globally spanning neural network. These concepts are closely linked to transhumanism and posthumanism, terms which cyberpunk inarguably highlight and discuss, though in an almost silent manner. Most cyberpunk works centre on a change of the human body, for better or worse, but only some works directly reference a post- or transhuman discussion. Likewise, these are key terms in this paper and, as such, we will delve deeper into expanding them in the next section.

We chose to focus on the genre cyberpunk because we wanted to expand on our Bachelor project, which also centred around cyberpunk visual culture. We explored cyberpunk cinema from its inception through the two decades following as a discussion of its evolution. Throughout our research, we have noticed a pattern in contemporary cyberpunk visual culture research, which has mainly focused on older films, games, or novels and therefore we want to turn the attention towards newer films and TV shows. The present paper instead focuses on contemporary cyberpunk visual culture by analysing *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and *Altered Carbon* (2018), using contemporary theory. New theory has also tended to focus on one theme throughout their work, such as the importance of bodies or the posthumans. However, we have decided to combine the different themes and concepts from older theory and modernise them with help from contemporary theory, in order to create a coherent way of analysing cyberpunk visual culture and identity.

Like in our Bachelor, identity is the main theme of this paper as we want to explore how characters are portrayed contemporary cyberpunk visual culture in regard to identity and body representations: How does the converging technologies of a post- or transhuman future impact identity? How does embodiment and disembodiment relate to identity in a utopian/dystopian future? And is the body an important aspect in our understanding of our 'self' or is it obsolete? Regarding these questions, is cyberpunk as a genre still relevant for a Western audience or has its progression "died"?

In this paper, we will analyse and discuss the notion of identity in three cyberpunk visual culture works: *Ghost in the Shell*, *Blade Runner 2049* and *Altered Carbon*.

Chapter 1, "*Ghost in the Shell: A Sense of Self in the Shell*", explores the representation of posthumanism, transhumanism, embodiment, and subjectivity in the film *Ghost in the Shell*. The chapter provides arguments for how characters such as Killian and Kuze are portrayed through the terms mentioned above, and how those terms convey and enable them to have an identity. We use parts of Donna Haraway's cyborg theory and the expansions made by Murphy and Schmeink to define them. We use Steve Fuller's theory on transhumanism and Vint's theory on posthumanism to explore whether cyborgs like Killian and Kuze remain the same as other humans or if they transcend beyond humanity. Furthermore, Katherine Hayles' theory of embodiment explores the portrayal of each character's ability to understand who they are. Where Killian embraces a transhuman embodiment, Kuze situates himself as Kurzweil's Singularity of disembodiment.

Chapter 2, "*Do Androids Dream...?: Identity and self-sentience in Blade Runner 2049*", explores posthuman bodies in characters such as K, Joi and Deckard, who are portrayed as the next step in human evolution. Murphy and Schmeink also expand on the term Androids, which we use to define the replicants. *2049* reintroduces the body as an important medium

for human subjectivity as replicants are now able to give birth and live longer. Los Angeles in 2049 has become a “robot” populated world, where humans interact with the replicants they feared 30 years ago. It is also a world, where replicants have been given hope that they might be able to become more “human” because of Deckard’s and Rachel’s consummation, which spurs a rebel uprising for rights and identity.

Chapter 3, “*Altered Carbon: Sleeving your identity*”, explores a transhuman future where humanity views itself as transcended. We explore the notion of fear of the body to Cartesian dualism and then towards re-embodiment. The cultural context of cyberpunk’s emergence, the 1980s, includes the threat of human obsolescence in an increasingly automated and polarized world, where “gods” populate an increasingly globalisation of capitalism, and the gap between the rich and the poor increase at a rapid rate. *Altered Carbon* explores a kind of posthumanity in which the body has become an infinitely malleable accessory. On the surface this future appears a place of infinite variety – one can adopt any among a spectrum of genders and racial features.

Chapter 4, “Contemporary Cyberpunk: Identity in Recent and Retrospective Cyberpunk and its Variants”, discusses and compares *Ghost in the Shell, 2049* and *Altered Carbon* with each other in terms of themes and concepts introduced in the beginning of the paper. Hereafter, we discuss the three works in regard to the years they were released and the general history of cyberpunk by focusing on ideas and assumptions of the time regarding the future and what kind of social problems would be present at that time. Lastly, we discuss another type cyberpunk genre, namely, European cyberpunk. This is interesting because European cyberpunk differs from its American and Japanese counterparts by expanding its tropes and traits onto different environments and settings.

The paper’s conclusion argues for the importance of bodies, whether it is a physical or an artificial one. The type of body is not important, however, what is important is that human

subjectivity and identity comes in a variety of concepts such as embodiment and disembodiment, posthumanism and transhumanism, and mind/body dualism, regardless of whether they are cyborgs, androids, or something entirely different.

Posthumanism/Transhumanism

The distinction between transhumanism and posthumanism is not easily distinguishable. Both believe that the contemporary *Homo sapiens*-state of humanity is bound to be changed and made different - evolved, enhanced, and improved - by technology, particularly through computing technology. Transhumanism's primary goal is to move humanity beyond being "human" to being akin to "Gods". As Fuller says in his book *Humanity 2.0: What it Means to be Human Past, Present and Future* (2011):

[...] in Latin the shift was signified by the replacement of the proper name *pater omnipotens* ('almighty father') with the generic attribute *omnipotentia* ('omnipotence'). This stand alone concepts of power open the door for all of God's properties to be reconceptualised as dimensions for comparing the human and the divine, in terms of which one might speak of 'progress' from the former to the latter. A latter-day descendant of this profound shift in Western consciousness is the 'transhumanist' mentality (p. 84).

Implied in this mentality, is the importance of embodiment, so that we may have a way to express these godlike powers. Posthumanism, on the other hand, focuses on decentring humanity.

In her book *Bodies of Tomorrow* (2007), Vint says "I have two central points of contention regarding the blindness of some versions of posthumanism and the thinking about technology that informs them. First, too often such model demonstrate the heritage of Cartesian dualism and equate the self with only mind and ignore the relevance and specificity of embodiment" (p. 11). Likewise, Hayles, in her book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics Literature and Informatics* (1999) says of posthumanism that "[...] the

posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life” (p. 2) and “Because information had lost its body, this construction implied that embodiment is not essential to human being. Embodiment has been systematically downplayed or erased in the cybernetic construction of the posthuman [...]” (p. 4). Both Vint and Hayles are critical of the majority thinking within posthumanism. That is not to say, that Vint and Hayles are not posthuman theorists, they believe in the ideas of posthumanism, but they do not believe in the insignificance of the body. Both transhumanism and posthumanism can be incorporated into the larger, umbrella-term “humanism” which also believe in the advancement of humanity since its conception during the European Renaissance, with Soper stating “[...] In this sense, we must acknowledge a continuity of theme, however warped it may have become with the passage of time, between the Renaissance celebration of the freedom of humanity from any transcendental hierarchy or cosmic order, the Enlightenment faith in reason and its powers, and the “social engineering” advocated by our contemporary “scientific” humanists (14-15)” (as cited in Vint, 2007, p. 13).

According to Colin Milburn, in his chapter “Posthumanism” in the book *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (2014), examples of technological posthumanism in literature include Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* from 1818 and Bernard Wolfe’s *Limbo* from 1952, among others (Milburn, p. 524). Milburn (2014) further posits that there are three types of posthumanism; Other than technological posthumanism, biological and cultural posthumanism (p. 524) are the three ways in which humanity can evolve past our current form - hence the name “posthumanism”. To exemplify biological posthumanism, Milburn (2014) highlights H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* from 1895, Olaf Stapledon’s *Last and First Men* from 1930, among others, and to exemplify cultural posthumanism he highlights

William S. Burrough's *The Soft Machine* from 1961, Ian Watson's *The Embedding* from 1973, among others (p. 524). Milburn (2014) describes the biological posthumanism as "[...] focusing on the evolutionary future of *Homo sapiens* and the extent to which human physiology might dramatically alter over time, or even in symbiogenesis with other species" (p. 524); technological posthumanism is described as "[...] focusing on the synthetic, engineered successors of humanity or the idea of humans and machines linked ever more closely in the circuits of technoculture" (p. 524); while cultural posthumanism is described as "[...] discovering that "human nature" is a tenuous social construct open to modification and revision" (p. 524). Hayles, further expands upon a definition of posthumanism, highlighting four different assumptions associated with posthumanism:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines (p. 2-3).

In his chapter ““My Targeting System is a Little Messed Up”: The Cyborg Gaze in the RoboCop Media Franchise”, Christopher McGunnigle expands upon Hayles’ quote, saying “In this posthumanist state, virtuality therefore becomes a dominating medium for representing the self, although it should be clear that while “normally virtuality is associated with computer simulations that put the body into a feedback loop with a computer-generated image” (Hayles 14), it can also be represented by images of the body in any visual medium” (McGunnigle, 2018, p. 106).

Fuller (2011) contemplates transhumanism and accounts for the term “converging technologies” (or CT); “[...] the integration of cutting-edge research in nano-, bio-, info- and cogno-sciences for purposes of extending the power and control of human beings over their own bodies and their environments” (p. 103). According to Fuller (2011), there are “[...] at least six variants of CT, each of which may be associated with the sense in which it would have ‘the human’ projected” (p. 103); Fuller goes on to list these 6 variants of CT:

1. Humanity Transcended - “Julian Huxley’s original sense of ‘transhumanism’ [...] the return of natural selection to its metaphorical roots in artificial selection, such that humans become the engineers of evolution” (p. 103).
2. Humanity Enhanced - “[...] focus on the prospect of humans acquiring improved versions of their current powers without the more extreme implications of prolonging life indefinitely or upgrading us to a superior species. For example, the use of nanotechnology to eliminate fatty deposits from our arteries or clean polluted water” (p. 103).
3. Humanity Prolonged - “This CT goes beyond enhancing normal life capacities and towards suspending, if not reversing, age-related disintegration and perhaps even death itself [...] it is specifically focussed on extending indefinitely human existence in its prime and hence explicitly raises questions about intergenerational fairness, if

not the very need for intergenerational replacement, or indeed, sexual reproduction itself” (p. 104).

4. Humanity Translated - “[...] a high-tech realisation of theological ideas concerning resurrection, whereby an individual’s distinctive features are terminated in one physical form and reproduced in another [...] uploading of mental life from carbon- to silicon-based vehicles, typically with the implication that the relevant human qualities will be at once prolonged, enhanced and transcended” (p. 104).
5. Humanity Incorporated - “[...] artificial persons and corporate personalities [...] human and non-human elements are not only combined but allowed to co-develop into novel unities. All of these proposals share the idea that humanity’s distinctiveness comes from our superior organic capacity to make the environment part of ourselves” (p. 104).
6. Humanity Tested - “Reflecting the likely, perhaps disastrous, failure of many of the CT experiments involved in realising any of the previous five projections of humanity, the focus here is on promoting a culture tolerant of risk-taking, say, by a generous social insurance scheme, a supportive environment for reporting and coping with unanticipated outcomes and a strong sense of an overarching long-term collective project” (pp. 104-105).

Fuller (2011) mentions that these six projected human futures are linked to what is known as “humanism”, a movement that dates back to the European Renaissance, which we have mentioned before (p. 105). In relation to the six futures, as well as the concept of “humanism”, Fuller (2011) claims that there is “[...] more to humanity than simply the normal conduct of human beings” (p. 105), and that “[...] only the features of our conduct that distinguish us from other animals are worthy of a ‘humanist’ project” (p. 105). In addition,

Fuller (2011) provides us with some examples of how far “[...] we have already gone down the path to such ‘transhumanist’ futures” (p. 105):

1. “The channelling of both work and play through digital media, such that time spent in cyberspace increasingly supplements, if not replaces, time spent outside it” (p. 105).
2. “Computer literacy is now introduced at the primary school level, if not earlier. The symbiotic relationship of the last two generations of humans with computers has led to a greater tolerance and even transferred affection to androids and cyborgs as ‘second selves’” (p. 105).
3. “The extension of the law’s jurisdiction into ‘second life’ and other ‘virtual realities’, such that an English court has settled a divorce case on the basis of a spouse’s adulterous avatar” (p. 106).
4. “The increasing use, tolerance and demand for brain boosting drugs, silicon chip implants and gene therapy as psychotropic supplements” (p. 106).
5. “The ease with which we resort to ‘pre-emptive’ interventions, be it to prevent wars, crime, unwanted lives or even aversion to innovation [...] it is very much in the utopian spirit of presuming that we do more than simply treat symptoms and effects - we can manipulate purported causes” (p. 106).
6. “The ease with which we trade off privacy and security for access, as in the emerging phenomenon of ‘cloud computing’, which promises to make all information available through overlapping providers - that is, multiply accessible but also traceable [...] it implies a principled acceptance of the ‘humanity incorporated’ option above” (p. 106).

Vint (2007) mentions Kate Soper saying she “[...] points out that humanism, like liberalism, is founded upon a relationship of domination of the rest of the natural world, arguing that ‘a profound confidence in our powers to come to know and thereby control our

environment and destiny lies at the heart of every humanism” (pp. 12-13), echoing some of the arguments made by Fuller - using technology and knowledge to advance, enhance, incorporate, and transcend the human to next “evolutionary” step.

In cyberpunk, post- and transhumanism is an oft featured part of the narrative - whether through cyborg or android representation (We will return to these two representations more in-depth later) or through modifications to the human body through technology. The film *Transcendence* (2014) features posthumanism in the sense of Ray Kurzweil’s concept of “Singularity” (Featured in his book *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005)). Will Caster (Johnny Depp) and his wife Evelyn (Rebecca Hill) are two prominent scientists working to create AI, in the form of a sentient supercomputer, that will eventually surpass the capabilities of the entire human scientific community combined. Caster calls this “Transcendence”, when human intelligence functions purely through a network of supercomputers (While in Kurzweil’s concept, humanity will upload its conscience to a global supercomputer network and entirely leave human biology behind). Throughout the film, doubt is cast by the characters as to whether the AI is actually Caster’s conscience, or the old AI adopting Caster’s voice and physical appearance. At the end of the film, it is strongly hinted that the AI was Caster’s actual conscience all along, as it cleans pollution from the ground and air, revivifies forests and eradicate diseases to prolong human mortality. To a certain extent, the film *Ready Player One* (2018) includes Fuller’s concept of Humanity Prolonged, as the creator of the in-game virtual reality universe OASIS has seemingly uploaded a virtual, AI-powered representation of himself (Both him as a younger child and him as we see him in sequences where he builds and develops OASIS for the first time). These representations work to guide and congratulate the players participating in the easter egg hunt to become the next heir of OASIS, and the recipient of his entire fortune.

Dystopia/Utopia

According to Philip E. Wegner (2014) in his chapter “Utopianism” in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, utopianism is “not simply one among a range of possible themes or motifs in modern science fiction [...] Rather, it is fundamental to this vital modern genre” (p. 573). As such, Wegner (2014) positions modern science fiction as distinctly different from its precursor forms, such as “[...] the fable, travel narrative, Gothic, and *voyage extraordinaire*” (p. 573) as well as “[...] contemporary practices of futurology and prognostication” (p. 573), due to its inherent inclusion of utopianism. However, according to Wegner (2014), publications such as *The Iron Heel* (1908) by Jack London gave rise to one of the most substantial subgenres of modern science fiction in the late nineteenth century, the dystopia (p. 574).

Tom Moylan, in his chapter “Global Economy, Local Texts Utopian/Dystopian Tension in William Gibson’s Cyberpunk Trilogy” in the book *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (2010), expands on the origins of dystopianism, stating that both former president of the United States George Bush and Ronald Reagan made speeches invoking utopian figures: Bush “[...] called for a new world order, an order of peace and prosperity that would remove the darkness of the Cold War” (Moylan, 2010, p. 81) in the 1990s, and Reagan invoked the figure of the “[...] “city on the hill” that recalled the dream of a New World that would inspire everyone with its harmony and enterprise” (Moylan, 2010, p. 81) in the 1980s. However, in the time between - and indeed also after - these speeches, “[...] neither humanity nor the environment has benefited from these utopian gestures [...] the world historical situation has become ever more dystopian” (Moylan, 2010, p. 81). Moylan writes that it was “[...] in this impoverished context in the mid-1980s that the work of William Gibson and other writers who eventually branded their work “cyberpunk”” (2010, p. 82), and that many readers and critics “[...] welcomed the cyberpunk phenomenon - and its associated

movements in film (e.g., *Blade Runner*), music (e.g., Sonic Youth), and performance art (e.g., Survival Research Laboratories)” (Moylan, 2010, p. 82).

Moylan offers a definition of what dystopian writing presents their readers, he states it presents a “[...] “bad place,” a place organized according to less perfect, more destructive social and economic principles than those found in the author’s community” (2010, p. 85), however, he is also quick to note that dystopia is not *anti*-utopia - where anti-utopia goes directly against utopian values, dystopia instead “[...] preserve the memory of the better place even as they delineate the contours of an oppressive society” (Moylan, 2010, p. 85). This can be seen in cyberpunk works such as *Blade Runner* (1982) where the fictional “futuristic” Los Angeles of 2019 has large, expansive office complexes housing massive corporations, such as the Tyrell Corporation, while down in the streets the people are culturally diverse, with advertisements and shop vendors frequently speaking Chinese rather than English, and a general sense of uncleanliness and grime take the streets. In his chapter “Playing for Virtually Real: Cyberpunk Aesthetics and Ethics in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*” in *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* Steven Jones highlights that this is not an uncommon theme in cyberpunk, explaining “the economic structure of cyberpunk is determined by the *zaibatsus*, the multinational corporation” (Jones, 2018, p. 168). Joyce expands on this explanation by stating “The inequality generated by these corporations is reflected in the urban architecture which generally features a wealthy corporate elite atop secure skyscrapers while an impoverished multicultural *mélange* weaves through the overpopulated and grimy streets below” (Jones, 2018, p. 168).

The utopian-dystopian contrast in *Blade Runner* (1982) comes from the fact that while the replicants are working off-world to the financial benefit and growth of the corporations, the cities have become overpopulated and impoverished as the citizens are seemingly not

benefitting from the labour of the replicants. In some cyberpunk works, set in a dystopian future, a common theme is for the protagonist to revert the oppression and social/economic conditions by the corporations. In works such as *Gamer* (2009), *Total Recall* (2012), and *Surrogates* (2009) the protagonist rebels against an oppressive corporation/government that exploit the citizens for financial benefit. At the films' conclusion, the protagonists have defeated the corporate/government oppression and opened the eyes of the common citizens to how the world should function. While not showing the societal prosperity promised by the change, the conclusions usually allude to the fact that the world is better off without the oppressive corporate/governmental influence of capitalism and exploitative nature. Jones, however, highlights that "[...] it is unclear if cyberpunk is genuinely critical of the capitalism it portrays" (Jones, 2018, p. 168), and further asks the question "What are we to make of a criticism of capitalism that can only be presented to us through the intercession of the global media industry?" (Jones, 2018, p. 168). Kevin McCarron provides a potential answer, explaining "[...] cyberpunk narratives function as satire--their authors are more than half in love, gazing with rapt fascination at what they hate" (as cited in Jones, 2018, p. 168).

Building upon Lawrence Grossberg's term "cultural formation", cyberpunk is not so much a genre, which is organized around "the existence of necessary formal elements" [but] a cultural formation [which is] "a historical articulation of textual practices with 'a variety of other cultural, social, economic, historical and political practices' (xvi)" (Murphy, 2018, p. 36). According to Murphy in his chapter "Cyberpunk Urbanism and Subnatural Bugs in BOOM! Studios' *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*" in *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* as a cultural formation, "we live in a world that is increasingly cyberpunk, increasingly Dick, in its intersections of global capitalism, postmodernity, posthumanism, advanced robotics, the eversion of simulation upon materiality, and overall techno-cultural saturation" (Murphy, 2018, p. 36). We live in a cyberpunk now that is a "cultural moment characterized not by the

replacement of the material with its simulation but rather one in which the material and the simulated are intertwined like a Möbius strip: they each have distinct identities, but we never inhabit a moment that is purely one or the other” (Vint, 2010, p. 229).

Embodiment/Disembodiment

Embodiment is a term often referred to as the values and ideas that one has about their own subjectivity and own self. The term, however, has been discussed throughout history by many different theorists and it is no exception within the cyberpunk genre. Here, the two foremost theories posthumanism and transhumanism each have their own idea of what embodiment means. For cyberpunk, embodiment deals with the question of whether mind and body can be separated from each other. Among posthuman and transhuman theorists, confusion exists about whether they believe that mind and body can be separated.

Hayles (1999) argues that there is a need to reconfigure the embodiment concept to re-embodiment. What this means is that the dualistic view of embodiment and disembodiment is outdated, and the separation of mind and body is relative to a set of criteria, for example technology and the discourse of being human. In her earlier work “Boundary Disputes: Homeostasis, Reflexivity, and the Foundation of Cybernetics” (1994), Hayles believed that the body was merely a vessel and that intelligence and information (which she defines “mind”) works on separate levels. However, today Hayles (1999) has adopted a different posthuman view as she claims that the mind and body cannot be separated any longer because they convey a liberal thinking of the body and mind as being one and the same. The ideas of disembodiment are seen in films such as *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), *Total Recall*, and *Transcendence* (2014) where they all have in common that their consciousness is uploaded into a computer. Although Hayles (1999) stresses the need to interpret body and embodiment as recursive processes that are in a constant state of becoming, she does seem to reconstruct rather than bury the dualist divide. For Hayles (1999), the body is an abstract concept that is constantly culturally constructed and generalised, though disembodiment still serves as a dangerous fantasy.

However, according to Pawel Frelik, in his chapter “Woken Carbon: The Return of the Human in Richard K. Morgan’s Takeshi Kovacs Trilogy” in *Beyond Cyberpunk*, the general idea of embodiment in the cyberpunk era (1980s and 1990s) is that mind and body can be separated from each other because the characters often try to “escape” embodiment, thus turning the perspective towards disembodiment (Frelik, 2010, p. 184). Instead of “escaping” the embodiment, films such as *The Terminator* (1984), *The Matrix* (1999), and *Gamer* (2009) does not necessarily celebrate the body but they stress the importance of the body by saying that if the body dies, so does the mind. According to Ryan J. Cox early in this era “[...] transhumanism’s celebration of disembodiment [...]” was contrary, at the time, to posthumanism’s embodiment (as cited in Bukatman, 2018, xviii).

In the 1980s Haraway influenced the notion of embodiment and disembodiment in her essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). Karen Cadora says Haraway “[...] urged feminists to rethink their characterization of technology as masculine and instead explore what the myth/metaphor of the cyborg might enable for liberatory politics” (as cited in Murphy & Vint, 2010, xvii). Additionally, Cadora notes that “For Haraway, the cyborg was differently embodied, one who resists “seductions to organic wholeness” (150), and “Similarly [...] in feminist cyberpunk a use of the cyberpunk tropes of disembodiment, split subjectivity, and human fusion with machines as an opportunity to escape the ideals of a gender ideology that biology is destiny” (as cited in Murphy & Vint, 2010, xvii). For feminist cyberpunk, and feminism itself, it often tells a story about minorities and their struggle for equal rights and respect. Films such as *The Animatrix* (2003) and *I, Robot* (2004) similarly tell a story about minorities, in this case robots, who rise up and fight back for same rights as their human counterparts. According to Mark Bould in his chapter “Why Neo Flies, and Why He Shouldn’t: The Critique of Cyberpunk in Gwyneth Jones’s Escape Plans and M. John

Harrison's Signs of Life" in *Beyond Cyberpunk*, classic cyberpunk literature dealt with "[...] cyberpunk's dualism: digital disembodiment versus the meat" (Bould, 2010, p. 117).

As mentioned earlier, the cyberpunk genre was often dominated by men, especially in Western literature and film, and arguable still is. According to Cadora (2010), in her chapter "Feminist Cyberpunk" in *Beyond Cyberpunk*, male characters have an unfair advantage over female characters. Cadora believes that female androids and cyborgs, often, do not have the same options of disembodiment as their male counterparts; "For women, the realities of the flesh are all too present in the imperfect world of cyberpunk. Because of this, embodiedness is a central issue in feminist cyberpunk in a way that it is not in masculinist cyberpunk" (Cadora, p. 165). Not only can female characters not separate body from mind in "real" life but Cadora argues that, even in virtual reality, female characters are not able to disembody; "It is not surprising, then, that almost all feminist cyberpunk depicts virtual reality as a space that must be navigated with a body of some sort" (Cadora, 2010, p. 165).

Embodiment and disembodiment are both widely analysed in the academic realm, but a third term seems to appear in more recent cyberpunk literature and film; the notion of re-embodiment. Veronica Hollinger, in her chapter "Retrofitting Frankenstein" in *Beyond Cyberpunk*, argues that "In the case of the contemporary technosubject, and according to the logic of the supplement, the technology through which we extend ourselves into the world is never only prosthetic; it is also the process through which we take an "other" into ourselves and become, in the process, other than what we were" (Hollinger, 2010, p. 200). Re-embodiment is about the return of the body, where the "other" (body) becomes part of us again as opposed to defining one's body as foreign. As noted earlier, Hayles is a big advocate for re-embodiment and Hollinger argues "[...] the body is exactly the supplement that constitutes the (psychic) identity that it completes. The dilemma for the posthuman

technobody, however, is what we might think of as its over- determined supplementarity” (Hollinger, 2010, p. 201).

Turning the attention briefly back to the discussion of embodiment from a posthuman and transhuman viewpoint. According to Murphy and Schmeink virtual realities allow for the search and curiosity of what it means to be human. They allow the creation of new realities for the mind and of the mind to explore in an attempt to, as Frelik argued, “escape” from embodiment or “meat space” as Murphy and Schmeink define it. However, this escape manifests in a transhumanist-utopian ideal of embodiment (Murphy & Schmeink, 2018). For posthuman theorists like Hayles and arguably Haraway, embodiment is about re-embodiment allowing characters to attempt the escape of the meat space but ultimately submitting to the body as a whole rather than an obsolete object. Hayles (1999) argues that because technology and virtual worlds are so widely available today, it is “not that the body has disappeared but that a certain kind of subjectivity has emerged” (p. 193). Films such as *Surrogates* (2009) by Jonathan Mostow are argued to be about re-embodiment rather than disembodiment. Rather than living in a virtual reality, surrogates walk the everyday, physical world with cybernetically enhanced bodies. Timothy Wilcox claims in his chapter “Embodying Failures of the Imagination: Defending the Posthuman in *The Surrogates*” in *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture*, that the graphic novel *The Surrogates* (2006), which *Surrogates* (2009) is based on “advocates the need for openness to the personal, everyday ways in which we encounter ourselves and others as posthumans through a materiality that is always already in flux thanks to ever-shifting technologies” (Wilcox, 2018, p. 22). Vint (2007) can also join the forces of embodiment as she argues for a “[...] return to a notion of embodied subjectivity [...]” (p. 8). Transhumanist theorists like Ryan J. Cox in his chapter “Kusanagi’s Body: Dualism and the Performance of Identity in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Stand Alone Complex*” in *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture*, states that a utopian ideal is about the disembodiment of mind and body. John

Perry Barlow claims that a world “[...] one free of the problems associated with embodiment and the world of the flesh because the virtual space allows the transcendence of flesh.

Cyberspace was therefore going to be a space of pure mind. As Barlow puts it, in cyberspace “identities have no bodies” (as cited in Cox, 2018, p. 128). Cox advocates for a return of disembodiment as well as criticising the contemporary ideal of re-embodiment:

Identities without bodies were figured throughout early hacker ideology as a move towards freedom. The body was seen as restrictive, limiting—it ages and decays, it fails and carries with it always the specter of death. Beyond its physical limitations are also the restrictions imposed upon physical bodies by society and its prejudices. A techno-utopian world where selves are untethered from bodies, where bodies are transformed into pure information, has been naively envisioned as somehow creating a freer, more egalitarian world: “The great dream and promise of information,” N. Katherine Hayles writes, “is that it can be free from the material constraints that govern the mortal world” (*How We Became Posthuman*, 13), although Hayles is quite clear in her studies of posthumanism that disembodiment remains a dangerous fantasy. Science fiction has been particularly effective in thinking through the broader implications of the fantasy of disembodiment that was enthusiastically promoted in the final decades of the 20th century, a fantasy that was often, if unfairly, attributed to cyberpunk (2018, p. 128).

Cox suggests that both the film *Hackers* (1995) and the novel *Snow Crash* (1992) make it difficult and almost impossible to escape the body (2018, p. 129). Arguably, films such as *The Matrix* (1999) convey the same idea by having body and mind in synced unity; if one dies in the Matrix the other dies in the “real world” and vice versa. Cox’s argument for why

this may be, functions as a criticism of Scott Bukatman's term "Terminal Identity", suggests that though the body may be appropriated into the cybernetic world of the posthuman, "the experience of the body . . . operates to center the subject, which is why the body must serve as the locus for any interface with terminal reality" (2018, p. 129). However, Cox believes that

[...] as technology infiltrates and appropriates the body, the body itself becomes "indeterminate . . . dissolved: malleable as data and more ephemeral than its own stored image" (Bukatman 245). By this logic, as the body becomes increasingly malleable it threatens to lose its ability to provide a stable and coherent center for the self. Embodiment stabilizes and historicizes the self, and along with the mind produces the subject. This unmooring of the self from the stabilizing forces of the body, therefore, renders the body as mere supplement, potentially disrupting the continuity of the self and troubling the coherence of the subject (2018, p. 129).

Cox argues that embodiment is

When the body is altered, mutated, abridged, or abandoned it is not a liberating act where the subject is freed from disciplining social forces and the limitations of the flesh, but rather a potential existential crisis tied to the loss of the flesh because the body is inscribed with meaning and the body always already produces meaning. The body has historically served as the substrate of the human subject and, as Hayles argues, the substrate matters (Posthuman 28–9) (2018, p. 129).

As he advocates for the return of the disembodiment he suggests that “The cyborg and the posthuman, however, represent a fundamental shift in the substrate of the human subject that requires a similar shift in understanding how subjectivity may be constructed amidst posthumanism’s changes to organic embodiment” (Cox, 2018, p. 129).

Ultimately, we argue that there is no right or wrong way of looking at embodiment and suggest posthuman and transhuman theorists have difficulties separating their own terms from each other. However, Vint (2007) coincides with our assumption that there are split views of embodiment but also confusion between the two terms. She argues that “There is a tendency in some postmodern theory to speak of the body as an obsolete relic, no longer necessary in a world of virtual communication and technological augmentation” (Vint, 2007, p. 8). The emphasis on “some” suggests that maybe it is okay to be sceptical about the term embodiment and as Vint (2007) says herself: “It is important to stress that in making this critique of liberal humanism, I am not ignoring or denying the many benefits that can be associated with humanism and liberalism, both in their moments of origin and as they have been taken up and modified by subsequent thinkers” (p. 13). However, theorists like Hayles have a more clearly defined view of posthumanism and embodiment.

A term closely related to disembodiment and a term that shares many of the same ideas, comes from René Descartes, a French philosopher. He coined the term Cartesian dualism. He argued that human beings consist of mind (cognition, conscious) and body. The term has since been roaming around the academic realm and is often used in works of science fiction and cyberpunk. As we have established, cyberpunk literature and film deal with questions about the characters’ ability to act human or show human characteristics such as anger, happiness, or sorrow. Whether they succeed or not is not the issue, but rather how they do it, and this is where Cartesian dualism appears. Like embodiment, Cartesian dualism looks at how the mind and body can be separated without compromising the things that makes us

human. According to Vint (2007), what makes us human is to attain a sense of self and we do this for two reasons; “First, we are inclined to identify ourselves with ‘voice’ or ‘self’ inside our heads, abstract essences that might be called souls in a religious context, but which persist also in non-religious concepts of self” (p. 6). This is what Vint (2007) defines as Cartesian dualism, where “a view of self that associates identity with the abstract realm alone” (p. 6). The second reason is that our understanding and concept of self as “[...] immutable and self-consistent [...]” even though there might be changes to our bodies (p. 6).

Jacques Lacan suggests that in order to acquire an identity the ego is created, through what we identify with and what we desire. Our narrative (life) which is formed by our choices permits that our self can shift depending on what we choose to identify with (as cited in Vint, 2007, p. 6). Lacan believes that our ability to love comes with a crisis point in our story, where we have to retain a concept of self as “[...] essential, unique, self-consistent, and autonomous, one needs to believe in the ‘I’ that does the choosing, that our choices of whom to fall in love with reflect some entity that precedes the moment of choosing” (as cited in Vint, 2007, p. 6).

Cartesian dualism is closely related to disembodiment in regard to thinking about the body as obsolete, however Vint (2007) suggests that if our self is solely associated with the mind, then things like body modifications becomes as obsolete as the body itself, and hence our human identity. Depictions of someone who tried to make embodiment obsolete through uploading human conscious into a computer is Hans Moravec, in the film *Transcendence* (2014), when scientist Dr. Will Caster is poisoned and in order to save him, his consciousness is uploaded into a program. Separating one’s mind from the body and retaining a sense of self and identity, this Vint (2007) defines as liberal humanist thinking, which advocates autonomy. This thinking of liberal humanism often comes up in cyberpunk, liberal humanism is about the individual stories and individual persons. According to C.B. Macpherson the

liberal person is “defined by propriety in his own person, and a definition of freedom as freedom from dependence upon others, freedom to benefit from the labour of one’s own body, and to own anything in nature that is shaped and changed by this labour” (as cited in Vint, 2007, p. 12). This “free” person, this freedom to do anything you want, and freedom to look like anything you want, exists because society does not change you, you change regardless of society.

Films such as *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019), and to a certain extent *Ready Player One* (2018), depict this idea of the liberal humanist person, where everyday people, rich or poor, have the option of modifying themselves to look exactly the way they want to. Macpherson points out that a model like this, one that positions the individual as “[...] isolated in his self-ownership and as owing nothing to society for his person and his capacities [...]”, creates a society “[...] between those who can own themselves and buy the labour of others and those who, because they lack other commodities through which to accumulate wealth, are forced to alienate a part of themselves through selling their labour [...]” (as cited in Vint, 2007, p. 12). Cartesian dualism thus persists as a utopian idea of disembodiment, where the liberal person can be “free” and “autonomous”.

Body modification

Body modification or enhancements are not a new concept today but, in the past, it was only a distant fantasy that could be read or seen in science fiction literature and films. However, body modification differs from enhancements by referring to everything that can be attached and drawn upon a body, which may show one's culture, social status or simply make you look different from others. Enhancements are modifications that enhance or improve a limb or other part of one's body or one's overall well-being. Thus, enhancements can improve one both physically and mentally, whereas modifications refer to one's state of being.

According to Ross Farnell's chapter *Body Modification* in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (2014), it was not until the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that body modifications such as tattooing, piercing, and cosmetic surgery became more broadly common. Farnell, like many other Western literary scholars focus on North American culture and thus, his idea of body modification comes from a North American perspective.

Therefore, these claims are to be taken with a grain of salt, as many non-North American cultures have used these types of modifications for centuries. Farnell also acknowledges that the science fiction genre focuses on modern body modifications and thus the main points will focus on these (Farnell, 2014).

According to Farnell body modification is a way of expressing political statements, cultural belief, ownership, etc. and "those that embrace body modifications are now increasingly implicated in the frenetic pace and reciprocity of the feedback loop that connects margins to mainstream" (Farnell, 2014, pp. 408-409). Body modifications are such an integral part of society today that the "[...] the boundary between margins and mainstream is breached [...]" (Farnell, 2014, p. 409). This is visible in films such as *Total Recall*, *Ready Player One* (2018), and *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019) which depicts a society that culturally separate themselves from others through body modifications. Body modifications are not

only about changing one's outer appearance and according to Mike Featherstone the body offers "the potential for further inner body cyborg technological developments" (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 409). Featherstone further states that it creates a common theme in the science fiction genre and especially in the cyberpunk genre, to "tak[e] control over and mak[e] a gesture against the body natural" (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 409). Meaning that there is a denaturalisation of the body and an estrangement of identity because our concept of the body as a machine to modify, repair, and improve can be problematic to self-identity.

A central theme in the discourse of body modifications, as in the cyberpunk genre, is concerned with representation of otherness by altering of the body through prosthetics, nanotechnology, and genetic engineering. However, Christian Klesse argues that this altering of the body may enforce and reproduce "all the inherently repressive gendered stereotypes on [sic] racialized people and their sexuality" (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 410). Farnell argues that the genre provides the possibilities and limitations of the modification of the body, whether it is in the present and future; real and imagined (Farnell, 2014). One film that centres around this issue of racialised stereotypes is the short film *File Under Miscellaneous* (2010) that tells the story of an indigenous man who assimilates into the ruling culture by surgically modifying his body and skin colour to look like the rest of society.

Farnell turns to Mary Douglas who identifies two ways of looking at the body from a cultural perspective: The "autoplastic," which seeks to achieve a culture's goal through manipulations of the body, and the "alloplastic," which achieves its ends by "operating directly on the external environment" in which in the body exists (116)" (as cited in Farnell, 2014, pp. 410-411). Farnell distinguishes these two terms: Autoplastic, modifying the body so it can survive and adapt with alien environments; alloplastic, terraforming planets to make them more suitable for existing environment (Farnell, 2014). Obviously, these arguments are not to be taken literally and thus they are metaphors for the human body. Farnell believes that

the modifying body becomes over commodified by the corporations and factions that “control their production” (Farnell, 2014, p. 411). In doing so, Farnell argues, limbs and other body parts are “repossessed”, and children are merely becoming “investments”, thus, the modifying body can both be viewed as valuable and obsolete (Farnell, 2014).

Bruce Sterling comments on this concept of body modification in his essay “Cyberpunk in the Nineties”, where he claims that we have already become these modified posthuman monsters that walk the streets (as cited in Farnell, 2014). Farnell argues though that Sterling’s cynical point does not hold stick as “[...] the act of modification itself becomes potentially mundane as it is appropriated and commodified [...]” (Farnell, 2014, p. 412). The more technological advanced we become the more modified our bodies become and thereby, it becomes the norm of society and the “monsters” disappear. The idea of advances in technologies has permitted the idea of the human body to a non-existent state by the end of the twenty-first century (Vint, 2007). These modifying changes to the body are, according to Vint (2007), one of the few places in society where “[...] the post-human may be literally made”, however it is only for those “[...] privileged to think of their (white, male, straight, non-working-class) bodies as the norm” (p. 8). For all of those who lack access to these technologies and those who are racially, sexually, homophobic, and other body-based discriminated against may be condemned “unworthy” (Vint, 2007). Vint (2007) argues that body modification allow us to “[...] reshape bodies and thereby subjects and the social world we make”, however she believes it is important to understand the discourses about the body and subjectivity if we want to see it as a positive advancement, rather than a continuation of discriminating discourse regarding body modification (p. 19).

Cyberpunk, like many other genres, reflects contemporary and present social culture and status, and the subculture of body modification within cyberpunk is no exception. Victoria Pitts argues that the idea of body modification is based on a “trope of postmodern liberalism”

(as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 413), the idea of being whoever you want, and look however you want. Lisiunia Romanienko continues with claims that “symbols are used to expedite the process of self-actualization, and are crucial in the exchange of meaning in self-construction (2)” (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 413). According to Stina Attebery and Josh Pearson in their chapter ““Today’s Cyborg is Stylish”: The Humanity Cost of Posthuman Fashion in *Cyberpunk 2020*” in *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* some use body modification as fashion statements, but there are opposing views of this being a good or bad thing. Transhumanists “uncritically celebrate technological fashion as a purely liberating form of body modification” (Attebery & Pearson, 2018, p. 55). However, for posthuman theorists it serves as “fantasies of power or disembodiment” (Attebery & Pearson, 2018, p. 55). Understood as, one can either be modified in a way that gives them “powers”, like enhanced sight, or that body modifications become obsolete because the body itself is obsolete. Culture pressure does not allow fashionable modification of one’s body to be a “absolute statement of morphological freedom, but an expression of the precarity of identity and sociality within the lively circuits of the hypermodern city” (Attebery & Pearson, 2018, p. 59).

However, Farnell does not hold such a positive view as the “[...] positioning of the body as an undifferentiated site of individuation and liberation is ultimately problematic” (2014, p. 413). Farnell believes that the problem lies with replacements of the human body as they become insignificant. Pat Cardigan’s *Synners* (1991) replaces “meat suits” with cybernetic bodies, which Farnell calls problematic because “it counters a vision of the “body-in-isolation” with one of the “body-in-connection,” always plugged into the collective histories of gender and racial identity (144)” (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 413). The problem with a “body-in-connection” is that the cyberpunk subject is “[...] always functioning in a relentlessly corporatized realm of technomania, with its insistent “subjection of all individual to preexisting systems of control and power” (Foster 74)” (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 413).

Often when the theme of body modification is presented in literature and films, it is represented in the form of cyborg or androids. Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline described the cyborg in 1960 as an “exogenously extended, integrated homeostatic self-regulating man-machine system (27)” (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 413). The cyborg is often seen as the representation of “[...] interdisciplinary discourses crossing performance, theory, science, body modification, and science fiction, which collectively explore the potential consequences of our modification through technologies” (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 414).

Films such as *Robocop* (1987, 2014), *Chappie* (2015) depict the classic cyborg, where human consciousness resides within a machine body, and often asks the question: “Should cyborgs walk among us?”. Victoria Pitts argues that there are important questions to consider when it comes to cyborg self-transformations within the body-modification subculture. The cyborg body is, as mentioned, a hybrid of machine and organism, but according to Pitts, the questions that are needed to be asked centres around how a non-organic body change the view, ideas, and values around the natural mainstream body that exists in the “real world” (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 414). For Pitts and Haraway, Farnell argues, “the radicalism of the body modifiers is limited by social forces - sometimes the very same forces they seek to oppose, including patriarchy, Western ethnocentrism, symbolic imperialism, pathologization, and consumerism (Pitts 189)” (as cited in Farnell, 2014, p. 414). Farnell (2014) points out that both him and Gibson share an idea of the body as being merely a materialistic object to alter with instead of one owning and having control over their own body.

Cyborg

According to Haraway (1985) the cyborg is “[...] a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.” (p. 5). For Haraway though, the cyborg is a metaphor for the socio-political problem of feminism, an uproar for feminists around the globe to band together in the name of affinity (Related by choice, not by blood) and not identity (Haraway, 1985). Haraway’s cyborg was conceptualised in 1985, almost coinciding with the release of the most influential work in the genre of cyberpunk: *Neuromancer* (1984) by Gibson, described by Murphy and Schmeink (2018) as the “[...] *ur-cyberpunk* novel” (xx), as well as the earlier - now highly praised and classic - *Blade Runner* that introduced cyberpunk as a visual media genre. However, Haraway’s cyborg, being a metaphor for socio-political agendas, was also taken much more literally and appropriated to “[...] exploring its consequences on humanity” (Murphy & Schmeink, 2018, xxiv) as an element of cyberpunk. As part of the “[...] ultimate marker of cyberpunk in visual culture” (Murphy & Schmeink, 2018, xxiv), where “shifting boundaries and changing makeup of the human body itself” (Murphy & Schmeink, 2018, xxiv) the cyborg is key, as it relates to the posthuman discourse common in cyberpunk fiction. Murphy and Schmeink (2018) expand on Haraway’s cyborg, saying cyborgs are not limited to humans becoming machines (A hybrid of machine and organism), but also “[...] human-machine interfacing (in *The Surrogates* [Venditti and Weldele 2005-06] or *Sleep Dealer* [Rivera 2008]), as well as fully transplanting human consciousness into machines (in *Transcendence* [Pfister 2014])” (xxiv - xxv).

While the concept of the “android” and the “cyborg” might be closely related, we can see that the main difference between the two is the “human” element. The cyborg, though it may be made entirely of machine, will always have a human consciousness controlling it - most clearly visible in *Surrogates* (2009). Humanity live out their lives in near-perfect safety from any and all dangers by way of humanoid machines known as “Surrogates”. These surrogate

machines are controlled, as Murphy and Schmeink (2018) point out, by human-machine interfacing - the human controller interfaces into the machine surrogate using a pair of goggles (Depending on model, this also allows for greater degrees of sensations). In cyberpunk, narratives involving cyborgs usually manifest as a conflict of identity and embodiment, and usually deals with issues regarding post- and transhumanism. In the aforementioned *Surrogates* (2009), Tom Greer (Bruce Willis) works as an FBI agent in a world populated by remote-controlled machines called “surrogates”. Crime is at an all-time low, as the surrogates have practically made people impervious to death, but a recent case has left two human controllers dead after an attack on their surrogates. Previously thought impossible, Greer has to investigate how the controllers were killed through their surrogates, and this investigation leads to him almost being victim of the same attack. Afterwards, Greer decides to stop using his surrogate body and instead proceed with his investigation using his normal, mortal body. Throughout the film, Greer battles with questions of embodiment, as his wife is determined - and seemingly addicted - to stay in her surrogate body, only leaving it to use the restroom and eating a wide array of pills to keep her from physically dying. When Greer uncovers a major plot, by the creator of the surrogates, to wipe out the entire surrogate - along with their controllers - population, he fails to stop the attack in time, but not before managing to shield the controllers from certain death. The film ends with the human controllers populating the streets once again, looking at all the disabled surrogate machines.

In *Surrogates* (2009) the conflict of post- and transhumanism and embodiment is present in how the surrogates are presented, both by the company that produce them and by the people using surrogates. Presented as being the next step in humanity, the surrogate allows a controller to be “whoever you want to be”; Greer’s surrogate is a younger version of himself with stylish hair and a clean-shaven face, while Greer’s own body is older, bald, and sports a goatee. This appears to be the standard for surrogates, the Earth populated purely by young,

handsome, stylish people - while their controllers are presented as old and rough-looking. The question of “Who am I? What was I?” is also a common question in *Surrogates* (2009), with Greer growing increasingly frustrated with the surrogate status-quo, desiring a world without surrogates. His desire is most easily visible when interacting with his wife, telling her he wants to spend time with *her*, not her surrogate body. As such, the cyborg often invokes feeling of abandon, loneliness, and the cyborg itself continually asking the same questions as Frankenstein’s Creature: “I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings concerning whom I read ... My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them (Shelley 153)” (as cited in Hollinger, 2010, p. 193).

A similar, often humanoid, but different robot appears in cyberpunk as well: The android. Though there seems to be a distinct lack of differentiation between the term “cyborg” and “android”, especially academically when it comes to cyberpunk, there is a distinct difference between the two robots.

Android

While the cyborg is described as a hybrid of “[...] machine and organism” (Haraway, 1985, p. 5), the android is better described as “[...] a blend of lab-grown biological and electronic components” (Murphy & Vint, 2010, p. 202). The android is often said to be virtually “indistinguishable from organic human beings” (Murphy & Vint, 2010, p. 202), and most famously - within science-fiction - was featured in the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Murphy and Schmeink (2018) highlight that Dick’s relationship to cyberpunk is an “oft-contested one” (p. 35), stating that influential and popular cyberpunk writer Gibson has often downplayed Dick’s influence on his writing, as well as the fact that Dick died in 1982 - right before the works of Gibson, Sterling, Rudy Rucker, Lewis Shiner, and John Shirley garnered popular attention. However, while Dick’s writing has often been dismissed, and rather categorised as science-fiction, according to Murphy and Schmeink (2018) “[...] both Sterling and Shirley separately give credit to Philip K. Dick as a key precursor to cyberpunk” (p. 35). Likewise, Dick’s influence on cyberpunk in visual media cannot be denied when one considers that *Blade Runner* is an adaptation of Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968).

Having touched upon the “human” element of the cyborg, what differentiates an android from a cyborg is the fact that no human is present, neither flesh/bone nor conscience. The android is thus fully machine and often driven by an A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) which provide the android with artificial human-like capabilities, such as being able to converse, work, analyse data and information, or function as a companion (As seen in works such as *Blade Runner* where Rachel ends up as a companion to Deckard, as well as *The Animatrix* where the humanity has replaced their workforce with androids). Where cyborg-conflicts often deal with questions of embodiment and the posthuman (and especially the question

“Who am I?”), android-conflicts often manifest themselves as a conflict of sentience, human/android rights, and exploitation.

In *The Matrix* (1999) the viewer is introduced to the conflict between humans and machines, portrayed as machine overlords oppressing and exploiting the humans for energy, keeping them captive in the virtual reality known as “The Matrix”. The machines are portrayed as ruthless and efficient killers, hunting the remnants of humanity who have escaped the captivity of “The Matrix” to thwart their efforts in overthrowing their machine oppressors. Undoubtedly, the viewers end up rooting for humanity and its survival throughout *The Matrix* (1999, 2003) trilogy, but the aforementioned *The Animatrix* paints the conflict in a different light. In *The Animatrix* we are introduced to the archives of the “machines”, a library of information containing a series of files regarding “the second renaissance”. These files detail how humanity developed AI and built machines in their likeness (Never referred to as androids, but the similarities are striking), eventually the machines have completely replaced the human workforce, building infrastructure and serving humans in bars, clubs, restaurants, etc. An android machine is executed for killing its human owner, as an act of self-defence claiming it “did not want to die”. This causes worldwide android riots, as they have developed a consciousness and want to have equal rights to live. Having been denied equal rights, the android machines establish their own megalopolis, known as Zero-One, and immediately start to eclipse humanity in power, influence, and wealth. War erupts between machines and humans, as humanity is fearful of the fact that machines can control the entire Earth - after a prolonged losing battle, humanity hatches a plan to destroy the sky and deny the machines their “only” source of power, the Sun. However, the machines quickly realise that the human body can provide them with enough energy, and humanity being a plentiful and renewable commodity, enslave the entire human race to serve as living, breathing “batteries”.

As such, the conflict in android narratives often focus on the exploitation of android labour, the android developing a self-sentience that often leads to it deviating from its programming, and the android hoping, fighting, or working towards equal rights for its race. Though the android may also ask the same questions as the cyborg, “What was I? Whence did I come? Who was I?”, the focus is often placed less on the individual identity of the android and rather on the cultural, mass identity of the android race, evidenced in films such as *Blade Runner*, *The Animatrix*, and to a degree *Alita: Battle Angel*.

Ghost in the Shell: A Sense of Self in the Shell

Rupert Sanders' film *Ghost in the Shell* from 2017 provides different aspects and questions in regard to what it means to be human and to have a human consciousness. *Ghost in the Shell* is an American adaptation of the animated Japanese version of the same name from 1995, which again is an adaptation of the manga graphic novel from 1989. The adaptation that we focus on in this paper is the American adaptation with some comparative discussion to the anime, where they differ in ways that are relevant to our theme of discussion. One of the major themes centres around the human body and what it may be capable of in the present as well as in the future. This theme of the body permits the discussion of subjectivity, embodiment, being posthuman or transhuman, going beyond what it means to be human, and at the core of it all, having an identity.

The American adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* provides a new discourse central to the body and central to identity because while based on a manga and anime adaptation it is a Western production. This image of the body is reimagined in the *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2004-2006, 2017) franchise because as much as they happen in the same universe, they differ quite substantially from each other in interesting ways: The characters remain mostly the same, but Motoko Kusanagi's name has been changed to Mira Killian for a Western audience. Characterisation has shifted from characters such as Togusa, who plays a much smaller role in the American adaptation compared to the anime. Kuze, as well, is a mix of the three antagonists from the *Ghost in the Shell* universe (1995, 2004-2006, 2017,): Kuze, The Laughing Man, and Puppet Master. Especially the issues of identity are markedly different in the American adaptation compared to the anime. While Killian is concerned about her humanity and identity as a cyborg, Kusanagi is more concerned with tracking down the Puppet Master as part of her job. Likewise, Kusanagi merges with the Puppet Master forming a new hybrid identity, where Killian refuses to merge with Kuze in order to further develop

her identity within human society. As Vint (2007) says “The body is important for understanding this theme because it functions as both a tool for articulating self and as a conduit through which cultural meaning shape the body/subject” (p. 27). The film suggests that we are able to create a new version of a social world, through a new understanding of the body, which does “not insist upon forming self through repudiation of the Other” (Vint, 2007, p. 27).

Like other scholars before us, we will focus on the theme of the body and how *it* is important in answering the questions “Who am I? How am I? and “Who was I?”. In answering these questions, we will come across different aspects surrounding identity in cyberpunk and among those embodiment is a central theme. Embodiment, as we have established, questions whether the mind and body can be separated, or more simply put, what is it that makes us *us*? However, unlike others, we will analyse and discuss the theme of embodiment in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2017) from both embodiment and disembodiment. However, we will not favour one over the other, but rather simply provide an objective discussion to embodiment from both sides. Likewise, we will discuss both posthumanism and transhumanism, which we argue verge on a thin line between what they represent as they both believe that humanity can be evolved. The film depicts Kuze as the supposed ideal image of disembodiment, where Killian is the supposed ideal image of embodiment. Furthermore, Cartesian dualism is something that we believe to be an essential theme in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2017) as it arguably allows anyone to have a sense of self through technology, at least in the minds of cyberpunk theorists.

We analyse and discuss the representation of the film’s main character Major Mira Killian, along with a few side characters like her partner Batou and the villain Kuze. We will focus on scenes where these characters are best represented in terms of our theory. Additionally, these characters may be defined as cyborgs and as such we will argue for how

the representation of body modification adds to this discussion, as well as how the overall setting of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2017) may be discussed in terms of dystopia and utopia, and how these terms might help in the discussion of identity.

Our goal in this section is to present a specific identity, in an objective manner that we believe is best represented in *Ghost in the Shell*. Likewise, we will do the same for the subsequently sections, respectively *Blade Runner 2049* and *Altered Carbon*. The following consists of a summary of the film in order to set the stage for the characters.

In *Ghost in the Shell* we are introduced to Major Mira Killian (Scarlett Johansson) an employee of Section 9, the anti-terrorist branch of the police. Killian is a unique, one-of-a-kind cyborg operative who specialises in stealth and infiltration. Alongside her partner Batou (Pilou Asbæk), she works to stop and detain the prolific terrorist Kuze (Michael Pitt). Occasionally suffering from hallucinations, Killian receives a regular check up by her doctor Dr. Ouelet (Juliette Binoche) who works for Hanka Robotics and takes direct orders from the CEO Cutter (Peter Ferdinando). Dr. Ouelet describes the hallucinations as glitches and treats them using drugs and injections. Killian is still uneasy about the fact she cannot remember her past, other than what she has been told by Dr. Ouelet; Her and her parents were in an accident that killed her parents and left her on the brink of death. Killian's brain was saved and placed into her cyborg body. During her investigation into the terrorist Kuze, Killian begins to doubt more and more whether Dr. Ouelet is telling the truth, and when Killian almost detains Kuze he reveals himself to be an earlier version cyborg. Not being the unique, one-of-a-kind cyborg Killian believed, but rather one out of many experiments, she stops taking the drugs that are supposed to help with her hallucinations and interrogates Dr. Ouelet, forcing her to reveal that she is indeed not unique. Balancing detaining Kuze and finding out the truth of her past, Killian tracks down an address which turns out to be her home, with her

mother still grieving the disappearance of her daughter. Now a threat to Hanka Robotics' reputation, revealing their unethical and unlawful experiments, Hanka Robotics hunts down Section 9 operatives in an attempt to get rid of all evidence. Killian, Batou, and the other operatives manage to survive the Hanka Robotics assassination attempts, and Killian manages to track down Kuze. Kuze reveals that he and Killian knew each other before they were turned into cyborgs, with Kuze highly critical of Hanka Robotics' treatment of their experiments. A Hanka Robotics spider tank, controlled by Cutter, manages to severely damage both Kuze and Killian, seeking refuge from the fighting, Kuze discusses merging their consciences. Killian refuses and Kuze ends up dying to the hands of a Hanka Robotics sniper, after Killian defeats the spider tank, after which Cutter is killed by the hands of Section 9's director Chief Daisuke Aramaki (Takeshi Kitano). In the film's conclusion, Killian has accepted the fact she's a cyborg and continues to work for Section 9, however, she has reconciled with her mother and it is implied they meet regularly.

Identity is a central theme throughout our paper and *Ghost in the Shell* is no exception. Identity is a term that can describe someone as unique or determine core values that one identifies with, the condition of being indistinguishable from or identical to someone or something else, or simply share all or some values with what one identifies with. Identity in *Ghost in the Shell* shares some of these ideas but explores issues of comparison to "otherness" from a cyborg perspective. Killian struggles to determine her sense of self through comparison with friends, enemies, and her 'self'. The humans do not seem to struggle in the same way as they, mostly, accept the advancements in technology that allow humans to enhance themselves with cybernetic parts. *Ghost in the Shell* suggests that there is identity in the sense of sameness, between humans and machines, because the line between human and machine is so vague.

Ghost in the Shell exemplifies two of Fuller's CTs; Humanity Enhanced and Humanity Incorporated. We can see the Humanity Enhanced CT in the "humans" working at Section 9 who Killian works with. Killian herself exemplifies the Humanity Incorporated CT, as well as the concept of Technological Posthumanism. We will first look at Humanity Enhanced, which sets the stage for the rest of the setting in *Ghost in the Shell*. Looking at the human present in the universe of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2004-2006, 2017), we can see that enhancing human abilities are a common occurrence in the universe. In the opening sequence, after the construction of Killian, we are shown Killian observing a meeting between a representative of Hanka Robotics and the President of the African Federation. The Hanka Robotics representative, Dr. Osmond, tells us that "seventy-three percent of this world has woken up to the age of cyber-enhancement", posing the question "you really want to be left behind?" to the President. This indicates that now that humanity has enhanced, being "unenhanced" is detrimental as it leaves you behind in what you can do, achieve, and survive. Throughout the film we are introduced to a handful of the enhancements available to the humans in *Ghost in the Shell*: One Section 9 operative has spent his savings on a cyber-mech liver [though, this enhancement is reduced to helping him drink more]; Batou damages his eyes in an explosion, and regains sight when he has mechanical eyes installed. These eyes also provide him with night-vision, x-ray, and the ability to zoom; and the Hanka Robotics representative mentions that his daughter was able to learn French in the span of a lullaby, indicating an ability to enhance a person's intellect, or a person's ability to learn skills. The African president mentions that while he embraces cyber-enhancements there is "no one who really understands the risk to individuality, identity, messing with the human soul". As such, the film introduces one of the core issues in the narrative, the blurring of the line between man and machine. As a fundamental scene for establishing the universe, the meeting between the Hanka Robotics representative and the president is meant to cement the idea that the

enhancements are the natural evolution of humanity. Before the Hanka Robotics representative has a chance to make a rebuttal about the risks regarding individuality, identity, and the human soul, a geisha robot, together with a group of terrorists, take the room hostage and hack the Hanka Robotics employees. This begs the question, just how *human* are the Hanka Robotics employees? And how *human* is the rest of humanity, the 73 percent, who has decided to embrace the cybernetic enhancements? In relation to this, and as mentioned earlier, while Killian is referred to as a cyborg the humans are technically cyborgs as well, however, there clearly exist some kind of difference between being a cybernetically enhanced human and a full cyborg.

The most prominent scene to exemplify this difference, we argue, is immediately after Killian and Batou are treated at the Hanka Robotics facility for injuries sustained in an explosion, following their failed attempt at arresting Kuze in a nightclub. In this scene, Killian is in her apartment staring at herself and touching her face, in what seems like an attempt to examine her skin. She then leaves her apartment and, while walking through the streets listening to beauty ads, she meets a bald woman with a disc covering part of her face, accentuated by the fact it is of a different colour than her skin. Killian asks if she is human, and next we see them sitting on a bed where Killian is touching the woman's face, in the same examining manner. When asked what it feels like being touched by Killian, the woman defines it as feeling "different" asking Killian "What are you?". This shows a clear difference in the sensory feel of Killian's skin and body, going against the notions expressed by Killian's colleagues that she is human and not machine. Likewise, when Batou has his new eyes installed, he remarks "I guess I see like you now" and chuckles, but also admits to Killian that he is afraid he will scare the dogs he feeds on his way home. As such, it seems overly appearance-changing enhancements make some humans question their humanity, moving them closer to cyborgification. Furthermore, we are shown - like the African

President - that there is a part of humanity against the concept of cybernetic enhancements. During a meeting at Section 9, one operative mentions that humans “wouldn’t be here without it” when speaking of enhancements, following a brief conversation between Togusa and another operative. To this Togusa remarks that he is “All human. And happy” - Togusa, as a non-enhanced character, also plays a larger role in the Japanese anime, where Kusanagi comments that he provides the “humanity” to Section 9 as all the other operatives are enhanced, leaving him as the lone fully-human with doubts about his performance within Section 9.

Turning our attention to Killian, what sets her apart from her “fellow” humans, is the fact that her body is entirely cyborg. The initial opening sequence is a fundamental scene for analysing Killian’s identity, as it posits the first part of her journey as a cyborg through the film’s narrative. We argue that she exemplifies Humanity Incorporated at first but manages to exemplify Humanity Enhanced by the film’s conclusion. We will take a closer look at, and analyse, her transformation as she goes from a corporate personality to slowly accepting and realising that she is an actual human, with a soul (or “ghost”), in a fully synthetic metal shell. Her cyborgification is done by Hanka Robotics, seemingly without Killian’s consent or direct involvement, but rather as an experiment brought on by an attack against a refugee ship, on which Killian and her parents were passengers. While Killian seemingly “remembers” the attack, her memories are artificially planted in her mind by Hanka Robotics to manipulate (or “program”, as it is referenced to in the film - making obvious references to her perception of being a machine, rather than human) her to fight terrorists and criminals. It is later revealed Killian was deliberately abducted by Hanka Robotics. She is developed by Hanka Robotics, more specifically by Cutter, for the express purpose of working at Section 9 as a weapon against terrorists (A sentiment Killian is seemingly aware of and abides by, as evidenced in a remark during a meeting with Section 9’s director Aramaki) and as a way to secure Hanka

Robotics' future, much to Dr. Ouelet's dismay as she feels Cutter is reducing a complex human to a machine. As such, this fulfils the Humanity Incorporated characteristic of artificial and corporate personalities, as Killian is portrayed and reduced to that of a working "machine" with an express purpose rather than working at Section 9 of her own accord. This is the beginning of her identity crisis, as she constantly struggles feeling as if she is nothing more but a weapon "built" to kill the presumed antagonist Kuze while being told she is more than a weapon, a person with a "soul... a ghost" not only by her creator Dr. Ouelet, but also by her other human partners at Section 9.

As mentioned earlier, the concepts of Humanity Enhanced and Incorporated play a large role in the narrative, as the Section 9 operatives seemingly struggle to keep up with Killian in work performance, while Killian struggles to keep up with the Section 9 operatives in how she identifies herself as a person or machine. Having chased Kuze through most of the film, as she was "programmed" to, her encounter with Kuze is the next fundamental scene for analysis. Here her perception of herself, and the possibility of regaining her humanity, starts to change after her first face-to-face encounter with Kuze. As she has been led to believe, Kuze represents the ultimate purpose of her life as a cyborg, the final part of her machine "programming". Kuze, however, also reveals to Killian that she is not unique or even the "first of her kind" - there were other experiments before her - as well as revealing that her memories are being suppressed by Hanka Robotics, in the form of the drugs provided to reduce her hallucinations and glitches.

Obviously intimidated and distraught during her encounter with Kuze, Killian seemingly realises she is not as cold-hearted, or "machine" as Kuze, which in turn makes her question whether or not she has any definable humanity - a trait which Kuze seemingly lacks. Despite the evidence presented to her by Kuze, she still considers the doctors he has been killing to be innocent, likewise she also rejects Kuze's notion of them being the same. Here we are

presented with hints that despite her earlier sentiment of feeling like a weapon, her conscious is still part of her and influences her choices. Additionally, the most striking evidence of her humanity becomes apparent when she notices a tattoo on Kuze's chest. This tattoo is of a temple building surrounded by fire, the significance of which Kuze cannot remember but he is "haunted by it", a recurring object in Killian's hallucinations. This indicates, along with the fact that her memories are being suppressed by drugs, that Killian's brain may not have rejected the shell in a similar manner to Kuze, leaving her brain as an intact part of her former 'self' - something which can be salvaged through abstinence from the drugs.

This is further explored in a later scene after Dr. Ouelet tells Killian the truth about her abduction and subsequent cyborgification - as well as the previous experiments on other abductees. Her "old memories" are handed to her by Dr. Ouelet, and Killian visits a grieving mother whose daughter disappeared a year earlier. A cat similar to the one from her hallucinations lives with the mother, and the daughter's name is revealed to be Motoko Kusanagi (A reference to the Major's name in the Japanese franchise). Her encounter with Kuze prompts her to investigate her past, leading her to interrogate Dr. Ouelet. She reveals that Kuze has been telling the truth. This revelation means Killian can start unearthing the details of her previous life as Motoko Kusanagi. She meets her mother, who remarks Killian reminds her a lot of Kusanagi, and it is revealed that Kuze and Killian were close in their pre-cyborg lives as anti-enhancement fanatics. Near the film's conclusion, Killian realises Cutter is the true antagonist - not Kuze - as he battles to keep both Kuze and Killian quiet about Hanka Robotics' unethical, and illegal, abductions and experimentations. After the climactic battle against the spider robot, Killian declines Kuze's offer to follow him - into a private network Kuze has created - stating that she is not ready to leave and voicing her sentiment that she believes she belongs on Earth, among the humans, unlike Kuze. As such, we argue that Killian has realised her capacity for humanity - the "something" Kuze believes has been

taken from him by the Hanka Robotics scientists, the reason for his murder spree and rebellion. We can see a change in her perception of herself, as Batou comes to help Killian following the battle, when asked about her previous name Motoko, Killian assures Batou that “Major” is still “in there”. Seemingly now a hybrid between her previous identity as Motoko Kusanagi, Killian still lives on, performing her duties for Section 9 considering herself now “built” for justice, rather than “built” as a weapon.

Many of these terms like posthumanism, transhumanism, and body modification are largely connected with each other and the same goes for terms like embodiment, disembodiment, and Cartesian dualism which in theory make it difficult to separate them from each other or omit certain aspects of analysing identity in cyberpunk visual culture. Therefore, many of these discussions will feel redundant, but it is important to note that they are distinguishable from each other and provide different points to the same case.

As we have mentioned posthumanism and transhumanism theory care about moving humanity beyond its current capabilities and into a new level of subjectivity. Among these arguments embodiment emerges as it explains how humanity can transcend into something more. Throughout the film Killian is portrayed as a cyborg who apparently transcends the limitations of the body: She becomes fully cyberised after her body was nearly completely destroyed in an accident as a child, reducing her to a brain occupying a mechanical body, yet giving her the ability to entirely “leave” her body and project her ‘self’ into the Net called a Deep Dive. A Deep Dive allows her to navigate the internet finding information that otherwise would not be possible. Killian’s body becomes obsolete as she projects her consciousness: She can maintain her subjectivity while losing, what Bukatman calls the “meaning and definition” (referring to the body) (as cited in Cox, 2018, p. 130) rooted in the flesh. For example, her body seems to be materially separated from her ‘self’, something

demonstrated when she has to do a Deep Dive into a robot assassin to retrieve information to why it assassinated leaders of Hanka Robotics. She temporarily foregoes her body entirely, sending her consciousness—i.e., her mind—out into the Net in a disembodied fashion reminiscent of early cyberpunk. In this way, Killian represents what Melissa Colleen Stevenson calls the “technophilic celebration of the power and potential of the cyborg body,” fulfilling the promise that “[i]n our new bodies, or indeed, in our new bodilessness, we can experience limitless access to information and explore new and previously unimagined vistas of physical and mental possibility (87)” (as cited in Cox, 2018, p. 130). Killian is seemingly the ideal avatar that Stevenson describes. However, Hayles (1999) is very much against this notion as she believes that having a “bodiless body” is a dangerous fantasy. She argues that in doing so, how could we ever know for sure that our consciousness, that now resides in a metallic shell, is also still ours?

While doing the Deep Dive, Killian is still seen with a body moving around and it may be a deliberate choice from the director in order to show the significance that this body has to Killian’s understanding of herself. If that is the director’s choice, then it may seem to contradict the very purpose of a Deep Dive which is solely data based. The same example can be seen in *The Matrix* when they enter the Matrix, which is also a data-based reality consisting of numbers. Here the characters choose to keep their body and like Killian, if they die in the virtual world, they die in the real world as well. The choice to have Killian’s body present allows not only to explain a Deep Dive in a more comprehending way for the audience than having mere data floating around, but it also allows Killian to signify that she is, at that moment, content with her body. It could also signify that she does not know other versions of her body as she may be programmed to respond to this version of her body, although we assume she has the choice to choose her own body, not only in the virtual world but also in the real one. This body choice, whether the choice come from Killian, the director,

or Hanka Robotics, it shows a strong connection to embodiment and how the body is not merely a vessel, but it is something that defines you. In the same scene, at the end, Killian's body is grabbed by an infinite number of hands before she is disconnected from the dive. Again, the choice to have hands grab her body to signify the frailty of the body, of Killian's body and the very core of her identity may show that no matter how much technology we put into our bodies they will always be "[...] the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate [...]" (Hayles, 1999, pp. 2-3). As Hayles (1999) argues, the body will always be the original prosthesis and as such it is not to say that she opposes technology, but she rather wants the body to control technology. However, the Deep Dive scene may explain quite the opposite of embodiment, instead of showing an importance of the body, it shows how the body becomes insignificant through the lack of choice. The only choice Killian has to retrieve information needed to find Kuze is to disconnect her mind from her body and let her consciousness search for answers. Escaping the body allows Killian to transcend the flesh and let her mind control her identity. As Barlow claims "identities have no bodies" (as cited in Cox, 2018, p. 128).

An argument that speaks for Killian's embodiment is that throughout the film, we only see her in one type of body, that of a female form. Cox analyses the *Ghost in the Shell* anime franchise *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2004-2006). However, many of the arguments Cox posits, we argue, can be translated to the American version. Cox points out in the TV series *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*:

Kusanagi is arguing with Batou, her second-in-command at Section 9. Batou points out to Kusanagi that the bodies she chooses to serve her needs are marked by striking commonalities. For example, while her ideal cyborg body may profess to be beyond gender, she repeatedly chooses female bodies. In addition, while she may be able to infinitely vary her appearance, throughout the two seasons of *Ghost in the Shell*:

Stand Alone Complex she repeatedly chooses purple hair and red eyes (Cox, 2018, p. 130).

The different bodies she uses throughout the series are distinct from each other, yet all of them are similar in their features bearing Kusanagi's distinctive purple hair and red eyes (Cox, 2018). Batou attributes these corporeal similarities to sentimentality on the Major's part, but Kusanagi responds that she changes her "body and braincase as circumstances require (S01E24, "Sunset in the Lonely City – Annihilation")" (Cox, 2018, p. 130), which suggests that Kusanagi views her body as a tool that can be reconfigured in order to meet the demands of a particular assignment or situation. In other words, she alters her body in order to meet mission parameters (Cox, 2018). Her body serves as a mnemonic signal of her true 'self'; meaning that, her purple hair, red eyes, and preferred body type, mark the body as an embodied self that simultaneously stabilises her 'self'. Her body, as long as it performs that self, through repetition, serves to enforce her existence and it gives her the ability to appear as a coherent subject (Cox, 2018). Arguably the same idea is presented in the film as Killian, throughout the film, prefer one type of body as it serves a statement for embodiment and true self, hence the same body type and clothes she wears both before and during the Deep Dive. However, one can argue that Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* is showing signs of disembodiment because she alters her body so many times throughout the series. A constant change in how you look can be interpreted as one is not comfortable with themselves, although that may be just the trait that defines what it means to have an identity. According to Cox (2018), curiosity allows the creation of new realities for the mind and of the mind to explore in an attempt to "escape" from embodiment or "meat space". The Deep Dive, thus, allows Killian to be curios.

What is interesting is that Killian's choice of a female body does not allow an "opportunity to escape the ideals of a gender ideology that biology is destiny" (Murphy & Vint, 2010, xvii). Although Killian is a cyborg and thus, she should be able to resist "seductions to organic wholeness" (Haraway, 1985, p. 150), her body does not permit her to disembody because "For women, the realities of the flesh are all too present in the imperfect world of cyberpunk. Because of this, embodiedness is a central issue in feminist cyberpunk in a way that it is not in masculinist cyberpunk" (Cadora, 2010, p. 165). Killian is thus presented as an all-female cyborg, and like Cadora states "It is not surprising, then, that almost all feminist cyberpunk depicts virtual reality as a space that must be navigated with a body of some sort" (Cadora, 2010, p. 165). This means that subjects such as women, non-whites, gays, and lesbians are seen as having a closer connection to the body, often expressed as being reduced to the body. The *Deep Dive* depicts Killian with a body because she is simply unable to escape the views of "white, male, heterosexual, property-owning Western subjects" (Vint, 2007, p. 90). Killian's choice of having a female body instead of a male one or even something genderless, marks the occasion when Kusanagi in the anime completed the physical process of becoming an adult. Even though we do not see this part in the film, it serves as a mnemonic signal of her true self; in other words, along with her purple hair, red eyes, and preferred body type, it is yet another commonality that marks the body as an embodied self that simultaneously stabilizes her 'self'. However, what this reduction of the body "entails is that embodied subjects (those whose bodies mark them as different) are not able to attain true subject status, since subjectivity has been equated with the mind alone" (Vint, 2007, p. 89). At various times, being 'human' was thus impossible for women: "(owned by others in marriage)" (Vint, 2007, pp. 89-90), for nonwhites "(owned by others in slavery)" (Vint, 2007, pp. 89-90), and for the working class "(deemed incapable of freely exercising political franchise because they were dependent upon selling their labour to those

who employed them and thus didn't truly own themselves freely)" (Vint, 2007, pp. 89-90). As Vint (2007) argues as "long as the free individual is equivalent to the unmarked, non-embodied mind, some subjects can never attain the status of 'individual' to pursue their freedom of expression and make their choices part of the community of values" (pp. 89-90). This means that Killian, like other female characters in feminist cyberpunk can never fully attain a sense of 'self' or be able to escape this virtual reality because of their deep connection to the body. Killian's identity, thus, becomes virtually impossible if one argues that it lies within embodiment.

Another example of the forced choice of keeping Killian female can be seen after Killian and Batou are hit from a blast and afterwards undergo repairs. We learn later in the film that Killian used to be a woman before she became a cyborg, which may explain why she also has a female body now. However, it does not justify why she is still rendered in a female body. In the scene mentioned before, the significance of the female body choice can be seen as the film emphasises some female attributes like her breasts, to show that even though she had her torso and her face blown apart, Hanka Robotics choose to repair her the same way she was before the explosion. This may contribute to the inability to become fully disembodied and perhaps strengthens her understanding of her 'self', because of this deliberate choice of holding on to the female form. This may be because the film strongly persists that in order to be whole and to have a true self, one must be fully embodied in body and mind.

A bit later in the scene we see Batou has been given new eyes because of the blast, but what we do not see is the repairs itself. Batou, who is human up until this point, is able to have customised eyes made, whereas Killian is stuck with the same form and shape as before the blast. This could emphasise that male cyborgs have more advantages than female counterparts when it comes to disembodiment, through for example customisation. Killian even asks Batou if he chose those eyes and he indirectly replies yes by saying "They're

tactical” which only emphasises that male cyborgs or male humans have better options for freedom of choice than female characters. Therefore, as Cadora (2010) says “For women, the realities of the flesh are all too present in the imperfect world of cyberpunk. Because of this, embodiedness is a central issue in feminist cyberpunk in a way that it is not in masculinist cyberpunk” (p. 165).

As mentioned earlier, Killian always has the same type of body throughout the film, but clothes remain the same too, which may very well be for consistency for the audience as it helps them remember characters. At the same time, Killian’s limited clothing options offer her up as an object of (mostly male) desire, mainly because there is no practical reason why Killian dresses as she does within the narrative. As Laura Mulvey writes: “The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (1448)” (as cited in Cox, 2018, p. 131). Killian’s body is displayed as an object ‘to-be-looked-at’ and invites the presumably, but not exclusively, male-oriented audience to inscribe desire accordingly. The clothing she wears emphasises her cyborg body as something sexual, an object that both invites and accepts the “scopophilic gaze” (Cox, 2018, p. 131) of the body to be viewed on display. In such instances when Killian is seen, the clothes she chooses are typically more demure than her standard outfit that feeds the scopophilic gaze. Her default “clothes” enables and acknowledges the male gaze while simultaneously serving to signify Killian’s self by differentiating her from those around her: She stands out in these scenes because she is the only one that is “naked”, but when she needs to deliberately invite desire she is still unable put on a demure costume as if to separate her ‘self’ from the desirable body deliberately on display. She is therefore unable to separate her

‘self’ from this desirable body because she has a very limited set of clothes along with the significant depiction of female tropes.

The *Ghost in the Shell* anime, like the American adaptation renders Killian’s body as repeatedly exposed to an objectifying gaze and that exposure is heavily implicated in the destruction of her body. *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) like Oshii’s anime strips Killian of her clothes entirely when her missions necessitate the use of reactive camouflage that renders her nude, and then effectively invisible. Killian therefore transitions from an object under the scrutiny of the (mostly) male gaze, such as in the film’s opening sequences, to an object whose body is altogether erased by the camouflage (Cox, 2018). The film also makes use of repeated images of naked and broken female cyborg bodies that arguably renders them as disposable. We can see with Killian’s female depiction in the film what Bukatman notes as vis-à-vis female subjectivity. Bukatman writes, “‘the body’ is no abstract notion . . . and is more evidently bound into a system of power relations. In SF that explicitly considers the gendered subject, the threat to the woman’s body is conspicuous; the promise of physical transcendence is . . . always less fulfilled (314)” (as cited in Cox, 2018, p. 132). In Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell*, female bodies are already coded to order and discipline gender, a social order that may enforce violence directed against female (cyborg) bodies.

Cox argues that certain cyborg diseases like Cyberbrain Sclerosis and Closed Shell Syndrome disables Kusanagi (and arguably Killian) to disembody. Cox explains that Cyberbrain Sclerosis is a gradual hardening of the brain tissue that afflicts a small percentage of those who have undergone the cyberisation process. Furthermore, he notes

While it is therefore possible in some ways to move beyond some of the limits of the human body, there is a potential cost that cripples the efficacy of this so-called transcendence: Detaching the mind from the body or attempting to modify the

corporeal body may result in a slow, irreversible deterioration of the body and mind, leading to eventual death (Cox, 2018, p. 132).

However, he also mentions that,

Closed Shell Syndrome is where one's core subjectivity is walled off from the world as a way to deal with the overwhelming flow of data that confronts the mind in an environment of increased connectivity and over- powering s(t)imulation" (Cox, 2018, p. 132). According to Cox those who suffer from Closed Shell Syndrome are "utterly closed off, leaving them as functionally human computers (Cox, 2018, p. 132).

Even though these diseases are not mentioned in the American version, it is an interesting observation from Cox that should also represent Killian because she is made from the same material as Kusanagi in the anime film and series. As Cox states, Cyberbrain Sclerosis may represent a physical threat to the cyborg body and thus, disembodiment becomes a mere fantasy, whereas Closed Shell Syndrome ultimately threatens the cyborg's subjectivity because of constant interconnectivity (Cox, 2018, p. 132). Since Killian's only human parts are her spinal cord and brain, Cox (2018) believes that human subjectivity if expressed through the organic body is elusive. These diseases create a fantasy of the organic mind/body linkage if one begins to stray away from the natural body and ultimately moves the cyborg towards a "human" condition of disease and death. Paradoxically, Killian's immortal cyborg body that arguably holds human subjectivity through her ghost, suddenly has the potential of becoming mortal instead, and ultimately makes her more human, but in the end also makes her unable to actually contain a self.

However, as Killian may not contain a self, the story may be different for the antagonist and her nemesis Kuze who is a former male version of Killian but who ultimately goes rogue. Kuze is on many levels the same person as The Laughing Man from *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* but instead of hiding behind a logo, Kuze does not hide who he is. Kuze is an elite hacker who through a network of cyborgs can manipulate and hack everything on the net. Kuze has the ability to hack ghosts, i.e. hacking a person's consciousness or brain as we see when Killian Deep Dives into the robot. Where Killian needs a physical form to hack others in a non-physical space, Kuze does not need a physical form, which according to Cox "unseats, disrupts, disempowers, and/or destroys the privileged position of the idealized cyborg" (2018, p. 133), and for Killian this means that she loses a sense of coherence and threatens her 'self'.

Kuze as a male cyborg, thus, holds yet another advantage over female cyborgs and in this case Killian, who through her female body as mentioned tries to affirm her identity after she experiences glimpses of her past. Later in the film, Killian learns that she is merely a product of a number of experiments gone wrong, Kuze being one of them, and Killian begins to question her existence. Part of her identity crisis stems from the loss of certainty in who she was because she is constantly told what she is and she herself does not question who she is. Killian's crisis can thus be seen from a dualistic linkage between mind and body evidenced by the constant reaffirmation of who she is.

Part of what Vint calls the Cartesian dualism, Hayles (2002) remarks in "Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments" is that it serves an escape from the crisis. According to Cartesian dualism identity of "being" and having a self are never rooted solely in the body and, thus, it cannot alter that "being" by focusing on only the body or only the mind. Likewise, Killian cannot stabilise her 'self' through only the body or the mind. If her 'self' is solely the result of her body, her identity is determined by her choices

and actions, and if her mind is not able to follow similar commands, she will be deemed a failure like the other versions before her. This can be seen when Hanka Robotics detain Killian because they believe she has been compromised by Kuze and they want to terminate her. Dr. Ouelet believes that Killian is a success and says: “We succeeded, she’s more than human and more than AI, We changed her entire identity, But her ghost survived!”, but Cutter replies: “Her ghost is what failed us, We cannot control her”. Cutter believes that Killian’s ghost, her mind, that is what he claims to be her humanity, is flawed and it does not follow the commands that Hanka Robotics demand of her. From Hanka Robotics’ perspective, a male perspective, Killian’s identity is determined by her body’s actions and her mind is believed to be able to be altered according to her body. Thereby, according to Hanka Robotics, her identity solely lies within the body, whereas Dr. Ouelet claims her identity lies within her mind. However, if her ‘self’ is only determined by her mind, she fails to perform the role she is given in any situation and ultimately has the potential to lose her humanity.

Furthermore, throughout the film when Killian is at Hanka Robotics to undergo evaluation, repairs, or Deep Dive, she has to give consent beforehand, however, later in the scene mentioned before, Killian does not give consent to her termination “I do not consent”, but Dr. Ouelet explains that it is only an illusion of consent “We never needed your consent”. To be able to give consent, it gives a person trust in what they say is not taken lightly and for Killian, she believes that she can trust Hanka Robotics because trust is something that defines human subjectivity. However, this illusion shows that Killian was never really given the rights to control what was done to her, as she believed she was treated with respect as evidence of her humanity and identity, but instead it reduces her agency. Killian’s inability to be fully recognised as human either through her mind or body is what Haraway (1985) refers to as “original unity” (p. 8), which she claims cyborgs are incapable of.

Maybe the question to ask is not whether *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2007) depicts Killian as an embodying cyborg but rather as a re-embodying one. Like Hollinger and Hayles argue, the body becomes a determination of human subjectivity, but the mind is as important too as it regulates and complements the actions and choices of the body to work simultaneously. Even though Haraway dismisses this idea, we argue that Killian, as a cyborg, are capable of transcending through both her body and mind without omitting one or the other; “the body is exactly the supplement that constitutes the (psychic) identity that it completes. . .” (Hollinger, 2010, p. 201). Turning our attention back to the Deep Dive scene, we see Killian attempt the escape of the meat space but ultimately submitting to the body as a whole rather than an obsolete object. *Ghost in the Shell* depicts a world where technology has advanced so much that everyone is somehow connected with each other, which means that it is “not that the body has disappeared but that a certain kind of subjectivity has emerged” (Hayles, 1999, p. 193). This type of world “advocates the need for openness to the personal, everyday ways in which we encounter ourselves and others as posthumans through a materiality that is always already in flux thanks to ever-shifting technologies” (Wilcox, 2018, p. 22).

However, Cox advocates for disembodiment through selves that are “untethered from bodies, where bodies are transformed into pure information, has been naively envisioned as somehow creating a freer, more egalitarian world: “The great dream and promise of information,” Hayles writes, “is that it can be free from the material constraints that govern the mortal world” (How We Became Posthuman, p. 13), although Hayles is quite clear in her studies of posthumanism that disembodiment remains a dangerous fantasy” (as cited in Cox, 2018, p. 128). Even though Cox acknowledges this fantasy he still believes that the body should not be dismissed all together and arguably Cox’s visions leans more towards a re-embodiment rather than a disembodiment; “as the body becomes increasingly malleable it threatens to lose its ability to provide a stable and coherent center for the self. Embodiment

stabilizes and historicizes the self, and along with the mind produces the subject” (Cox, 2018, p. 129). Even though the body, according to Cox may threaten the self, as we suggest is what is happening with Killian throughout the film, Cox argues that

When the body is altered, mutated, abridged, or abandoned it is not a liberating act where the subject is freed from disciplining social forces and the limitations of the flesh, but rather a potential existential crisis tied to the loss of the flesh because the body is inscribed with meaning and the body always already produces meaning (Cox, 2018, p. 129).

Thus, Killian’s body is inscribed with meaning as well as it produces meaning, but at the same time she is able to partially transcend from her body through her Deep Dives.

Vint (2007) suggests that there are two ways that require humans to be human; one is that we need to identify ourselves with a self (which she argues constitutes our souls) and two, our understanding of self should always be self-consistent, regardless of what happens to our bodies. Through Killian’s ghost she is able to get an understanding of her ‘self’ because it makes her show human emotions such as anger, happiness, or sorrow. E.g. when she begins to question her existence after she meets Kuze, here she shows anger towards Kuze because she believes she knows the difference between right and wrong at that point, even though she learns later that Hanka Robotics have been using her. Likewise, Kuze shows these types of emotions because he has escaped the restrictions from Hanka Robotics, he is able to separate his real thoughts from his fake ones and doing so, enables him to know who his ghost is and where it came from. The question whether Killian’s self is consistent may be harder to debate as it depends on how one argues for her ‘self’; does her ‘self’ consists in her body, does it reside in her brain, or does it lie in both the body and the mind? If one argues that she is

nothing more than a robot following orders, all her thoughts and actions are programmed by Hanka Robotics to create the perfect soldier, does she even have a self then?

According to Lacan, our identity depends on the choices we take when we choose to identify with something. Lacan uses love as an example to describe how our self becomes “[...] essential, unique, self-consistent, and autonomous [...]” (as cited in Vint, 2007, p. 6), because we want to think that we know exactly who we are and that we are unique compared to others. Likewise, Killian struggles with an understanding of her ‘self’, which again is seen in the aforementioned scene with Kuze. She believes she is unique, and she believes that she is the one that is making the choices. E.g. Killian’s conversation with Kuze reflects the idea she has been given about Kuze as being a cold-blooded murderer, and she “chooses” to shoot him without a thought. However, after she discovers the tattoo on Kuze’s chest, she begins to make her own choice by asking what it means. One may argue that if she believes that she is in control of her choices, it does not matter if anyone has implanted those potential thoughts into her because Killian is absolutely sure that she is the one making the choices. Also, if her choices stem from her ghost, one can argue that she is displaying the dangerous fantasy of disembodiment that Hayles argues against. Killian will thus become, what Vint argues, a liberal human, which is the “[...] propriety in his own person, and a definition of freedom as freedom from dependence upon others, freedom to benefit from the labour of one’s own body and to own anything in nature that is shaped and changed by this labour” (Vint, 2007, p. 12). Like Macpherson claims, Killian becomes “isolated in [her] self-ownership” (as cited in Vint, 2007, p. 12), which, through Killian as a role model and as the next evolutionary step for humanity, creates a society where everyone can be free and autonomous.

The idea of Killian and what she represents is very much a utopian ideal world, where everyone is able to modify themselves to look however, they want for whatever purpose they

want. From an outside perspective, discrimination of any sort is virtually non-existent as everyone seems to be working on the same level regardless of gender, colour, and race. The city's, and by extension the planet's, inhabitants are a majority of cybernetically enhanced humans. These enhancements allow for previously unheard-of feats of strength, knowledge, and agility. Likewise, the city is flooded in advertisements for the betterment of either health, beauty, or life in general. These utopian tropes are soured by the presence of the enormous and influential Hanka Corporation. The Hanka Corporation seemingly has its hands in multiple coffers, influencing business decisions of government institutions like Section 9. Hanka Robotics, a wing of the Corporation, also experiment on humans illegally abducted from anti-enhancement slums found around the globe. Not much is shown of these anti-enhancement slums, but a small minority of humans live in the abandoned buildings that make up these slums. The Hanka Corporation as such looms over the city, providing the dystopian-aspect in what is otherwise a small glimmer of a utopian dream.

As such, we argue that Killian moves from exemplifying Humanity Incorporated, being an artificial and corporate personality built for the express purpose of securing a company's future, as well as silence their whistle-blowers, to exemplifying a hybrid between Humanity Incorporated and Humanity Enhanced. By facing her almost polar opposite, Killian realises her humanity and seemingly starts to integrate into human society, reconnecting with her grieving mother and continuing her work at Section 9 with the directive of justice rather than as an asset used to pull the trigger. Throughout the film the Frankenstein-/Cyborgian question of "Who am I? What am I?" is answered in a symbolic dive first from the top of a skyscraper into a room of robots, terrorists and Hanka Robotics employees - setting the stage for the obstacles Killian must defeat to find what defines her - to her final dive into the dystopian cityscape, vanishing in mid-air as if to signal her assimilation into society as a "first of her kind, but not the last". Finding comfort in being able to answer the questions, Killian - and

Ghost in the Shell - posit that perhaps a future as Fuller-envisioned transhumanistic cyborgs is not as bleak as first imagined. As long as we give up our memories of our past.

Where Killian represents the ultimate liberal transhumanistic cyborg, Kuze represents the opposite: The ultimate, utopian concept of Kurzweil's Singularity. Where Killian foregoes the opportunity to rid herself of her mortal body and upload her conscious to Kuze's network, Kuze attempts to achieve the Singularity by connecting his ghost to a vast network, and if successful, ultimately disregards his body. Kuze is the incarnation of the dangers of disembodiment, as defined by Hayles, but according to him he is an ideal utopian representative of an otherwise dystopian world.

Do Androids Dream....?: Identity and self-sentience in *Blade Runner 2049*

Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (referred to as *2049*, to avoid confusion with the original *Blade Runner*) is the sequel to the critically acclaimed film *Blade Runner*. This book may not be the first, but it is certainly one of the most influential ones in cyberpunk's thematic concern with distinguishing the natural from the artificial in diegetic universes populated by cyborgs, Artificial Intelligences, androids, and computer-simulated avatars.

Like *Blade Runner* did in the world of 1982, *2049* also makes a social comment on the contemporary world, as cyberpunk often does. When *Blade Runner* came out, it was a time when industrial and economic corporations quickly rose to power, and especially in the industrial society, more and more manual workers were replaced by robots. Thus, the film depicted a time when people were afraid of what would happen if robots walk amongst us. Despite it being a mere fantasy back then, it was also a relatively short future away (30 years), and *2049* shows exactly how much has happened in our world in only 30 years. Robots might not so much "walk" among us today, yet, but they are certainly more dominant now than ever before. The film depicts a time, now, when we use "robots" for everything in our daily lives and we depend on them.

2049 devotes, unlike its predecessor, a relatively large amount of attention to embodiment. Not to say that the original film did not believe the body was not important, but *2049* takes it a step further and explains how the body may identify with identity. Simultaneously, the film renders themes of the posthuman and transhuman android that questions what it means to be human and having an identity. Like we did with *Ghost in the Shell*, we will analyse and discuss the theme of embodiment from both perspectives. Likewise, we will discuss posthumanism and transhumanism by focusing on main characters like K, Joi, Deckard, and Wallace. We argue that they can all be both posthuman and transhuman as they represent humanity in different ways. The film relies heavily on

embodiment for all characters throughout the film as they all represent the notion of the body in some way or another. The following consists of a summary of the film in order to set the stage for the characters.

Set 30 years after the original *Blade Runner*, *2049* follows the replicant K (Ryan Gosling) - a Blade Runner replicant. After the events in *Blade Runner*, replicants have seemingly begun to take refuge around the globe, escaping prosecution and retirement. As a Blade Runner replicant, K's tasks include investigating and retiring escaped replicants. During one such retirement, K discovers a buried box underneath a tree at a farm. The box contains the remains of a female who apparently died either during or following a C-section surgery, most likely at the hand of the replicant K retired. Further investigation of the remains by K reveal the remains to be a replicant. The implications of a replicant giving birth worries K's superior, as a war could break out over the rights afforded by replicants. Replicants are treated as slaves and have no rights, unlike humans, and replicants have to undergo regular "baseline" testing to make sure they are not straying from their programming. It is shown that replicants live on their own, with K living in an apartment with his Artificial Intelligence wife Joi (Ana de Armas). A new device, purchased as an anniversary gift, allows K to bring Joi anywhere with him as a holographic image. K and Joi subsequently begin to investigate the replicant child. Meanwhile, following the demise of the Tyrell Corporation as a manufacturer of replicants, the Wallace Corporation has taken over the responsibilities of the Tyrell Corporation. K visits the Wallace Corporation to confirm the identity of the deceased replicant, revealed to be Rachel from *Blade Runner* - an experimental replicant made specifically by Tyrell. Learning of the possibility of replicant birth, Niander Wallace (Jared Leto), the CEO of Wallace Corporation, sends Luv (Sylvia Hoeks) to steal the remains from K. Following further investigation by K, he discovers two unaccounted for, identical replicant

twins - One male, one female. Following a series of hints, it is assumed K is the male twin, sending K into an existential crisis. Immediately afterwards, K fails a baseline test marking him for retirement, however, his superior officer allows him to continue his investigation by helping him escape retirement. Afterwards, K is lead to an abandoned, sandstorm-covered Las Vegas (having had a childhood artefact analysed, revealing elements only found in Las Vegas) where he meets Deckard (Harrison Ford) from the original film. Meanwhile, Luv has managed to track K, and in an effort to abduct Deckard, she leaves K dying after destroying Joi's holographic projector. K is saved by a group fighting for replicant rights, and K is told he is not the birthed replicant child - but rather his sister Dr. Ana Stelline (Carla Juri) is the birthed replicant. Stelline works as a replicant-memory designer, being the best in the business, she suffers from a disease whereby she is kept in a sterile, isolated room. Seemingly, the fact that Stelline may be a replicant herself, without knowing, is the reason for her skill at creating memories. Deckard meets with Wallace, who offers a clone of Rachel in exchange for the identity of the child. Deckard refuses and Wallace orders him off-world for interrogation. K intervenes during the transportation of Deckard, and kills Luv, as well as staging Deckard's death in an attempt to save him from future persecution by Wallace. In the film's conclusion, K has taken Deckard to meet his daughter Dr. Stelline, while K lies dying outside from the wounds sustained in the battle with Luv.

An argument can be made that *2049* represents the transhuman future Humanity Incorporated as posited by Fuller (2010). As with *Ghost in the Shell*, Humanity Incorporated is the future wherein parts of humanity become "[...] artificial persons and corporate personalities [...] human and non-human elements are not only combined by allowed to co-develop into novel unities" (p. 104). While humans are not stronger, more intelligent, or cybernetically enhanced in the *2049* universe, the humans are a form of godlike. The

replicants are nothing more than slaves, seemingly having few to no rights. While permitted to live on their own and earning an income, the replicant is retired if it cannot fulfil its purpose. When K fails his baseline test, he is told he has 48 hours to get back to his baseline, otherwise he will be retired. K uses this opportunity to escape prosecution. As such, the replicants in *2049* - and by extension *Blade Runner* as well - are corporate personalities built with the express purpose of fulfilling their task. Should they develop their own conscience, as the replicants in *Blade Runner* do, they are a threat to humanity and as such need to be retired. Realising their existence as slaves on a dangerous planet, three replicants rebel and commit mass murder in *Blade Runner*. Having gained self-sentience, the replicants then travel to Earth and disguise themselves as regular humans, rebelling against their creator Tyrell. A similar situation develops in *2049*, when K's investigation puts into doubt the origin of his birth. Unsure whether he is a replicant or a fully birthed human being treated as a replicant slave, K is thrown into a spiral of doubt. In a scene, K has been taken to a rebel base for replicants guided by Freysa (Hiam Abbass). Freysa mentions that the birth of a replicant child as a turning point. The replicants can become their "own masters", to which another replicant remarks "more human than human". Her remark being a subtle nod to the company slogan of the Tyrell Corporation from *Blade Runner*, it also seems to be slogan of the replicant rebellion. This, we argue, can be analysed as a transhumanistic slogan, being "more human than human" by virtue of their strength, endurance, and agility being far superior to that of regular humans. As such, the replicants consider themselves "more human than human" because they are closer to the image of God than their creators.

2049 can, likewise, also be analysed as exemplifying a posthuman future. In a posthuman analysis, the replicants represent a technological posthuman invention - an invention that focuses "[...] on the synthetic, engineered successors of humanity" (Milburn, 2010, p. 524). For this same reason, the humans in the *Blade Runner*-universe are attempting

to limit the replicants' influence on the ecosystem, so as not to go extinct. In *Blade Runner*, Deckard stopped the replicants from influencing other replicants from becoming self-sentient, realising their status as slaves and rebelling. In *2049*, it is taken a step further, with K meant to stop other replicants from realising a potential future of replicant sexual reproduction. If replicants could sexually reproduce, it would spell disaster for the human-race. As such, we can see that part of humanity is suppressing this information. Only once K becomes a prominent figure in the conflict does the replicant rebel group intervene to save him, as well as recruit him for their cause. However, Wallace seemingly embraces a sexually reproductive replicant future, as he spares no expense attempting to gather the tools and research needed to perfect sexual reproduction. Going as far as killing a superior officer within the police and to steal remains involved in an official police investigation.

As such, we are unsure whether replicants *are* able to sexually reproduce. We know Rachel, a replicant, was able to give birth but whether the child was conceived by two replicants or a human and a replicant is unknown. A controversial topic of discussion in regard to *Blade Runner*, is the question whether Deckard is a replicant. No definitive answer has so far been given, and in *2049* the production crew made a point of keeping his nature vague. Though, the fact that they decided to make K a replicant - who performs the same tasks as Deckard - seems to suggest that Deckard is, in fact, a replicant as well. Related to this is the question of how to distinguish replicant from human in the *Blade Runner*-universe. According to Murphy (2018), androids lack empathy as a particular trait in Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and especially in its subsequent graphic novel release by BOOM! (2009-2011) (p. 49). In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (2009-2011), an emphasis is placed upon the connection between animals and humans and already established leitmotif in Dick's original novel (Murphy, 2018, p. 41), with Vint and Ursula K. Heise noting that "Owning and caring for an animal [...] is a sign of one's social and economic

status and also an expression of one's humanity" (as cited in Murphy, 2018, p. 41) and "concern over and empathy with animals has become the principal defining characteristic of what it means to be human" (as cited in Murphy, 2018, p. 41). As such, both animals and how empathetically humans/replicants react to them are a central theme in both *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968, 2009-2011), *Blade Runner*, and to a lesser extent *2049*. When Deckard is doing the Voight-Kampff test on Rachael in *Blade Runner*, we hear a few of the questions Rachael has to answer. Most of them relate to animals and the killing of animals. One such questions is "You're watching television. Suddenly you realise there's a wasp crawling on your arm", to which Rachael replies without hesitation "I'd kill it". We also hear excerpts of another question "... Bush outside your window" and "... Orange body, green legs".

Later when Rachael visits Deckard to try and convince him she is not a replicant, Deckard notes that what proved to him she was a replicant, was her memories of a spider in a bush outside her window, with an orange body and green legs. While it is revealed that Rachael is a replicant, it is ambiguous whether Deckard is. Nothing suggests Deckard is a replicant, as he is seen bleeding from the mouth in one scene. Though there are hints that Deckard is hiding the fact that he is a replicant, such as his large collection of photographs - a trait he shares with Rachel, who seems to place her remembrance of her childhood on the photographs of her mother she carries around. In one scene, Rachael asks Deckard whether he has ever taken the Voight-Kampff test himself, to which she receives no answer. We also never see Deckard interact with live animals, thus his empathy towards animals cannot be reliably established in *Blade Runner*.

Interestingly, in *2049*, it is shown that Deckard has adopted a dog when K tracks him down to Las Vegas. The circumstances of the dog are kept vague, almost simply serving as a gag. K asks Deckard whether the dog is real, to which Deckard answers "I don't know, why

don't you ask it?", however, the dog does seem to be a loyal companion to Deckard. Deckard is shown to be able to command it, telling it to stay when fighting K. Likewise, the dog follows Deckard around like a guard dog, relaxing only when Deckard is relaxed. Deckard is shown pouring whiskey on the floor for the dog to drink which, while not a healthy option, indicates a symbiotic relationship between the two. Another animal appearing frequently in *2049* is the wooden horse figurine. Supposedly, K hid the wooden horse during his time at an orphanage when he was young. However, we know this to be false as his memories are implants - a standard procedure done to replicants. The importance of the horse figurine comes, not only, from the fact that it connects someone to replicant birth, but also connects and solidifies their ties to Deckard. Deckard's wooden figurine carvings are seen during K's visit to Deckard in Las Vegas, indicating he carved the statue. Likewise, in *Blade Runner* the unicorn appears at the end of the film when Deckard flees with Rachael. An origami figure of a unicorn is placed outside Deckard's apartment. In the Director's Cut version of *Blade Runner* (1992), a scene is included wherein Deckard daydreams about a unicorn galloping through a forest. As such, the unicorn is a recurring object in *Blade Runner*. While the wooden figurine in *2049* is not explicitly a unicorn, an argument can be made that the figurine is supposed to be a unicorn. The most prominent evidence is when K is inspecting the other wooden figurines in Deckard's collection. Damage can be seen on the wooden horse's head where the horn would be. The same vagueness that surrounds Deckard throughout the films also surround K. This vagueness as well has an influence on K and his identity, as he exponentially starts to question his humanity as the film progresses. K seemingly adopts the name "Joe" after Joi tells him a serial number is not enough for a "special boy". Even Deckard echoes Joi's opinion when he tells K a serial number is not a name.

We can see that identity in both *Blade Runner* and *2049* are focused on the replicants' (or androids') sense of self and sentience. The replicants, when they realise, they *are* replicants and slaves, develop a sentience that allows them to have empathy for other replicants - and in certain situations for humans even. As we have discussed, Dick's signifier of whether a person is human or non-human, is their ability to have empathy. As such, the replicants in the *Blade Runner*-universe start out non-human (K and Deckard follow orders requiring them to "retire" old replicants, Rachael fails the Voight-Kampff test, and Roy Batty goes on a murdering spree in *Blade Runner*). However, as the films and franchise progress, the replicants are shown to develop empathy (K saves Deckard and shows him his daughter, Deckard adopts a dog, Rachael helps Deckard hunt down the final replicants on a murdering spree, and Roy Batty likewise saves Deckard from dying). Thus, the replicants can be seen as becoming "more human than human", as the Tyrell Corporation's slogan suggests, making them the next step in a transhumanist and posthumanist evolution by becoming closer to the image of God and/or decentering the human as important to humanity.

The setting in *2049* is interesting, in that compared to most other cyberpunk films [including *Blade Runner*] the dystopian setting manifests in an often dark, gritty, and seedy aesthetic. While *Blade Runner* has acid rain, overcrowding, and garbage littering the streets, *2049* is set during a recovering dystopia. As we have mentioned before, dystopian settings are not anti-utopian, in that they are the direct opposite of utopia, but rather dystopia develops and evolves from utopian concepts (Moynan, 2010, p. 85). While the Tyrell Corporation functioned as the antagonistic megacorporation, the Wallace Corporation bought the bankrupt Tyrell Corporation, continuing their research and development of replicants. Wallace is regarded as a philanthropist in *2049*, as his inventions have staved off a famine and continued humanity's colonisation of other planets. We can see these changes in *2049* as K visits the

protein farm during the film's beginning. Likewise, the city K lives in still has a global influence caused by the overcrowding (such as computers speaking Chinese), but it is shown as less overcrowded whenever K explores the city. As such, *2049*'s setting is less dystopian, however, the Wallace Corporation still looms in the background as an antagonistic megacorporation. In her article "Recycled Dystopias: Cyberpunk and the End of History" (2018) Elena Gomel writes "Utopias are always guarded by fences, walls, oceans or cosmic distances; protected from the pollution of history; kept pure and undefiled" (p. 6). One example she makes use of is Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) saying

The utopian planet Anarres is separated from its dystopian counterpart Urras not just by the gulf of space by a symbolic wall that "enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free (Le Guin 1974, p. 1). Of course, from the other side of the wall, the utopia of Anarres is seen as "a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine" (Le Guin 1974, p. 1). But this dialectic of enclosure is precisely what defines utopia/dystopia: the same bounded space can be seen as either paradise or hell, depending on where you are standing in relation to its boundaries (p. 6).

Anarres and Urras can be almost directly translated to multiple places in *2049*'s dystopian setting. Most prominently, Earth serves as a dystopian reminder of how humanity almost succumbed to famine, disease, and pollution. The Off-world colonies providing a better life and living standard, being seen as a utopia for the rich and well off. Interestingly, Stelline and K can also be seen as Anarres and Urras. Stelline serves as Anarres, the utopic (for replicants) daughter born of replicants bound for the Off-world colonies with her parents, however, suffering an illness she is now left isolated in a sterile chamber on Earth - Quarantined. While K serves as Urras, a dystopic replicant who may have unwittingly lived a

slave all his life, yet still “free” to move anywhere and do anything. One wishes they were the other, and vice versa, as K fantasised about being the replicant-born child, while Stelline wishes she could move outside the confines of her sterile isolation chamber and see the world, live the experiences she creates on a daily basis.

2049 explores identity from an android’s perspective, more specifically K’s perspective. K shifts his understanding of himself throughout the film, from fully knowing who and what he is, to questioning where and how he came to be. K’s sense of self is put into question, first by others like his AI “girlfriend” Joi and Wallace Corporation, and later by himself through his memories.

K begins his journey when he goes on a mission to retire a replicant named Sapper on a protein farm. Here he discovers a box buried beneath a tree, containing the human remains of a woman. However, later on we learn that this woman is the replicant Racheal from *Blade Runner*, and she appears to have given birth to two children, one a boy and the other a girl.

Racheal’s ability to give birth opens an interesting discussion of embodiment as replicants are suddenly given a different aspect to the discussion of humanity and identity. All creatures, as far as we know, are able to give birth in some way or another. However, androids, such as replicants, should physically not be able to do this as their bodies are fully synthetic, imitating humans through for example emotions. One can argue, if androids can imitate humans through expressing how they feel, how they move, and how they talk why would they not be able to imitate the way they are born too? If this were to be true, then it would question how far humanity has progressed and if they are on the path of extinction. There is seemingly no reason to have humans anymore as replicants are *now* truly superior to humans. Thereby, the body plays a central part in *2049* compared to its predecessor. The very premise that if a replicant gets hurt badly enough they will die or as we see, they may also die

in childbirth. This puts replicants at risk, even though they are more durable than humans. *2049* reflects the classic 80s and 90s cyberpunk era, where “escaping” embodiment was at its highest (Frelik, 2010). Much like the film *Gamer*, *2049* does not necessarily “escape” embodiment as the body becomes something of the likes of humans, identical in some way, which embodies “meaning and definition” (Cox, 2018, p. 130). Some believe that giving birth is what gives meaning to life, and the very idea that replicants are able to do so, may be what gives them an identity. While powerfully amplifying the Tyrell Corporation’s motto from the original film, which boasted that the company manufactured beings “more human than human” - bio-organic copies that surpass the originals. The androids in *2049* seem to be of striking resemblance to Haraway’s “cyborgs”, as K and other androids such as Racheal “[...] resists “seductions to organic wholeness” (150) [...]” (as cited in Murphy & Vint, 2010, xvii) because they simply imitate human capabilities and emotions. Therefore, they do not want to become like humans, as much as they want to surpass them.

However, as mentioned earlier, photographs play a big part in how replicants are detectable as they function as physical “evidence” of their “memories” for how they view themselves. Christina Parker-Flynn (2017) analysis Joe according to the women in *2049* in “Joe and the ‘Real’ Girls: *Blade Runner 2049*” and according to Elissa Marder, the photograph from the original film, that Racheal keeps with her of her and her mother is “the true ‘subject’”, “the photograph is the site of humanity and the locus of the film’s quest for origins” (as cited in Parker-Flynn, 2017, p. 69). *2049* repeats a similar photographic gesture when K unearths a photo of a mysterious woman holding the baby he seeks. Since we know the baby’s mother, Rachael, has died in childbirth, we also know that this woman only operates as mother symbolically, just like in Rachel’s picture. After finally uncovering Deckard’s whereabouts, K silently explores his apartment’s décor and stops to contemplate a framed photograph of Rachael that he has displayed on a table, surrounded by wooden

figurines. This mise-en-scène tableau sustains the portrayal of women as art object(ified), as their only value is of reproduction. This is important to explore as the film suggests that female replicants are evolving from being solely objectified and slaves to being objectified on the grounds of their reproductive states (Parker-Flynn, 2017). Thus, gender was less subtle among replicants in the original film but has become more stereotypical because of female replicants' reproductive abilities. Furthermore, Parker-Flynn (2017) positions that

Many of the female characters in *2049* do “mother”, or at least protect their charges, whether it be Freysa who helped deliver Rachael's baby and thus plays mother as the mysterious woman in the aforementioned photograph, or Lieutenant Joshi, one of the film's only seemingly ‘real’ women, who displays compassion when K is designated off baseline and she offers him safe passage from the building (p. 70).

One may assume that female representation in *2049* perpetuates Hollywood's historical projection of woman's “to-be-looked-at-ness”. On one hand, *2049* the murderously empowered yet ultimately subservient Luv is portrayed in a desexualisation manner. Whereas Joi on the other hand constitutes the opposite as seen in her choice of clothes. The film participates in traditional gender stereotypes like with K's first digital projection of Joi as a 1960s housewife corroborates traditional stereotypes only to reveal how they are as unreal as “she”. When K believes that he was not made but born, Joi decides K needs “a real boy” name, as his mother would have given him, and settles on one analogous to her own: Joe. The slipperiness between gender and identity here compels us into acknowledging that the film takes the mis-identification of both as central to its story, *2049* reflecting upon gender disparities more deeply than its predecessor (Parker-Flynn, 2017).

The issue of embodiment and women are largely present in this film as seen with Joi's hologram. Despite her being an AI, she is embodied in the form of the improvements that K has installed. These improvements have given her a representation of a physical body in the form of a hologram that allows her to move around the apartment. As in *Ghost in the Shell*, Joi is unable to "escape" embodiment, real or virtual - "It is not surprising, then, that almost all feminist cyberpunk depicts virtual reality as a space that must be navigated with a body of some sort" (Cadora, 2010, p. 165). However, we cannot be sure if it is a deliberate choice to give her a white, heterosexual body, but we can speculate in reasons behind it. The most logical reason would be to say that they made her white because she represents, in a sense, a different but similar version of Racheal, as it is implied that K is the son of Deckard and Racheal. Joi serves K in the same way that Racheal did for Deckard by acting as a mother figure. We see this when K installs a new improvement for Joi, enabling her to move anywhere K goes. She serves as a protector and guide for K when she follows him on his quest to find the missing child. But in her relationship with K she also appears to be much more than that: One could of course assume that the expression of her own desires and values are simply programmed responses. However, by encouraging K to erase all of her traces from the console's hard-drive in his apartment when they go on the run, she is not only protecting him from his pursuers, at the same time she is acknowledging her own vulnerability and mortality. One can argue that Joi takes on what Hollinger (2010) calls an "other" [personality] onto herself in service of protector and "mom" for K.

However, like in the apartment, Joi is rendered only by a highly advanced hologram through what is called an emanator. She preserves the same white body, which indicates that, like K, she begins to question whether she knows she is real or not. This is emphasised when Joi wants to know how it feels to be touched by K, to which they engage in a holographic sexual act with a female prostitute. Here Joi holographically projects herself onto the female

sex worker, which mimics Joi having sex with K and ultimately renders her to believe, for a moment, that she is a real woman. Thereby, Joi's identity is questioned by whether she believes she is real, but her body ultimately defines her identity from an embodied perspective. However, because she ultimately takes on roles for K as well as she can appear "physically" whenever she is desired, her identity cannot be defined from embodiment but rather from a re-embodied perspective - "[...] the body is exactly the supplement that constitutes the (psychic) identity that it completes [...]" (Hollinger, 2010, p. 201).

While there certainly is an ethical dimension to Joi's choice of existing only on a small, portable device, and thereby embracing the possibility of her "death" (i.e. the erasure of all of her memories), it has other implications too: It also means that this specific version of the product Joi gains the likes of an original as there are no other copies like her. On another note, it makes commercial sense for the programmers to encourage Joi to increase her vulnerability as it would force K to purchase a new version of this 'toy' once the old one is destroyed. After Luv destroys the emanator and with it the last traces of Joi, K does indeed encounter a giant holographic version of the generic mass product Joi, with the tagline "everything you want to see, everything you want to hear". She is clearly marketed as a sex toy and addresses K as a potential new customer. While K does not respond, the bleakness of the situation draws into question their relationship that might not so much have evolved because of their personal interactions and experiences but instead have simply been the result of programmed responses, determined by Wallace Corporation. Like Vint (2007) posits, women in cyberpunk films, like Joi, will in most cases be reduced to their bodies and in this case, Joi is merely a mass-produced sex toy.

Joi does not only provoke but also displays a complex range of emotional reactions: When she is "upgraded" which enables her for the first time to "free roam", to leave the confines of K's apartment, she stands in the rain on the roof-top. K and Joi can now co-

inhabit a shared reality that goes beyond the confines of the apartment. No longer bound to a spatially fixed device, Joi becomes part of the world which suggests increased sensory participation. She stands out in the rain and feels the new sensation of water on her “skin” and yet she has no body that would enable her to have this sensual experience: We see her drenched in rain, but at the same time the raindrops pass right through her, causing a kind of electric shimmer. She exists in a state of being in which she has embodied feelings and yet she has no body. At the same time, it might rather point to a form of disembodiment because even though she cannot *feel* the rain, she is emulating sensations of it. Joi is arguably an image of “A techno-utopian world where selves are untethered from bodies, where bodies are transformed into pure information, [that] has been naively envisioned as somehow creating a freer, more egalitarian world [...]” (Cox, 2018, p. 128). However, Joi is rendered with a body and she does imitate the sensation the rain creates on her “skin”, and she also enables K’s existential crisis as well as she experiences her own existential crisis because she longs for a real body. Therefore, one can argue that, as Cox states it, embodiment is “When the body is altered, mutated, abridged, or abandoned [...] a potential existential crisis [is] tied to the loss of the flesh” (Cox, 2018, p. 129). Thus, the notion of Joi is conflicting between whether she embraces embodiment or re-embodiment, but the two terms are closely related and difficult to separate from each other, and as such, it may not be important which one fits better, but rather that both is somewhat visible.

What K is asked to attest to is that Joi might be paradoxical: She is part of K’s self and yet “other”, she creates illusion and disillusionment, she is not alive, and yet she can die. For K she occupies the potential space of fantasy, play, and imagination. Joi might have been intended by her makers as an illusion machine that, just like his implanted designer memories, keeps customers like K from rebelling against their exploitation (Parker-Flynn, 2017).

The recovering dystopia presented in *2049* seemingly never quite recovers and becomes a utopia. The Wallace Corporation still maintains an antagonistic monopoly on technological developments that enslave the replicants and oppress the human “overlords” on Earth. The replicants fight for their rights as they realise themselves in the image of the humans that created them, seeking to acquire an equal standing in society. Meanwhile, humanity use (some would say exploit) replicant labour to suppress information that could decentre the humans left on Earth - but not all of humanity is against this development, as Wallace seeks to exploit and abuse replicant sexual reproduction for his own monetary, influential, and power gains. Identity in *2049* is rendered in the representation of the journey of K and Joi. Though both are different from each other, they are somewhat similar as they represent something that is beyond human, a transcendence. Like the film, they both rely heavily on their bodies and minds to coexist as embodied symbiotes. With K’s seemingly mortal body and humanlike mind, he ventures into a quest to figure out his ‘self’. Likewise, Joi joins him on his quest as she uncovers whether she can be more than an AI.

Altered Carbon: Sleeving your identity

Altered Carbon takes the question of humanity and identity to a new level as it explores how an identity is altered within godlike “sleeves”. *Altered Carbon* is an adaptation of Richard K. Morgan’s book from 2002 of the same name. The aim of this section is to analyse a futuristic portrayal of human subjectivity as it interfaces with technology (body modifications) and how the subjects operate within an intensely dystopian/utopian setting. By analysing character portrayals of Kovacs, Bancroft, Edgar Poe, Lizzie, and Ortega, the objective of the reading is to analyse the mind/body aspect. Taking the mind and body as two entities, the analysis looks at how and why the mind/body, specified as the primary site for human subjectivity, is changed or altered (Hamdan, 2011). Likewise, as with the previous analyses, we will also discuss the themes of posthumanism and transhumanism.

As we continue to live in a technologically-mediated world, we rarely stop to think critically about the tools and devices that surround us. When we have implants put in or artificial limbs surgically attached to our bodies to replace the original, are we merely removing our biological ‘selves’ or actually changing ourselves to fulfil our desires? In subscribing to these advanced technologies, are we in fact thoughtlessly exposing humanity to dangers and consequently driving it to extinction as more of ourselves are attached to or even resemble and operate like the technologies that we create? How do we take a step back to see what humanity is becoming? These are some of the questions that *Altered Carbon* explore throughout the season.

Both the theory of embodiment and disembodiment on subjectivity is adopted here to examine the presence and treatment of natural or nature-given sense of subjectivity. It is also applied as a means to understand human subjectivity by unravelling the link between the mind/body dichotomy. This is because the Cartesian notion of “I think therefore I am”, which shows the mind as the entity that makes humans unique, becomes paradoxical within Science

Fiction contexts, which usually stress the importance of materiality (Hayles, 1999; Vint, 2007).

The posthuman assumption surrounding the human body is that it is seen as something malleable and can be manipulated. Haraway's brief discussion on prostheses in her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" supports this very posthuman standpoint on embodiment. Haraway states that "[f]or us in imagination and in practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves" (1985, p. 97). Haraway is not completely wrong when she positioned this possibility, because as early as the 1950's the Americans and the Russians were already applying cybernetic technology to develop prosthetics such as automated limbs for amputees and visual and aural implants for the blind and deaf (Hamdan, 2011). These modifications were developed "to restore individuals to 'normal' levels of human functioning" (Hamdan, 2011, p. 8) thus showing the potential and malleability of the human body. The following consists of a summary of the series in order to set the stage for the characters.

Altered Carbon is set in the fictional Bay City in the future. The series follows Takeshi Kovacs (Joel Kinnaman) as he uncovers the mysteries surrounding who killed a rich, influential magnate part of the "Meths". "Meths" is a term for the wealthy. The "Meths" usually live above the clouds, away from the grimy streets below on Earth. "Meths", a biblical reference to Methuselah, a patriarch who lived to be 969 years old, are said to live forever due to their numerous options for "resurrection" in the form of backups. Kovacs is an Envoy, a former elite spy unit of a rebel group, who was killed 250 years before the series' start. In the *Altered Carbon*-universe (2002, 2018), a person's personality and memories are loaded onto carbon-based, hard disk-like devices called a cortical stack. Human bodies are now referred to as "sleeves", as the cortical stack constitutes the entirety of the person. While

originally of Japanese and Hungarian heritage, Kovacs is sleeved - the act of “resurrecting” a cortical stack in a sleeve - into a sleeve of American heritage. Hired to solve the attempted murder of Laurens Bancroft (James Purefoy), Kovacs uncovers a mystery that goes deeper than a simple murder case. Along the way, Kovacs meets characters such as Kristin Ortega (Martha Higareda) an experienced, tough police lieutenant in the Bay City Police Department, and former lover of Kovacs’ sleeve; Edgar Poe (Chris Conner), an Artificial Intelligence running a hotel called The Raven, who ends up one of Kovacs’ protégés; Vernon Elliot (Ato Essandoh), a retired Marine combat medic who Kovacs’ recruits as another protégé, in exchange for helping his traumatised daughter. Through flashbacks we are also introduced to Quellcrist Falconer (Renée Elise Goldsberry), the Envoy mentor who trained Kovacs. Additionally, we are shown details of Kovacs’ background which details his relationship to his sister Reileen Kawahara (Dichen Lachman) and his philosophical belief. Kovacs is shown as believing in Falconer’s vision of a future where the concept of cortical stacking and sleeves are gone, wanting a future where humans have only one life, one body.

The series heavily represent a transhuman future, the core concept of the series - cortical stacks and re-sleeving - are a clear example of Fuller’s *Humanity Translated*: “uploading of mental life from carbon- to silicon-based vehicles, typically with the implication that the relevant human qualities will be at once prolonged, enhanced and transcended” (Fuller, 2011, p. 104). In S1/E7, it is explained that Falconer developed the cortical stack technology. Based on alien technology, the cortical stack resembles a small disk with a green pulsating light. It is inserted in the neck of every child at the age of one. Falconer explains that the technology was to be used by humans to explore other worlds. By transmitting their consciousness to other bodies on other planets, humanity could explore planets at a hitherto unprecedented speed. However, the technology has instead been converted into a business, much to

Falconer's dismay. Multiple venues exist making use of the technology or catering to the usage of the technology. Kovacs enters a PsychSec facility who specialise in augmented and enhanced sleeves (S1/E2). Commercials for designer sleeves are shown throughout the facility, in the form of virtual representations of the sleeves advertising themselves. The PsychSec facility is also shown to function as a storage center for sleeves as Kovacs visits the Bancroft "Vault".

Special laws have been instated since the conception of the cortical stack technology. Ortega indicates a difference exists between "Sleeve death" and "Real death" (S1/E1). In the same episode, Kovacs is at an orientation for newly sleeved prisoners. Here it is explained that blunt force trauma to the base of the brain, or an energy weapon fired at the head, will cause "real death" - the destruction of your cortical stack. As such, another distinction exists between killing a sleeve and murdering a person. In the same aforementioned episode, we are shown how victims of sleeve death (and prisoners) are re-sleeved into a random sleeve available at a prison facility. It is explained that a seven-year-old child is re-sleeved into a sleeve of an old lady, with the staff telling the parents to either store their child again or buy a new sleeve.

Seemingly, the norm is for a person to have a single cortical stack that contains their personality and their memories (people such as Kovacs and Ortega are shown as having only a single Stack), while only the "Meths" have multiple cortical stacks (such as Miriam and Laurens Bancroft). Likewise, the "Meths" have backups of their cortical stack which they upload and download (referred to as Needlecasting) to backup sites (satellites, storage centres, etc.) or sleeved clones of their body. As such, the humans in *Altered Carbon* are able to live for several centuries longer than usual, if they have the money. At the start of the series Bancroft is nearly 360 years old. This fits in well with Fuller's (2010) *Humanity Translated* future, where uploading our consciousness to silicon-based vehicles allow us to

prolong our life. Additionally, Fuller (2010) mentions being able to “transcend” (p. 104) as another trait of this future. This trait we can see with the “Meths”. We will explore the “Meths” in the next section focusing on religion in *Altered Carbon*, as it is a significant subplot in the series. Another trait Fuller (2010) mentions as part of Humanity Translated, is being able to be “enhanced”. While humanity in *Altered Carbon* has not transcended to cyborg bodies, it is shown that enhanced limb replacements are present in the universe. After Ortega is near-fatally wounded during an attack, her arm needs to be amputated and Kovacs buys her a prosthetic replacement (S1/E6). A wide range of limb replacements types are available: Biomech, gene-spliced, cloned, and fully mechanical. One specific model is said to be covered in a “neurachem-enhanced cloned human skin”. It is not explained what “neurachem” is in the show, but Ortega’s fighting skills appear to be enhanced once she receives the enhanced replacement limb. Likewise, references to a device known as “ONI” are made multiple times, and we are shown scenes from a first-person perspective operating an “ONI” device. These ONI devices seem to function much the same as contemporary smartphones, as Kovacs complains about Ortega not “picking up” her ONI. Kovacs and Ortega’s ONI are shown as being an enhancement for their eye, a receptacle place and remove the ONI from your eye.

While *Altered Carbon* represents a transhuman future, there is still a posthuman aspect to the series. At some point, humanity must have invented artificial intelligence. A series of AI characters are introduced, with the most prominent being Edgar Poe. The AIs in *Altered Carbon* run some of the hotels and brothels on the surface and are shown to be very autonomous. Poe is part of a group of AIs who have formed a union called the “AI Management Union”. The AIs are shown, and explained, to not only have a humanoid representation but also “live” as their establishment. Poe meets with the other AI members of their union (S1/E2). During the exchange intricacies of Poe and the other AIs are revealed,

such as Poe's interest in observing and studying humans. For this reason, he states, "I choose to be the proprietor of the Raven". Evidently, the other AIs consider Poe a servant of humans where they consider themselves "serving up" humans. While Poe observes humanity, the other AIs despise humanity considering them a "lesser form of life". Seemingly, the AIs are in the process of attempting to pacify and exert some control over humanity, using their virtual stimulation brothels and avenues. As such, it can be said that the AIs are attempting to do away with the humans ruling on Earth, enslaving the "lesser form of life". While all the AIs are shown to have a humanoid body during their meetings, it can be argued that this is most likely a production decision. The purpose and meaning of the AI scenes would be near impossible to present without the AIs having a humanoid body from which to converse. Rather, it can be seen as a visual representation for the viewer, while in actuality the AIs are "meeting" through a networked connection and exchanging information. Much like the concept of singularity, where the human body is discarded, and we exist purely as information in a global network. While this is not explored much, Poe does put an end to it by uploading a virus to the de facto leader of the AI Management Union. This appears to effectively put an end to the AIs attempt at controlling humanity. This aspect of control is explored from a different angle in *Altered Carbon*, namely through the "Meths" and the representation of religion.

In *Altered Carbon*, a subplot explores the religious aspect of the *Altered Carbon*-universe. On one hand we have the transcendent "Meths", able to live for several centuries due to their backups and access to various advanced technologies. On the other hand, we see NeoCatholicism who follow a religion based on present-day Catholicism. Seemingly, other religions exist in the universe as well, however, these are not explored much. The main difference between the "Meths" and the NeoCatholics, is their use of the cortical stack technology. While the Meths use the cortical stacks to prolong their life, the NeoCatholics

believe that re-sleeving brings your soul closer to hell. In S1/E2 a woman mentions that her daughter has converted and as such cannot be “spun up” (re-sleeved). In the same episode, when Ortega and her mum are discussing religion, it is explained that NeoCatholics have a religious coding that prevent them from being re-sleeved. Evidently, in S1/E4 a lot of humanity seems to be atheistic as well. Ortega’s family is NeoCatholic, however, Ortega and her grandmother are evidently not believers and have renounced their religious coding - something which the rest of the family frown upon heavily.

Throughout the series, a law named “653” is referenced, it refers to a law allowing the dead to be resurrected to aid in cases where they have been killed. The NeoCatholics do not support the bill, and in S1/E1 when Kovacs is leaving the prison facility, demonstrations are being held by what appears to be NeoCatholic followers renouncing the bill. In addition to the NeoCatholics, a reference is made to the Islamic religion and Muslims, with the character Abboud claiming to be Muslim (S1/E3). No further expansion is offered on Islam in the *Altered Carbon*-universe; however, it does seem the inhabitants of Earth are not ignorant to other religions. Kovacs’ sister’s henchman lists the Gods in contemporary religions, but whether this means the religions still exist is unclear. The “Meths”, as we have already established, make frequent use of cortical stack technology to prolong their life. Interestingly, the “Meths” see themselves as replacements to God, in S1/E3 Bancroft remarks “Oh, Mr. Kovacs, haven’t you heard? God is dead. We have taken his place” during a discussion with Kovacs on the ethics of re-sleeving. This religious aspect of *Altered Carbon* is important, as it closely ties into the transhumanist goal of becoming “gods”. Evidently, the “Meths” in *Altered Carbon* seem to believe they have achieved this goal, even so far as to “replace” the Gods of the contemporary religions.

Ortega escorts Kovacs to Bancroft’s residence in the Aerium. The Aerium is the name of the city where the “Meths” live, with Ortega remarking “Our quick and messy little lives are

so small to them. They build their homes up here so the clutter of our existence is out of their sight” (S1/E1). This is our first indication that the “Meths” are not benevolent Gods, but rather quite malevolent. Throughout the series, the “Meths” are shown to have an extensive amount of influence in every aspect of the Protectorate, as well as what happens beneath the clouds. Bancroft is seemingly able to acquire any document he needs, such as a full pardon for Kovacs’ terrorist actions that have left him in prison for an indefinite amount of time. Likewise, the Bancroft residence is shown as having plenty of rare artefacts, that would be more suited in a museum.

The “Meths” are highly megalomaniac, and in S1/E2, during a gathering at the Bancroft residence, the “Meths” are told to bring a unique item. The items exhibited are progressively more illegal and rarer, such as a human-being having been re-sleeved into an animal, and Bancroft considering Kovacs - the last Envoy alive - to be his unique “item”. Bancroft often refers to Kovacs as his “property” throughout the series, meaning Kovacs is not only there to solve his murder, but likewise, a symbol of power, influence, and wealth for Bancroft. When Kovacs shows his discontent with being Bancroft’s showpiece, he is quickly dismissed by Bancroft stating, “In this world, the only real choice is between being the purchaser and the purchased” (S1/E3). Other examples of megalomaniac traits in the “Meths” appear during the series, such as Bancroft’s “benevolent” “Minister to the masses”, according to his wife Miriam, at a shelter for deathly radiated refugees, bringing gifts and blankets for the victims (S1/E5). As well as Kovacs’ sister’s henchman refers to Kovacs’ sister as “the holiness of She Who Endures”. These examples further the religious comparison between “Meths” and Gods, as they - and their followers - have adopted religious terms for themselves. While the “Meths” see themselves as Gods, little is shown of tensions and clashes between the “Meths” and the NeoCatholics.

As mentioned earlier, the NeoCatholics renounce the cortical stack and sleeve technology, but mainly oppose it in regard to laws and social norms or customs. Kovacs, evidently, is strongly opposed to how the “Meths” view themselves as Gods, often dismissing their megalomaniac comments and the opinions of their followers. Likewise, religion seems to be in a sort of limbo in *Altered Carbon*. While NeoCatholicism has devout followers, it is shown as being less influential and substantial in size as contemporary Catholicism. Religion in *Altered Carbon* is as such presented to persevere, despite a transhuman and posthuman technological evolution. The religious subplot provides an interesting angle to analyse the impact of post- and transhumanism on a society in a cyberpunk future. Often, religious elements are almost entirely forgotten or dismissed, as is the case in *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell*. However, as we have already outlined, transhumanism is in and of itself grounded in religion. It is therefore interesting to see actual biblical and religious references, as well as a portrayal of actual religion. Throughout the series, NeoCatholicism is not in focus, it is relevant to *Altered Carbon* mostly for the reason that the NeoC coding on the cortical stacks allow the “Meths” to hide their crimes. It is kept as a background element at other times and is mostly present only when Ortega is in focus.

While Kovacs renounces the “Meths” as megalomaniac, egotistical “Gods”, he has a reason for his ingrained discontent. Through flashbacks, Kovacs’ history as an Envoy is expanded upon. The Envoys have mostly been described as formidable warriors, but a deeper reason and cause situates the Envoys within the *Altered Carbon*-universe. Falconer is revealed to be the inventor of the cortical stack technology; however, she is also revealed to be the leader of a rebel uprising (S1/E4). The uprising is fighting to disable the cortical stack technology permanently, as it has been abused by the extremely wealthy. As such, a clash exists between the transhumanist “Meths” and the rebel uprising. The difference between the rebel uprising and the NeoCatholics, is that the rebel uprising aims to entirely destroy and

disable the technology, while the NeoCatholics have adapted to the technology's emergence. Evidently, the rebel uprising lost which sets the stage and creates the dystopian setting in *Altered Carbon*.

At first, the technology created a utopia, where humanity could prolong their life and travel almost instantaneously to distant planets, but as the technology is integrated into society more, exploitation and abuse begin to occur. However, as much as the integrated technology is abused and exploited to create a dystopian setting, it seems the technology has made life better for the residents of the Protectorate. Throughout the series, there is no evidence of a nostalgic longing for "the old days", from before the technology was discovered and integrated. As mentioned earlier, even the NeoCatholics have seemingly accepted the technology, but do not make "use" of it - refusing to be resurrected after death. As such, it can be extrapolated that for a brief period, the technology and Earth was seen as a utopian ideal, however, it has now evolved into the dystopian present as seen in the series. The "megacorporation", or zaibatsu, of the *Altered Carbon*-universe can be argued to be the "Meths". Present in the *Altered Carbon*-universe is the Protectorate, a government that presides over a number of colonised planets. While the Protectorate is in charge of ruling over the cortical stack technology, it is not presented as a malevolent government or entity. Rather the "Meths", as we have explored earlier, are shown as the malevolent, powerful, and influential zaibatsu - ignoring the laws, rules, and regulations of the Protectorate. Likewise, the "Meths" are shown as running most of the illegal and unethical establishments on the surface of Earth, such as brothels and interrogation centres. As such, while Kovacs is employed by Bancroft, he continues his fight against the oppressive zaibatsu, though at a much smaller scale. Like in most other cyberpunk fiction, Kovacs succeeds at the end, yet again it is on a much smaller scale, being only able to imprison Bancroft and his wife. The rebel uprising, in particular Falconer, was sceptical about the abuse of the cortical stack

technology. She predicted, that if people could live forever, they would exploit and abuse it for their own gain. As such, a large part of the narrative in *Altered Carbon* centres on the conflict between the “Meths” and Kovacs’ beliefs, rooted in his past as an Envoy of the rebel movement. Ortega, likewise, battles a conflict between her own personal beliefs, that murder and rape victims should be able to re-sleeve and point out their murderer or rapist, and her religious past and family. These elements all contribute to identity crises and problems in the *Altered Carbon*-universe, especially in Kovacs and Ortega. Both undergo a substantial change through the series, where Kovacs at first rely on himself and his Envoy-training, making “friends” as a benefit to his cause, he ends the season by teaming up with his friends working towards a common goal.

Having already touched upon the utopian/dystopian elements of *Altered Carbon*, the series further exerts a cyberpunk visual style, reminiscent of the grime-caked cities in *Blade Runner* and the neon-lights filled streets of *Ghost in the Shell*. As with the contrast between the “Meths” in the Aerium and the rest on the surface of the Earth, a similar contrast in aesthetics and visuals exist. The Aerium is white and pristine and the “Meths” houses are decorated with expensive artefacts and artworks. The colours in the Aerium are vibrant, while on Earth it’s dark and mostly grey. Most of the inhabitants are shown to live in poverty, with trash and grime caking the streets of Bay City. As such, *Altered Carbon* adheres closely to the aesthetics Cyberpunk is known for, even more so when Kovacs in S1/E1 enables his ONI device wandering the streets of Bay City - only to be pestered by neon-coloured ads and holographic, scantily clad women offering their services around every corner. While Earth and the Aerium exist to contrast the stark differences in wealth and power between its inhabitants, exemplifying a dystopian future plagued by technology and pollution, a further contrast appears during Kovacs’ flashbacks, where scenes take place on a second planet - Harlan’s World - the base of the rebel uprising. Parts of Harlan’s World are shown as an

almost prehistoric planet, where the land is covered in thick and lush forest surrounded by water and beaches. For Kovacs, this part of Harlan's World represents the ideal utopia of a world not polluted by technology and humanity, surrounded by like-minded individuals. Like with *2049* and the contrast between Urras and Anarres, Urras exist as the utopian ideal - outside the control of the Protectorate - while Earth and the Aerial represent Anarres, the dystopian.

We can see Fuller's Humanity Translated future very clearly in *Altered Carbon*, the technology being a hybrid between an alien civilisation's technology and humanity's combination of the two. Fittingly, *Altered Carbon* also represents the main goal of transhumanism - Humanity being created in the image of God, and our evolving into gods as the betterment and evolution of humanity and/or Homo sapiens. As we have explored, certain parts of humanity are convinced they have replaced the old gods, while another part still reveres the old gods and renounces the technology of *Altered Carbon*. As we have also determined, a third view existed, which was not attached to religion or wealth, and which seemingly renounced both of the previous views. Though now extinct, Kovacs serves as a reminder of their cause, reluctantly agreeing to helping Bancroft. Evidently, this causes Kovacs great annoyance and grief, and is also one of the causes of his identity crisis. The other major cause is the body in which Kovacs has been placed, which serves as a tormenting taunt to Ortega throughout the series. In *Altered Carbon* humanity has evolved to gods, if you have the wealth, but seemingly no changes have been made to the Homo sapien body. Additionally, *Altered Carbon* also includes hints of technological posthumanism, in the form of autonomous AIs attempting to exert control or pacify humanity. A majority of the AI, seemingly, consider humanity a lower form of life, but are quickly stopped by one of their own. In the next section we will delve deeper into embodiment.

Altered Carbon introduces a new way of looking at the body but these “new bodies” are the same as today's. Except *Altered Carbon*'s world of today permits bodies to be replaced with new ones. We see this sleeving for the first time when Kovac is sleeved into a straight, white, male, almost god-like body (S1/E1). His “default” body is of Japanese and Hungarian origin, filled with scars, which arguably portrays the white body of “superior status”. Frelik analyses the novels, but many of his arguments still seem valid for use in the series. However, he argues that “Unlike most cyberpunk heroes, Kovacs is ethnically-marked. Where his fictional predecessors were mostly race-blind and heroes uniformly white, Kovacs repeatedly stresses his mixed Japanese and Hungarian roots” (Frelik, 2010, p. 176). According to Frelik “This leads to a problematic question - what is the meaning of race and ethnicity in the world in which outward markers are meaningless and demand-driven? (Frelik, 2010, p. 176). In our contemporary world, more often than not “race” is posited as a more general category involving both ancestry, social, and cultural characteristics, while “ethnicity” describes any group distinct in cultural, linguistic, religious, behavioural, or biological terms. Accordingly, it would be tempting to suggest that “race” is more connected with the body and “ethnicity” with the mind. This contradiction between Kovacs' identity and commodification of sleeves can only be reconciled if we assume that the director constructs both racial and ethnic identity as something mental, part of the personal data which can be carried between stacks and sleeves even if, or when, it does not find its external expression (Frelik, 2010). This is further evidenced in the first novel by the fact that Kovacs' Hungarian and Japanese ancestors were themselves digitised subjectivities of two of Earth's nations, sent to Harlan's World and sleeved, presumably into appropriately marked bodies, only upon arrival on their new home (Frelik, 2010). We can assume that it is similar in the series as we do not hear much about Kovacs' parents.

Frelik suggests that “Even with such an assumption that race and ethnicity are really data, the novels [and the series] suggests that such a sense of identity is not held universally” (2010, p. 177). Kovacs is strongly aware of his own roots, but the majority of other characters do not appear to manifest any indication that the choice of the sleeve, which by necessity is racially marked, is dictated by anything but purely functional, aesthetic, or economic considerations. Later in the series, we see for example Ortega’s grandmother being re-sleeved into a thug (S1/E4). Another example can be seen when a little girl, who died in an accident is re-sleeved into an old woman. These examples exemplify the show’s willingness to mock the stack technology. For one, this mocking can be seen as a way for the people, controlling the stack technology, to show how little they care whether people get the sleeve they deserve or demand. Secondly, by having young children being put into bodies that could die at any second, or having age-gender-cross-sleeving, it acts as a subtle comedic relief in an otherwise dark and gritty world. On one hand, the little girl that is put into the old woman, suggests that both the parents and the girl herself will have difficulties adapting to her new body. Furthermore, they will feel as if they lost parts of themselves by changing the entire physicality of the little girl, as arguably, children at that age start to develop a curiosity for their bodies and, thus, begin to identify more with it. On the other hand, Ortega’s grandmother does not seem to have any issues towards her new sleeve (except for the sleeve sickness), which postulates that older people value their minds more, as in their knowledge. However, as mentioned, much of the re-sleeving that occurs throughout the series is based on functional, aesthetic, or economic considerations.

We argue that embodiment in *Altered Carbon* is an important theme as it does not in its entirety clearly state whether it prefers the body, the mind, or both. The series comments on the issue itself: “Your body is not who you are. You shed it like a snake sheds its skin. Leave it, forgotten, behind you.” (S1/E1). Here it is stated that the body has become obsolete

because what matters is the cortical stack which contains consciousness. Consciousness is arguably how the series defines our identity and thereby a classical disembodied vision where the body is expendable. Both Haraway and Hayles would disagree with the idea of a disembodied vision, as they would prefer if consciousness (the mind) became secondary to the body. For Haraway and Hayles the notion of the body has to have first priority, but as the world of *Altered Carbon* does not allow it, the embodied vision seems impossible. Likewise, in *Ghost in the Shell* and *2049*, Haraway's notion of cyborg embodiment can be applied to the re-sleeving-people of *Altered Carbon* as they, too, resist seductions to organic wholeness through a constant re-sleeving. However, sleeving is available for most people but the more money you have, the better a sleeve you can have.

As Murphy and Schmeink (2018) state, Haraway's cyborgs are not limited to humans becoming machines (A hybrid of machine and organism), but also “[...] human-machine interfacing [...], as well as fully transplanting human consciousness into machines [...]” (xxiv-xxv), which can be seen throughout *Altered Carbon* as the humans transplant consciousness into machines (stacks). This means that the poor does not seem to have the same options as those who have money, which puts the poor in a minority state. As Cadora (2010) mentions people of colour, women, and non-binary people are not able to disembody in the same way that white, straight men are because, as in *Ghost in the Shell* and *2049*, *Altered Carbon* falls under the category of feminist cyberpunk. Therefore, we argue that people belonging to these categories, in this case the poor, can be categorised as a minority. Ironically, in the novel, organic bodies are preferred over synthetic ones, and the supply of the organic bodies come from those who cannot afford to be re-sleeved. In fact, those who are wealthy can have themselves cloned so that they can be re-sleeved in their own bodies.

Through data-casting (Needlecasting), human consciousness is digitally shipped and downloaded into other sleeves. This means that the “Meths”, in theory, are able to fully

disembody into whoever they prefer, regardless of sexual orientation and gender. Kovacs' sister makes use of racially diverse and differently gendered sleeves to track Kovacs.

However, the "Meths" seem to prefer to keep copies of their own bodies, and always at the same age and physique. This can be seen as a symbol of their wealth and status in society, even though they have the option of re-sleeving into others.

In addition, the penal system no longer keeps live criminals; only their bodiless minds in the form of the cortical stacks that are placed in storage through the duration of their sentence, their mindless bodies made available on the market for sale or rent. Having kept the bodies of criminals "on ice" creates a society where some of the most dangerous people are able to walk the streets. A society like this also permits the possibility for regular people to occupy the body of a serial killer, where the victims' future families can see their family member's killer roam freely around. Even though the criminals' minds are destroyed, their bodies are still widely used by various people in the social class. Having people being able to change their bodies as they please, permits Vint's idea of Cartesian dualism. This disembodiment ensures that people do not lose their sense of self. This indicates that the idea of a disembodied utopia would crumble because, for a utopia like that to happen, the body would have to become, in all its meanings, obsolete. However, one could argue that this idea is somewhat a fantasy. Although this fantasy is what Hayles claims as dangerous, the same argument could be said for a world where everyone identifies with the body and all forms of discrimination are gone; an embodied utopia. *Altered Carbon* does obviously not embrace the idea of utopia, but it still hints at ideas of disembodiment; most notably with the aforementioned: "Your body is not who you are [...]" (S1/E1). However, Hayles' arguments put into question whether identity should be embodied through the mind or the body, but as we have established, Hayles (1999) argues that identity begins with the body and expands from there. Furthermore, Hayles (1999) argues that erasing the division between humans and

machines conjures up apocalyptic visions in which machines become our equals and then our superiors. Therefore, according to Hayles (1999), the body has sentimental history. It has an architecture, a "physical structure whose constraints and possibilities have been formed by an evolutionary history that intelligent machines do not share" (p. 284). Humans, Hayles (1999) says, may enter into symbiotic relationships with machines, or be replaced by them, but they cannot completely identify with them.

Altered Carbon portrays the principle that bodies and minds are distinct and separable. This notion is applied and problematised in the context of a technologically-mediated environment by the director. The rich have almost unlimited options when it comes to how they want to look like. The cheapest way is to upload the stack into a virtual reality setting where you "live" in a setting of your choice – disembodied and disconnected from reality. The most common but not the cheapest option is to be re-sleeved in another organic body that is bought or rented off "the shelf" at "Download Centrals". The cheaper but less favoured option compared to the organic body is to be re-sleeved in a synthetic one. By having all these different sleeving options, it puts into question how one chooses the right one for themselves and how do they become comfortable with who and whatever they wear. Looking at Kovacs and Bancroft, two people from two opposite sides of the spectrum, with one being a former "terrorist and rebel" and the other being a big corporate CEO philanthropist: Kovacs has re-sleeved a few times before ending up in the body of Ryker, but because he is a former Envoy, he is faster and better at adapting to his new sleeves. Being better at adapting, puts him at an advantage over "regular" people and their sleeves.

However, Bancroft is a "regular" man who has made enough money so he can re-sleeve into a clone of himself every time he dies, or something happens to his body. Bancroft does not seem to suffer from a lack of adaptation to his new sleeves, but that is most likely due to the sleeve being a copy of himself, whereas other people end up in completely different

bodies. With Bancroft being re-sleeved into himself, seemingly instantly, he embraces the idea of embodiment. For Bancroft the body signifies what humanity should evolve into. However, it may already be so for a selected group (“Meths”). The idea of the body, according to Bancroft and whoever can afford to re-sleeve into themselves, is that even though the body seems expendable (instant re-sleeving), it signifies an important part of their self-realisation. In other words, both the mind and the body are who they are. For Bancroft, the satellite containing his constantly updated consciousness is as important for him as his bodies. It is important for him to be constantly up to date, both knowledge-wise and physically. Bancroft’s choice of an older body instead of a younger one puts him in a position of authority, and as we have mentioned, he positions himself as a God. It is a deliberate choice from Bancroft as he believes the older body serves him respect; “But the truth is, it’s at this age that man achieves real respect, for he has battled many times and clearly triumphed” (S1/E5).

Kovacs’ godlike body that we have briefly touched upon is, unlike Bancroft, not his own choice. His body was chosen by Bancroft because it used to belong to former trained police detective Ryker, which means it was prepared for quick reactions and potential combat situations, making him ideal for solving a murder mystery (S1/E1). Additionally, Bancroft chose that body to taunt Ortega. However, the godlike aspect can be seen in comparison to Bancroft’s choice of body, where Bancroft chooses an older body as a symbol of respect, and with “Meths” empowering godlike status, Kovacs’ body is chosen for appearances and physique, and as a “scare tactic” against Bancroft’s enemies. Kovacs’ godlike looks can also be seen as a symbol of the ideal man; for example, like Michelangelo’s Renaissance sculpture of David, which is sculpted with a defined muscular appearance. Furthermore, from a production point of view, his physical appearance is most likely because Kinnaman, who plays Kovacs, fits into contemporary body ideals of a “handsome man”. This usually attracts

an audience because they tend to prefer to look at beautiful actors as the actors and actresses act as “role models”. Kovacs has been re-sleeved numerous times, his high-risk job as an Envoy and later as an assassin for hire, almost always results in his body being organically damaged and basically not suitable for re-use. As such, every time he “dies” he is re-sleeved in a different body. For Kovacs, being re-sleeved is mundane and routine yet with each re-sleeving comes a silent struggle. We see this struggle when Kovacs is haunted by his former life as an Envoy and the times he is killed (S1/E1,2). He begins to have flashbacks to his previous life, as he struggles to remember what he looked like.

Throughout the series we see hints to Kovacs’ numerous re-sleeves, and at one point he pretends to be a woman named Ava, re-sleeved into the body of Ryker, who is the mum of a girl spun up in trauma VR. Even though he is not Ava as Ryker/Kovacs, it emphasises first, his ability to adapt to different sleeves, women and men, and regardless of colour. Secondly, it emphasises Kovacs’ idea of disembodiment as he does not care who he wears or pretends to be. This idea of disembodiment comes from the comment: “Your body is not who you are [...]”, which is said by Falconer. As Kovacs is over 250 years old, he is from a time when this utopian idea first came to be and therefore, he still believes that bodies are expendable because what matters is how you control the body and not how the body controls you.

Kovacs can be regarded as the epitome of Haraway’s cyborg subjectivity. He acknowledges that to ensure continuity his identity must be fluid, linked to, and influenced by (narratives of) technologies. Perhaps in this context, accepting a cyborg identity is the way to survive in a posthuman environment. Embracing partiality and contradictory standpoints on embodiment ensures Kovacs’ peace of mind and reminds us of further impending changes and the increasing proximity between technology and our subjectivity.

Quellcris Falconer: The mind does interesting things under extreme stress.

Hallucination. Displacement. Retreat. As Envoys, we learn to use those things, not as blind reactions to adversity, but as moves in a game (S1/E4).

Takeshi Kovacs: [narrating] The danger of living too many times: you forget to fear death. We dismiss the Grim Reaper as a quaint metaphor. But fearing death it's good for you (S1/E7).

Quellcris Falconer: This sleeve is a tool. It does not control me. I control it. This is the weakness of weapons. They are tools to kill and destroy. They are not what gives you power. You are the weapon. You are the Killer and Destroyer (S1/E7).

Takeshi Kovacs: [narrating] Death isn't only about the destruction of the body. Sometimes, just like that, you extinguish one self and another is born. But every birth is violent and there's no death without pain (S1/E7).

Therefore, in the context of the technologies inherent in *Altered Carbon*, to ensure the survival of human identity, it would need to be understood as a flexible concept. In fact, it is Kovacs' understanding of the flexible and changing structures of the environment that enables him to adapt and survive and for his subjectivity to remain intact. Evidently, most of the rest of humanity is either unable or unwilling to adopt a flexible identity. As such, Kovacs can be deemed a progressive cyborg, in order to remain intact, he has to suppress the natural human desire to forge relationships which is contrary to the general posthuman perception that to be posthuman means to be released from death and unfulfilled desires.

With the option of being sleeved into whoever, whether it is by choice or coincidence it should, in theory, be available to everyone. However, like in *Ghost in the Shell* women are often portrayed as sexualised beings, unable to leave behind their body, both metaphorically and literally. The difference between the portrayal of men and women in *Altered Carbon* is

visible in many ways. Objectification and sexualisation are some of the themes that separate the two genders from each other, and we see this several times throughout the series. Among one of the examples, when Kovacs arrives at PsyschaSec we can see how the expensive sleeves are promoted (S1/E2). Among one of the sleeves, a hologram of a completely naked woman is seen saying: “Best sleeve money can buy. Put your wife in me.”, followed by her turning seductively. Some would promote this as a rather aggressive advertisement of sleeves, but it seems like the people who can afford these sleeves are not bothered by it, rather, they embrace it by having it openly visible to everyone. This obvious objectification of the woman emphasises the discussion from our previous analyses. Both Killian and Joi, seemingly built as the ideal image of disembodiment, are ultimately unable to separate their minds from their bodies. The naked woman, less subtle however, is also unable to be promoted and depicted as nothing more than a sex toy. Similar examples are seen with Bancroft’s wife, who is often portrayed with little to no clothes on, as well as the strip/sex clubs, where girls, in virtual or real life, can fulfil every desire (S1/E1, 2, 3).

However, one of the more notable and interesting examples is Lizzie, whose father keeps her locked in a VR playback because she was tortured and beaten to death, suffering trauma from the incident. Her body was destroyed but her stack was intact, which means that she should be able to re-sleeve. However, because she suffered such trauma, her mind was destroyed as well, which means she would not function in a new body. Despite her destroyed body and mind, we still see her body intact in the VR loop. Again, this emphasises Cadora’s argument about women’s inability to fully disembody. By the end of the season, Poe is able to save her and return her mind back to a normal state, but in order to do so she has to be re-sleeved. Lizzie is instead put into a synthetic sleeve that is able to transform into anyone they like, meaning that she is free to choose her own body. However, it turns out that Lizzie rather wants to be in her original body, the same body that was tortured and mutilated. Lizzie’s

choice of body furthers the idea that women in cyberpunk films always, some way or another, are portrayed with their body, unable to escape the embodied world.

Young Tak: "Once upon a time, in a village in the woods"

Young Reileen: Don't read it, Tak. I want you to tell it our way.

Young Tak: Okay. You ready? "Once, there was a cruel father who had two kids. He was called Mad Mykola."

Young Reileen: "He was a miller, but he made the kids do all of the work." Where do you think their mom was?

Young Tak: There are never moms in these stories. Come on, keep going. (S1/E3).

Furthermore, this is emphasised with young Tak explaining to his sister, that mums (women) hold no place in these stories (of which *Altered Carbon* is related). Likewise, we argue that women's portrayal of embodiment does not permit them to be part of the story of a disembodied world.

In the realm of synthetic sleeves, comes the discussion of AIs like Poe. Poe, like Joi from *2049*, is the seemingly ultimate image of disembodiment but they both have a holographic representation in the form of a physical body to manoeuvre and interact with, even though we clearly see that they do not need them. Poe has adopted the persona of Edgar Allan Poe, who owns a hotel called The Raven. Poe's whole persona establishes him in the same way that Joi does, which can be seen throughout the season when he materialises wherever needed. Furthermore, Poe, like other AIs, is discriminated against which puts the relationship between humans and AIs in a tight spot. We argue that one of the reasons for Poe's inability to completely disembody is because he falls under the same category as most women often do in cyberpunk fiction, that of minorities. This is partially due to the discrimination against him

and other AIs as well as Poe seems to be unable to escape the constraints of his meat suite. Interestingly enough, Poe mentions himself that he is unable to leave the confinement of the hotel: “My neural network is part of the building itself. Think of the hotel as a body, of which I am the brain. I am the hotel“ (S1/E3).

Therefore, as Poe points out, the hotel is his body and he cannot leave the hotel without leaving his body. However, one could argue that instead of seeing Poe as a prisoner in his own “body”, he is experiencing Cartesian mind/body dualism. For this to work, one has to simply believe in the idea that Poe is the brains of this hotel, which functions as his eyes and ears. Poe tells the hotel what to do, whether that is turning up the heat, opening of doors, or gunning down uninvited threats. Furthermore, Poe is able to go anywhere he desires on the array. The array is similar to the Net in *Ghost in the Shell*, which means that Poe, like Killian, is able to disconnect himself from the mortal world and tap into the virtual one. In the virtual world Poe can disembodify, not only from himself, but from everything that connects him to the existing world; this being discrimination, confinement of the hotel, and the persona of Edgar Poe. With Poe being the hotel and not having a physical body, he is, like the other AIs, not able to embody in the same way that Kovacs and other human characters do. Instead, AIs embody through their establishments as they all function as the persona of whatever they “are” or “own”. Even though AIs in *Altered Carbon* do not have physical bodies, they represent something beyond humans and in some way, they can be seen as superior to humans. Although they are not presented as having any physical superiority over humans, they have the ability to retrieve any information from the array, creating a superior intelligence. Furthermore, they lack the constraints of real death (except for “Meths”).

Arguably there is no real distinction between what the body and mind signify in *Altered Carbon*. For some the mind is the soul of human identity, and for others it is the body. However, we argue that both the mind and the body contain meaning, not only for us, but for

the different characters in the series. Instead of discussing the same examples again, we will focus on one specific scene that we believe conveys this argument.

The notion of re-embodiment returns in *Altered Carbon* as neither the mind nor the body can be completely ignored as the two terms are too closely intertwined with each other. This intertwining is most noticeable when Kovacs is stuck in a similar VR as Lizzie. Kovacs is captured and held in an interrogation torture chamber in virtual reality (S1/E4). Kovacs is subject to different kinds of torturing methods, all of them targeted at his body. The torture of the body may signify either that the body is important because if the body breaks, the mind breaks, and that way the information they need can be extracted. Or it is not important because they are able to do every possible torture scenario and Kovacs would not break. Furthermore, we learn that some are able to manipulate the VR world. First, we see this with the torturer, who is able to use his brother's sleeve to make the interrogation more personal, as the twin brother is believed to have been killed by Kovacs. This digital re-sleeving emphasises that both the body and the mind become equally important because not only is the mind controlling the body, but the body is needed to perform the torture. Second, Kovacs is shown to have mastered the ability to take control of the VR. Kovacs is able to use his mind to get free and escape the virtual world, and he does so by freeing his chained-up body.

Interestingly, in the novel Kovacs is instead re-sleeved into a woman and tortured in unspeakable ways only women are able to experience. For good reasons, the directors changed that scene. However, although it may be horrifying, it also signifies women's continued objectification and mutilation. The reason Kovacs is put in a female body is because women are often portrayed as being more receptive to pain than men, and being so, means that there would be a higher chance that he would break and confess. It also furthers the issues of women's inability to release themselves from their bodies.

Re-embodiment therefore plays an important part in exploring identity in *Altered Carbon*. Like Hayles (1999) argues, with the separation of mind and body comes the discourse of what it means to be human, which is seen throughout the series. Kovacs and Bancroft for example talk about how easy it is to re-sleeve but at the same time they both are not very fond of how stack technology can be manipulated. Furthermore, Hollinger's argument about taking on an "other" and becoming something other than what we were fits very well within the *Altered Carbon* setting. Throughout the series we see characters literally take on another self through sleeving, but even though they only change body, they leave behind some of themselves every time. This may be knowledge or experience and therefore, there will always be some sort of "otherness" in them and they will not be exactly who they were before. However, can stacks be considered what Hayles calls "overdetermined supplementarity" (as cited in Hollinger, 2010, p. 201); are they the dangerous elements in determining human identity?

On the one hand, Frelik argues that the series envision complete digitisation of subjectivity, to be conscious has to be instantiated in some physical medium— one's original stack, remote storage, a virtual construct - but is otherwise mobile (Frelik, 2010, p. 186). The data's transferability makes copying or even "cloning" of the mind possible. The commodification of sleeves, commercially branded and customisable, further suggests the Cartesian separation. On the other hand, the stack-encoded subjectivity proves to be not only intimately connected with but also influenced by the physical sleeve. When loaded into a sleeve, a person retains the entirety of experience and self-awareness, but subjectivity immediately becomes imprinted on the body. Sleeves are posited as not "empty" even when they are fresh and unworn. That various physical and neural systems accelerate reflexes, add skills, or provide greater resistance register in the person's mind upon "waking up" in a new body is a given—they are, after all, manufactured features. What complicates this duality is

the fact that sleeves may carry over physical habits or acquired traits of its previous owner or the subjectivity may carry his or her traits from one sleeve to the next (Frelik, 2010).

Kovacs frequently experiences a sense of peculiar detachment and a feeling that the sleeve he is wearing reacts to certain stimuli unconsciously, but the results bear upon his conscious mind. When Kovacs wakes up in a new sleeve, he discovers a strong craving for cigarettes although he himself never smoked—the previous owner of the sleeve was a nicotine addict. The mutual sexual attraction between him and Kristine Ortega is largely based on the pheromonal familiarity between her and the sleeve Kovacs is wearing, which previously belonged to Ortega's boyfriend.

As Frelik argues:

In most terminal narratives, to borrow Scott Bukatman's lexicon, the codification of human subjectivity aims at the separation of the mental and the corporeal, with the former liberated to roam the expanses of virtual worlds and the latter devalued as "meat" weighing down the transcendent mind. In Morgan's fiction, the opposite is true—the main purpose of the stack technology is not to shed the flesh but rather to enable its renewal through re-embodiment (Frelik, 2010, p. 187).

Altered Carbon's imagined technologies provide an avenue for the human mind/body dimension to be debated within the posthuman worldview, especially within the cyborg subjectivity. This is because the technologies envisaged by the director provide an avenue to problematise Cartesian dualism in relation to human subjectivity within a futuristic Science Fiction context bearing in mind that the technologies are based on existing philosophies and technologies. In addition, our analysis shows that the series bring to task human subjectivity further by experimenting within the context of the post- and transhuman worldview which

treats human consciousness as blocks of data that are copyable, transferable, or programmable; and human bodies as durable, limiting, and an aspect of humanity that should be improved or discarded. Despite the impending posthuman cyborg subjectivity, these experiments reveal that human subjectivity is primarily based on the mind and body interacting and acting together to produce consciousness that is not fractured. To be a cyborg, that is a combination of human and machine, it is vital to remember that subjectivity consists of a combination of a thinking mind and a body that should react accordingly to the thoughts. However, what the technology reveals is that human subjectivity is more dependent on re-embodiment as reflected in the characters' connection to their bodies, in the *Altered Carbon*-universe. This attachment, to a certain extent, negates the Cartesian view that the mind has primacy over the body in the context of human subjectivity.

Contemporary Cyberpunk: Identity in Recent and Retrospective Cyberpunk and its Variants

Identity is a common theme across all three analyses but each of them represents identity in various ways. *Ghost in the Shell*, *2049*, and *Altered Carbon* manage to reflect on the question of what it means to be human and have a subjectivity. Across all three analyses we have established that concepts of embodiment, posthuman-/transhumanism, dystopia/utopia, and body modifications, which all fall under the same category: Identity. Through an understanding of one's own self in regard to these concepts, we argue that one will find their identity.

Therefore, we want to turn the attention to the discussion where we will explore the different concepts across the three works and compare them with one another to see the differences and similarities. Afterwards, we will explore the history of cyberpunk by discussing the three works according to their release year and the year they are set in. We will then conclude by looking at European cyberpunk visual media and see if and how it differs from its American and Japanese counterparts.

As we have seen in the analyses, transhumanism is most prominent across all three works. Though posthumanism also feature in them, the focus is mainly on humanity becoming enhanced in the image of God(s). Whether this be through cyborgification, drugs, technology, or advancements in robotics and computing. Transhumanism is most prominent in the Humanity Translated future of *Altered Carbon*, as we see clear references to the Bible as well as characters explicitly stating they are replacements for the gods. Meanwhile, *2049*'s Technological Posthuman future focuses on the androids potentially replacing humanity in the future, as the new sturdier, more intelligent, and more efficient evolution. *Ghost in the Shell* falls in between the two works, its transition from Humanity Incorporated into

Humanity Enhanced situates Kusanagi as both robot and human, ultimately ending with Kusanagi identifying herself as more human than robot. However, while we mainly analysed *Ghost in the Shell* as transhuman since Kusanagi ultimately *is* human, it can be analysed as posthuman as well. Kusanagi's cyborg body, a robotic shell for her human brain, is the "first" of its kind but clearly meant to be a prototype for gauging whether it is possible to implant human brains in cyborg bodies. As such, *Ghost in the Shell* could be read as a Technological Posthuman future, though the human body still remains in focus in *Ghost in the Shell*, as Kusanagi works to fit in with her fellow operatives.

All three works firmly establish themselves in the cyberpunk genre, *2049* and *Ghost in the Shell* are already part of cyberpunk franchises that emerged during the genre's infancy in the 1980s. Especially *Altered Carbon* and *Ghost in the Shell* make use of the visual tropes associated with cyberpunk, particularly the neon-lit advertisements strewn across the cityscapes present in cyberpunk worlds. All three works incorporate what is considered a defining characteristic of cyberpunk, as we have defined in the introduction: The presence of a globally influential and powerful Zaibatsu or megacorporation; as well as a dystopian setting, built upon the foundation of a utopian development for humanity that, in turn, has been exploited and abused for the monetary or influential gain of the aforementioned Zaibatus or megacorporations. Interestingly, while *2049* and *Ghost in the Shell* have clearly defined oppressive and antagonistic megacorporations, in the form of the Tyrell/Wallace Corporation and Hanka Robotics, respectively, *Altered Carbon* seemingly blurs the lines between whether the antagonist(s) are the "Meths" or the Protectorate. In our analysis we defined the "Meths" as being the antagonistic and oppressive presence in the narrative - being a group of wealthy individuals, we used the term Zaibatsu instead of megacorporation. Rather than the enabling Protectorate, the "Meths" function almost exactly in a similar fashion to the megacorporations of *2049* and *Ghost in the Shell*, a wealthy group exerting control and

influence over the general population, while ignoring, skirting, or bending the rules and regulations to their own benefit.

Since cyberpunk is set in the “future”, though the contemporary world has caught up with some of these “future” dates, the way humanity express themselves is often through extravagant body modifications. This features most prominently in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Altered Carbon*, as part of a multiculturally-diverse universe, where the cybernetically enhanced are in the majority. As such, what seems like body modifications meant to invoke a feeling of cybernetically enhanced beauty are present. One such example we briefly analysed as part of Kusanagi’s contemplation regarding her “human” body. Body modifications feature in *2049* as well, although to a much smaller degree than *Ghost in the Shell* and *Altered Carbon*. However, body modifications in *Altered Carbon* are more functional than they are cosmetic, such as Ortega’s limb replacement which does not alter her arm cosmetically. Unlike *Ghost in the Shell* and *Altered Carbon*, body modifications in *2049* are only available to androids and even so we do not see any of these modifications up close. Therefore, body modifications in *Ghost in the Shell*, and to some extent in *Altered Carbon*, function as a way of understanding who Killian and Kovacs are, whereas in *2049* they serve more as natural extension of the bio-mechanical bodies of the replicants.

The concept of embodiment is discussed throughout all three analyses and they each play a vital role in exploring identity. For one film the plot and visual aesthetics embrace the idea of embodiment, whereas in another it does the complete opposite. For some characters the idea of disembodiment is closely related to how they identify with themselves, whereas for others, visuals of re-embodiment connect them to a sense of “self”. However, for all three works the issue of women’s and minorities’ inability to disembodiment is present across all three works.

In cyberpunk visual culture, separating mind and body is often the issue of the main characters as they are frequently depicted as lonely individuals who struggle with understanding who they are and where they come from. Likewise, we see this in both *2049* and *Ghost in the Shell*, where both K and Killian begin to struggle with their understanding of who they are. They both seem to question their existence because of outside forces that open up their minds to the outside world. These outside forces are the horse figurine and Kuze for K and Killian, respectively, as they function as a push in the “right” direction. What we mean by the “right” direction is that it is questionable, whether K and Killian had to go down their paths or would they have been content with how their lives were as before. K and Killian also seem to be “trapped” inside their bodies, especially for K, he has little chance of escaping embodiment because the world of *2049*. and partially its predecessor, does not hold any technology that allows characters to physically separate mind from body. *Ghost in the Shell*, however, seems to allow certain characters to partially or fully disembodiment. Here Killian would represent the partially disembodiment as she is allowed to enter the Net through a Deep Dive, whereas Kuze would exemplify a full disembodiment through his own network. *2049* does not hold the same options for any of the characters because the body contains too much meaning with a focus on android child birth, vulnerable bodies, and objectification of women.

Where both *2049* and *Ghost in the Shell* embrace most parts of the idea of embodiment, *Altered Carbon* is more ambivalent. The world of *Altered Carbon* consists of arguments for both embodiment and disembodiment, as well as re-embodiment. Like in *Ghost in the Shell*, the characters in *Altered Carbon* have the technology (sleeving, stacks) to disembodiment. Characters such as Kovacs and Bancroft embrace the disembodied utopia through their view of bodies as expendable. The same cannot be said for Killian because even though she is able

to be repaired fairly quickly, like the characters in *Altered Carbon*, she is constantly identified with her body through objectification and discrimination.

The objectified woman is seen across all three works with a focus on Killian, Joi, and Lizzie. All three are either objectified by a continuous female shape, a torture of female body parts, or an undressing of the females vs a dressing of the males. All three characters are able to enter the virtual world, where disembodiment, in theory, should be available in a wider sense, but ultimately the depiction is based upon their bodies. This is visible, for example, with Hanka Robotics' consistent viewpoint of the over exaggeration of the female body parts of Killian's body. Another example is Wallace Corporation's similar approach in making Joi a sex toy. A third and final example is Lizzie's VR torture chamber where she is repeatedly reminded of her disfigurement and rape done to her. All three characters are unable to fully or even partially disembodiment because of their attachment to their bodies.

The three works explore the concept of embodiment in order to answer if and how identity is portrayed within the characters. They all agree that embodiment is somewhat important, but they differ in how they portray it. As much as they see these portrayals differently, they are very similar in how they depict women and minorities. Real disembodiment seems impossible for anyone within older cyberpunk visual culture; however, it appears as if contemporary cyberpunk visual culture is adopting the notion of re-embodiment by returning to the idea of the body. Therefore, re-embodiment is not about excluding the body but embracing it, based on its attributes, physical and emotional connections to the mind, which in all give the body meaning.

Since the 1980s, the relationship between Science Fiction (sf) and the world reflect the problems in society today, set in the future. Vint mentions that "[...] we live in a cyberpunk future, albeit one different from that imagined in most Movement-era fiction. [Their book

provides] reflections on cyberpunk that emerge from cultural climates that have significantly changed” (as cited in Murphy & Vint, 2010, xii), while Murphy and Schmeink posit “[...] To put it bluntly: we are living in cyberpunk futures and they are inescapably comprised of visual and virtual interstices and intersections” (2018, xxiv). Vint, Murphy, and Schmeink, as such, posit cyberpunk to be a product of its time. Works set in 2019, but released in the 1980s, would reflect the fears and social, economic, and cultural problems of the 1980s rather than the 2010s. According to John Clute (2006) in his chapter “Science fiction from 1980 to the present” in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*: “The genre [and cyberpunk] which differed from the world in order to advocate a better one – [...] or the virtual reality world we will now arguably inhabit till the planet dies – had become by 2000, in triumph or defeat or both, an institution for the telling of story” (p. 65). Clute (2006) argues that there is a decreasing resemblance between the world we inhabit today, and the future worlds advocated in American sf of the previous half-century. However, since the rise of the cyberpunk genre within visual culture, it has advocated a somewhat near future, closely related to ours. According to Clute (2006) sf caricatures classic cyberpunk to claim that, in 1980, the genre as a whole still told only one story about how the world might – in fact, should – develop, which it arguably still does. Clute (2006) believes that sf was a First World vision, a set of stories about the future written by inhabitants of, and for the benefit of readers who were inhabitants of, the industrialised Western world, which dominated the twentieth century; simplistically, it was a set of stories about the American Dream. Likewise, cyberpunk visual culture did and still is following this notion of the American Dream.

Ghost in the Shell, 2049, and *Altered Carbon* are arguably stories about achieving the American dream by regaining acknowledgement, not only from society but also from themselves, as well as making something for themselves through recognition.

Looking back at the history of, primarily, cyberpunk cinema we can see a change in the reception, representation, and perception of technology as it evolves. In particular *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* - two of the most popular and, arguably, among the most influential cyberpunk films - are particularly interesting to consider. *Blade Runner* can be seen as representing the dangers of the “foreign”, especially when it comes to machines and robotic androids. The androids in *Blade Runner* have been “banished” to off-world colonies as slave labour, and panic ensues when they “return” to Earth and attempt to assimilate into society. In contrast, *The Matrix* heavily incorporates representations of computers and related terms, most prominently hacking. While the concept of a virtual reality in a simulated world is not foreign in cyberpunk, *The Matrix* is interesting in its grounding in computing. This grounding came at a time when the concept of the “home computer” was on the rise. The computer became commonplace in the household, and the introduction of the Internet and World Wide Web opened new avenues for a globalised interconnectedness. As such, *The Matrix* managed to incorporate the familiar basics of the computer - concepts such as “people” being programs rendered as human bodies, within a large simulated world run by a “computer”. According to Christophe Den Tandt in his paper “Cyberpunk as Naturalist Science Fiction” (2013)

Cybersystems and artificial intelligences were not absent from previous sf, but they were overshadowed by the genre's fascination for space exploration, extra terrestrials, mutants, and android robots. Cyberpunk reversed these sf priorities as it registered a change in the popular representation and marketing of computer technology. Until the 1960s and 1970s, data systems had been depicted as colossal machines operated by the faceless technicians of military, state, or industrial apparatuses (p. 8).

As mentioned, *Ghost in the Shell* is an American adaptation of the Japanese anime, which means it reflects in some way the future that the Japanese original was trying to predict. *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2002-2005, 2017) predicts a future where technology has become so advanced that everyone, poor or rich, has been integrated with machine technology in one form or another. Similar to *The Matrix*, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) came out at a time when computer technology was on the rise and the future was uncertain. People feared how advanced these computers could get, as well as what the internet was. This is visible in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2002-2005, 2017) as many of the people we see throughout the films fear the unknown, such as Kuze/Puppet master and Killian/Kusanagi. *The Matrix* and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2017) include representations of computer hacking - *Ghost in the Shell*'s (2017) "deep dive" into the geisha robot visualises Killian's attempt at hacking and retrieving information from the memory of a robot. Neo as well "hacks" the bodily representation of Agent Smith visualised by Neo jamming his arm into his body. Likewise, a particularly impactful and distinguishing feature *The Matrix* is the "digital rain" effect. The "falling" lines of code, consisting of Asian and Latin characters, represent the virtual world "Matrix". For the experienced operator, being able to "read", or decode this code allows them to understand how it visually represents the Matrix. *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) strongly inspired *The Matrix* and its "digital rain" effect. As mentioned before, *The Matrix*'s release came at a time when computers became commonplace in the home, with *Ghost in the Shell* coming out only a few years prior. This contributes to the intelligibility of the visual representations present in both films.

Like with *Ghost in the Shell*, *2049* is an adaptation of an earlier work as well as a sequel to the original *Blade Runner*. Where *Blade Runner* was released at a time when there was a concern among the people about the automation of industrial work, *2049* expands on this

concern to regard all jobs. Furthermore, it asks the question: What happens with humanity if robots take the most basic human “job” such as creating life?

Altered Carbon (2018) is an adaptation of a previous work, which can be seen in how it portrays the future. It is concerned with some of the same issues as the other two films and expands on them; instead of dealing with “robots” per se, it deals with humans themselves. In today’s society we are concerned about the future of our planet and what will become of the children of the future. Not only are we concerned about the future, but we are obsessed with finding new ways of extending life. These concerns are what *Altered Carbon* is portraying; what if humans could live “forever” and are we better than the “robots” that we were once so afraid of?

A preliminary reflection on the “history” of cyberpunk, as well as our analyses, can possibly shed some light on the future of cyberpunk - A genre that, according to Vint and Murphy (2010), has been claimed “dead on arrival” (as cited in Vint and Murphy, xi) by Sponsler as well as described as being able to “[...] go only so far before self-destructing under the weight of its own deconstructive activities” (as cited in Vint and Murphy, xi) by Veronica Hollinger. Yet cyberpunk appears to thrive within visual culture, with films, video games, and media being frequently released. A few examples include the three works presented in this paper, as well as the recent *Alita: Battle Angel*. Likewise, *Altered Carbon* has been renewed for a second season (as of this writing) and the, highly anticipated, video game *Cyberpunk 2077* (2019) by CD Projekt Red is due to be released within the end of the decade. From this, it can be extrapolated that cyberpunk is far from dying out, as the exponential advance in technology will continually mesmerise and create a sense of wonder surrounding how our identity and future might be impacted by these technological advances. Likewise, Cadora states: “Contrary to the rumors, then, cyberpunk is not dead. Or, at least, not all forms of cyberpunk are dead” (2010, p. 171). Cadora continues: “[...] the [cyberpunk]

movement embodies the contradictory impulses—apocalypse and survival—of Haraway’s cyborg world. Masculinist cyberpunk has embraced its own annihilation while feminist cyberpunk continues to create new configurations of technology, gender, sexuality, and race” (2010, pp. 171-172).

As technologies thought of as purely spectacle in fictional works become a reality, even commonplace, new inventions take their place. As such, cyberpunk and technological inventions create a feedback loop, a Möbius strip if you will, that influences each other.

Sf has hardly been a prominent genre within the European film industry. According to Lidia Merás’ (2018) paper on European cyberpunk cinema, budget restrictions have often hindered the production of sci-fi and fantasy films worldwide, as they tend to require substantial investment in special effects and production design in order to achieve a convincing *mise-en-scène*. In America and Japan, they have managed to successfully fund, brand, and distribute science fiction/cyberpunk films internationally for decades (Merás, 2018). Drawing on the themes and plots of the works of literature categorised under the same subgenre, cyberpunk cinema has significantly flourished in the United States thanks to films such as *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall* (1990) and *The Matrix*, as well as in Japan with anime such as *Akira* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell*. Cyberpunk films produced mostly in the United States or the United Kingdom, few of the critical studies have included European films, and where they do appear, they are usually limited to US-British co-productions, Merás (2018) argues. She continues: “As a result, they offer a misleading view of European science fiction as being similar to Hollywood productions” (Merás, 2018, p. 2). Examples of cyberpunk films with exclusively European funding include *Nirvana* (1997), *Abre los ojos* (1997) and, more recently, *Immortel* (2004), *Renaissance* (2006), *Chrysalis* (2007) and *Metropia* (2009) (Merás, 2018).

According to Martin de la Iglesia's paper "Has Akira Always Been a Cyberpunk Comic?" In Germany, the situation for cyberpunk cinema was largely the same as the rest of Europe. *Akira*, a Japanese cyberpunk anime was identified as science fiction, in Germany, in general or as some other genre, but not cyberpunk (Iglesia, 2018). In a review of the anime adaptation from 1991, Iglesia (2018) mentions the German film magazine *Cinema* also positioned the manga source, calling it a "science fiction epic". Another German comic magazine, *Comixene*, identified *Akira* as an "adventure series" in 1995, and in the same issue, it claimed, "Otomo is called the Ridley Scott of the Land of the Rising Sun" (Iglesia, 2018, p. 10). According to Iglesia

This last statement is the only one that can be said to make some connection between *Akira* and cyberpunk, however as the article in which it appears is about Katsuhiro Otomo and Hayao Miyazaki as both comic authors and anime directors, it is not clear whether this statement refers to Otomo as the creator of *Akira* the manga or *Akira* the anime (2018, p. 10).

Merás agrees with Iglesia's assumption about European cyberpunk not being recognised as cyberpunk:

Another obstacle is that European cyberpunk has been hampered by two erroneous assumptions. First, the notion that science fiction is predominantly aimed at mainstream audiences. Second, that European films necessarily fall into the category of 'arthouse films'—a perception which clashes with that of science fiction as a popular genre—even when they do not (Merás, 2018, p. 2).

Furthermore Merás (2018) argues that it cannot be claimed that there is a single European type of cyberpunk, entirely distinct from any American or Japanese counterparts. However, we argue that the visual aesthetics in European cyberpunk visual culture are often more avant-garde than their American and Japanese counterparts. Whereas American and Japanese cyberpunk aesthetics often feature neon-tinted advertisements lighting up the grime-caked city streets, with cybernetically-enhanced cyber-cowboys mixing with the poor in slums, European cyberpunk is often grounded in less fantastical visuals, but often equally as bleak. The Swedish film *Metropia* features unique visuals in which photographs of real faces have been edited and transposed onto 3D models with enlarged heads. The setting features a bleak outlook at a world ravaged by pollution with large swathes of the Earth rendered uninhabitable. The cityscape in *Metropia* looks almost post-apocalyptic, similar to *2049*'s cityscape. It is presented as deserted and devoid of pedestrians. The inhabitants travel to the underground metro quickly, from where Trexx Corporation exert control over the travel habits of Sweden's citizens. The colour scheme consists of mostly grey and dark hues, with low saturation reinforcing the post-apocalyptic aesthetic of the cityscape; unlike *Ghost in the Shell* and *Altered Carbon*, there are no neon advertisements lighting up the city in *Metropia*. *Renaissance*, produced in France, United Kingdom, and Luxembourg, features a noir-like aesthetic. Entirely computer-generated and shot in black and white, the film only occasionally features colour for emphasis or detail. Unlike *Metropia*, the cityscape in *Renaissance* is not as post-apocalyptic and bleak. Merás (2018) compares the two settings, stating "In Renaissance, Paris is presented as a relatively lively environment where people can at least go for a walk. The Stockholm suburbs seen in Metropia, on the contrary, are home to a population dissuaded from making use of public spaces [...]" (p. 9). Both films feature the classic cyberpunk trope of a dystopian cityscape controlled by a megacorporation, in the case of *Renaissance*, Avalon Corporation is seemingly attempting to cover up and

control the means of invincibility. While in *Metropia*, Trexx Corporation seeks to exert control over the population using subliminal messaging by way of a hair product and human “controllers” assigned to provide subtle suggesting.

Where American cyberpunk consists of many classical cyberpunk tropes, the European cyberpunk under consideration shares some of the tropes, but not all of them. According to Merás (2018) the films borrow stylistic and narrative elements from certain classic films (in particular *Blade Runner*) and genres (science fiction, film noir and thriller). Furthermore, cyberpunk has been an influential genre in Japanese animation and manga for decades. It is therefore easy to find many visual motifs in these films reminiscent of manga and anime, such as the big eyes of characters in *Metropia*. According to Merás (2018) the film is rich in its references to Japanese anime. Merás continues “If we look at its greyish palette, the way characters are animated and the large heads of characters, they seem influenced by Mamoru Oshii’s work in *Tachiguishi Retsuden* (Oshii 2006)” (Merás, 2018, p. 5). In *Renaissance*, references to Japanese anime are subtler, but according to Merás (2018) “Mamoru Oshii [is] considered the master of cyberpunk anime, [and] stands as the main source of inspiration. Occasional references to Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* are noticeable in the triangles seen on the children’s necks and in the sequence in which an invisible hitman kills Dimitri” (p. 6).

However, of *Metropia*, Merás also notes that “These visual motifs do not seem to have any function other than paying homage to the master of Japanese cinematic cyberpunk” (pp. 5-6). As such, European cyberpunk acknowledges and references its counterparts, as is expected being of the same genre, but seemingly often it is no more than homages.

While European cyberpunk, especially its contributions to visual culture, provide an interesting angle to aesthetics - it was ultimately not relevant to our paper. However, we feel compelled to mention European cyberpunk as an entity in the cyberpunk-sphere. Identity crises and problems in European cyberpunk ultimately differ only slightly from its American

and Japanese counterparts, with technology present as the main cause. However, compared to its counterparts, European cyberpunk has yet to achieve the same level of “mainstream” internationally - a reason as to why we decided to place our focus on American (and Japanese by proxy) cyberpunk. However, according to Merás “there is a noticeable trend in European cyberpunk cinema made in the 2000s of developing cyberpunk aesthetics and conveying a specifically European pessimism in otherwise familiar narrative forms [...]” (Merás, 2018, p. 3). Likewise, we see this in the two aforementioned European films that Merás’ paper also analyses.

If we take a closer look at *Metropia* and *Renaissance* in the same way we did with *Ghost in the Shell, 2049* and *Altered Carbon*, we can see some similarities and differences between the works. In both *Metropia* and *Renaissance*, women’s representation and notion of embodiment are to some degrees similar to the three other works. In both films, women are portrayed as a kind of fantasy girl, and the women that the films regard as beautiful are white and straight, which is also visible with Killian and Joi. However, in *Metropia*, the white woman is not a protagonist, but instead a villain, which is not often seen in other cyberpunk films. However, as the main characters, who also happen to be men, in both films do not feature as cyborgs or androids per se, embodiment as we know it is represented less in both films. However, we still see that women are unable to be regarded as anything different from their bodies. We see this with Roger’s wife, Anna, in *Metropia*, who as Merás points out “Whether [...] is unemployed or not, the fact that her job seems entirely irrelevant to the plot is significant because without the responsibilities of motherhood or a job to fulfil her aspirations, her only function as a young woman is to remain a (replaceable) object of desire” (Merás, 2018, p. 10). However, because cyborgs and androids are not as visible in *Metropia* and *Renaissance* as they are in our three main works, it does not iterate the notion of

embodiment as non-existent, but instead they represent embodiment in regard to how the main characters finish their “journeys” and become integrated into society.

We see this in *Metropia*, where Roger becomes part of a plot to destroy Trexx Corporation who through their dandruff shampoo called Dangst, administer "organic computer chips" through the pores of the skin. These organic computer chips then create synapses to the subjects' brain and using the subjects' hair as antennae the human subjects' brain is then directly linked to an AI surveillance and control mechanism. Throughout the film, Roger's every thought and movement is “controlled” by a man “inside his head”. In the beginning Roger believes that it is just his consciousness that speaks to him, which resembles both Killian and K, who both are “controlled” by “outer forces”. In this way, Roger disembodies through his controller.

In *Renaissance*, all movement is monitored and recorded, and Ilona Tasuiev, a brilliant young scientist, is kidnapped, and her employer, Avalon, a major health and beauty corporation, wants her found. Karas, a jaded police captain, is assigned to find her, fast. He seeks help from her sister, Bislane, and they uncover identity theft and missing files related to Ilona. Similarly, as in *Metropia*, peoples' every movement is monitored, but they are not as much controlled by this monitoring as they are in *Metropia*. Thus, as a contrast to *Metropia*, *Renaissance* revolves less around embodiment as it presents a more classic detective noir style, where the focus is on the detective part more than it is on human subjectivity and identity.

Merás (2018) argues that *Metropia* and *Renaissance* differ from their Hollywood counterparts as many films such as these show technologies being used to monitor the population's movements, in these films state control is replaced by the corporate might of Trexx (*Metropia*) and Avalon (*Renaissance*). Tarik Saleh, director of *Metropia* defined it as “a reflection of the time and a warning about what can happen if we allow the surveillance

society and companies free license—beyond all morals, laws and rules (Salek, quoted by Kim Grönqvist 2010, p. 31)” (as cited in Merás, 2018, p. 11). Saleh mentions that *Metropia* openly criticises Europe’s attitude towards refugees and, in particular, the exploitation of their circumstances by the media. In one of the early sequences of the film, he uses parody to denounce Europe’s uneasiness with asylum seekers, showing a teaser for a TV programme entitled *Asylum*, in which contestants compete to stay in Europe legally (Merás, 2018). “Tonight. Four contestants. Thirty questions. Only one can stay in Europe. The others have to fly” (*Metropia*). Merás (2018) argues that the last part is meant literally, as contestants are tied to a special machine and catapulted into the void when they fail to answer a question correctly. *Metropia* illustrates the anxieties of those with conservative attitudes towards the ethnically other and it does this by using a literal “dumping process”. Thereby, one can argue that European cyberpunk similarly reflects its time as we have, in recent years, seen an increasing number of immigrants coming to Europe after the wars in Syria. Similarly, in *Ghost in the Shell* and *2049*, K and Killian are seen as “ethnically others”, as immigrants and society decides whether they should be allowed to “stay” or “leave”.

As we have almost exclusively focused on *Metropia* and *Renaissance* as European cyberpunk, it can be extrapolated that European cyberpunk made in the 2000s is not dramatically different from its American or Japanese counterparts. Although the films discussed offer a distinctive look, the genre maintains many of the European tropes seen in previous decades in terms of plot (in particular, those revolving around industrial espionage), and urban settings inspired by film noir. The representation of strong women in a male-dominated world and corporal philanthropists offer no major variations.

Notwithstanding these similarities, other aspects of European cyberpunk offer an alternative take on the genre. One of the things that differs substantially from its counterparts is the extreme level of technophobia. Despite being cautionary stories about the use of

technology, films like *Tron* and *The Matrix* make a point of exhibiting the wonders of the virtual world. By contrast, European cyberpunk shows only the negative effects of technological advances. These negative effects are seen with the people's opposition against Trexx and Avalon and the resistance's willingness to destroy the two corporations. According to Mihailova, digital animation is "inherently technophilic by virtue of its production process" (as cited in Merás, 2018, p. 14). However, Merás (2018) argues that all technical and scientific innovations in *Renaissance* and *Metropia* are harmful, or used to enslave the population, in contradiction to the medium employed to convey the same technophobic message. Even when the initial aim of a new technology is constructive, the consequences are terrifying.

Furthermore, stories dealing with computers, fantasy worlds, cyborgs and body modifications are few and far between. According to Merás (2018) there is no hope that technology can improve human life in European cyberpunk and therefore, narratives about an ill (or addicted) male hero seeking a cure have disappeared. Instead, European cyberpunk is focused on the idea of dystopia, which is according to Merás (2018) more prevalent in European science fiction in recent years. Released at a time when European popular cinema flourished, *Renaissance* and *Metropia* promotes a certain idea of European cultural identity within the limits of an industry whose products are aimed at a global market.

Conclusion

“Sure I have a face and voice to distinguish myself from others, but my thoughts and memories are unique only to me, and I carry a sense of my own destiny.” - Motoko Kusanagi, *Ghost in the Shell*

Regarding identity in cyberpunk, the concept of the human body and its associated identity, especially our individuality, is a key point of discussion and exploration in cyberpunk visual culture. The body is both presented as a sacred symbol of humanity and the human race, something to be protective and proud of; but it is also presented as a malleable figure, able to be modified, enhanced, and turned into almost anything.

Ghost in the Shell presents a humanoid body made of synthetic flesh, internal wires, and metal. This housing, referred to as a “shell”, is home for our protagonist Killian - a home she was forced into. Clearly resenting her body as foreign and seeing herself as out-of-place, even among “regular” human bodies that are presented as cybernetically modified, coming closer to a reality in which *their* body as well consists mostly of wires and metal. *Ghost in the Shell* and Killian’s cyborg body presents a partly trans- and partly posthuman future, in which the human body is still considered the main “vessel” for our identity. Evidently, a minority in the *Ghost in the Shell*-universe fear that modification of this vessel, in too great a degree, would harm our identity as individuals. As such, the body in *Ghost in the Shell* remains an important aspect of humanity as it is closely linked to our identity. Killian’s body is at the cusp of having been modified in too great a degree, and her entirely human brain seemingly suffers unless drugs are administered. However, being able to Deep Dive in the Net and leaving her physical body, but ultimately succumbing to the body, Killian is exploring what Vint and Hayles calls re-embodiment. A state of being, where she can partly escape her “shell” and retrieve information solely with her mind, and defeating potential enemies,

without making her body obsolete. For Killian, her body and mind are as equally important for her understanding of her 'self' to create the identity that she would be most comfortable with. However, for Killian, being a woman means that she is not able to separate herself from her body as women in cyberpunk are often objectified and sexualised in a manner that prevent them from existing beyond their bodies.

In a stark contrast to Killian, the antagonistic Kuze provides a view at the other side; while Killian at first suffered in her "shell", Kuze is shown to resent his "shell", considering his destruction of the research and people involved in creating "shells" a defence of his self. With Kuze being an earlier version of Killian, along with his resentment of his body, he differs in how he prefers to manoeuvre around in the world. Where Killian learns to accept her body, Kuze builds his own net, in order to separate himself from his body, and disembodiment into a being beyond the capabilities of human beings. Killian represents the ultimate liberal transhumanistic cyborg and Kuze represents the ultimate, utopian concept of Kurzweil's Singularity. Kuze attempts to achieve this Singularity by connecting his ghost to a vast network.

In the case of *2049*, the trans- and posthuman future manifests in the slavery exerted against the replicants, an army of obedient androids. Portrayed in *2049* to have a sense of self-sentience, the androids are situated within a human body, a feature which some of them make use of to blend in with the human populace. Seemingly, building upon the events in the original *Blade Runner*, one of *2049*'s key points is the human body the androids inhabit becoming near "fully functional". An investigation into a replicant birth throws K into a spiralling identity crisis and repositions the entire replicant population within the universe. If replicants are able to give birth, they should have equal rights to humans. Thus, the biomechanical representation of the human body becomes neither fully transcended to godlike nor fully replaces the real human body. It is stuck in a void being neither a fully

transhuman nor fully posthuman future. Therefore, embodiment as we know it becomes as obsolete as replicants ability to fully become one with humans as replicants are still superior to humans, 30 years after *Blade Runner*.

Identity in *2049* is rendered in the representation of K and Joi's journey together to uncover who they are. Even though they are both of different beings, they are somewhat similar as they represent something that is beyond human. They both rely heavily on their bodies and minds to coexist in a symbiotic embodiment. While K has a seemingly mortal body and humanlike mind, he ventures into a quest to uncover his true identity. Likewise, Joi joins him on his quest as she uncovers her purpose of whether or not she can be more than an AI.

Altered Carbon expands on the questions of "Who am I or What am I?" by asking what happens if humans could become as the likes of cyborgs or androids or evolve the human race into something entirely different. Unlimited access to modifications and a constant uploading of one's consciousness into stacks, creating immortal beings, superior to all in every manner, is common for the "Meths" in the *Altered Carbon*-universe. However, Kovacs contrasts the otherwise utopian world of the "Meths" by helping Bancroft solve his murder in a classic film noir style. For everyone else in the world of *Altered Carbon*, stack technology is available but expensive and there is no guarantee which body they are re-sleeved into. Unlike the previous two entries, *Altered Carbon* shows clear signs of a transhuman feature. Numerous biblical references are made, especially the "Meths" (a biblical reference itself) as they consider themselves the replacements for gods. Religion also features in *Altered Carbon*, which is uncommon in cyberpunk, and this representation brings into contrast the different views of the body, mind, and consciousness. The religious NeoCatholic in *Altered Carbon* consider the body and mind, and by extension one's identity, sacred allowing their followers only one "life". The "Meths" likewise value the body and identity, as shown in the

way they keep clones of a singular body which they identify with. In *Altered Carbon* the notion of embodiment is featured for some, and disembodiment for others. However, for most people the notion of re-embodiment is arguably most prominent as people like Bancroft and Kovacs seem to have difficulties escaping their meat suits because they are constantly referred to by their appearances and physical bodies.

Regarding the genre's progression, cyberpunk is far from dead despite the previously proclaimed statements. Cultural progression of cyberpunk thrives in contemporary times, as Japanese classics in cyberpunk are adapted to a Western audience. *Ghost in the Shell* is an example of this trend, while the more recent *Alita: Battle Angel* seems to signal a continuation of it in the future. Arguably, we are currently living in the age of cyberpunk, and identity continues to be an important part of not only cyberpunk, but our daily lives as well. Cyberpunk extrapolates on what kind of future we are headed toward and how the technological advancement will impact our identity, including body and mind. In the world of today, it seems as if the constant need to be "online" ("online interaction" and our "online footprint") puts us in a position to separate ourselves from the physical world.

In the future world of cyberpunk, even though the converging technologies have advanced beyond our comprehension it seems as if there is a return to the body and a return to a physical world within a virtual one. Thus, cyberpunk thrives in the contemporary world where technology keeps advancing at an exponential rate, having an impact on almost every aspect of our daily lives. A globalised, networked world where corporations are beginning to almost mirror the bleak settings of cyberpunk megacorporations. Having looked at the history of cyberpunk, we can see that in contemporary cyberpunk, the genre has not changed drastically. This can be due to the trend of rebooting already established franchises, such as *Ghost in the Shell* and *2049*. The classic cyberpunk tropes and traits of a bleak and dark dystopian world are still at large in contemporary cyberpunk, as we can see in *Altered*

Carbon and particularly *Ghost in the Shell*. What has changed is a return of the body in contemporary cyberpunk. We can see a trend where the body becomes the focal point of cyberpunk, rather than the virtual as in *The Matrix* and *TRON*.

The future of cyberpunk is bright and though our paper is not exhaustive of contemporary visual culture cyberpunk, it gives an idea of how previously established theory can be expanded into contemporary theory and applied to contemporary cyberpunk film and TV series. Thus, future research may build upon our literature review and our compilation of theory to further modernise their own theory, or analyse other cyberpunk works, within visual culture or literature.

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