

## EXPLORING SCIENCE FICTION FILMS IN THE POST-HUMAN LANDSCAPE: FROM 'GHOST IN THE SHELL' TO 'ALITA: BATTLE ANGEL'

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the portrayal of post-human themes in Hollywood adaptations, particularly in "Alita: Battle Angel" and "Ghost in the Shell." Analyzing these films through the lens of post-human film theory, the study explores their exploration of human-machine fusion, identity, memory, and the ethical dimensions of technology. It highlights the similarities and differences in their approaches to these themes, including societal structures, individual autonomy, and techno-ethical challenges. The paper also discusses the impact of environmental and technological philosophical themes and links them to the theoretical viewpoints of Rachel Carson and Pete Townshend. By weaving these themes into a sci-fi narrative, these films contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between human evolution, technological advancement, and environmental considerations in the post-human era.

**Keywords:** Techno-Ethics, Post-Human Landscape, Human-Machine Integration, Identity and Memory.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of science fiction animation began in the early 20th century, evolving alongside advancements in animation technology and the burgeoning field of science fiction, to progressively explore more serious and complex themes. During the 1930s and 1940s, animation began to incorporate science fiction elements, exemplified by the "Superman" series. In the 1980s and 1990s, especially in Japan, the rise of CGI technology marked a golden age for science fiction animation, with works like "Ghost in the Shell" delving into the limits of subjectivity. "Ghost in the Shell" and "GUNNM" are two milestones in Japanese science fiction animation and manga, representing the genre's evolution during the 1980s and 1990s.

Posthuman Film Theory is a cinematic framework that examines how films represent and explore posthumanist themes and concepts. Posthumanism, a broad concept, involves rethinking human identity and essence, particularly against the backdrop of rapid technological and artificial intelligence advancements. As an emerging field, Posthuman Film Theory engages various theorists and critics who have examined posthumanism's portrayal in cinema. Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" significantly impacted posthumanism by discussing cyborgs—entities merging the biological and mechanical—as beings that transcend gender, species, and machine boundaries, challenging traditional anthropocentrism.

Rachel Carson, a marine biologist and nature writer, highlighted in "Silent Spring" the extensive environmental damage caused by chemical pesticides like DDT, particularly their lethal impact on birds, leading to ecological imbalance. She revealed the complex interdependencies within ecosystems, emphasizing the long-term consequences of human activities on these delicate balances. Carson advocated for increased public awareness of environmental issues and promoted more sustainable agricultural and pest control practices to minimize environmental harm. She argued for a synergy between scientific research, policy-making, and ethical responsibility in addressing environmental crises, asserting that the notion of "controlling nature" is a conceited fantasy, a relic of an immature stage in biology and philosophy.

In "The Dark Side of Technology," Pete Townshend contends that technology is not just a tool or means but a mode of Enframing that shapes our worldview and understanding. He emphasizes that technology has transformed human existence, treating humans and nature as resources for endless consumption and exploitation.

Townshend urges deep reflection on technology to avoid being completely dominated by it, maintaining proper control and understanding. He explores how humans can remain free and authentic beings in a technological environment, not mere slaves to technology. While Carson's views focus on environmental conservation and ecological balance, emphasizing the impact of human actions on nature, Townshend's perspective leans towards a philosophical exploration of technology's essence and the human condition within a technological milieu. He posits that technology's dark side is dual-natured: on one hand, natural events or wars will destroy those reliant on technology, signaling the demise of developed countries. On the other hand, it could lead to humanity's extinction through involvement in global wars, using nuclear or chemical weapons, followed by global famine, combining these disasters to eradicate humanity.

Despite differing focal points, both Carson and Townshend profoundly influence our understanding of human activities, technological development, and their consequences. This paper uses textual analysis and case study methods to analyze the animations discussed, validating the power and depth of science fiction in

addressing complex modern issues and understanding the far-reaching impacts of technological progress on human society and the natural environment.

### **POST-HUMAN LANDSCAPES IN HOLLYWOOD COMIC ADAPTATIONS**

The 2017 live-action "Ghost in the Shell," a sci-fi film, is adapted from the Japanese manga and anime series. Set in a futuristic world where humans can extensively modify their bodies with advanced technology, replacing almost all body parts with mechanical components. The protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi (played by Scarlett Johansson), almost entirely mechanized except for her brain, leads a special forces unit (Public Security Section 9). The film revolves around Kusanagi's quest to understand her identity and past and her confrontation with a mysterious hacker known as the Puppet Master. In her investigation, she discovers clues to her past and begins to doubt the authenticity of her identity, uncovering a secret experiment on transferring human consciousness to mechanical bodies, and realizing she is a product of this experiment.

The 2019 "Alita: Battle Angel," another sci-fi movie adapted from the "GUNNM" manga and anime series, is set in the 26th century. Cybernetic surgeon Dr. Ido (played by Christoph Waltz) finds a mechanical girl's head in a scrapyard, attaches it to a body prepared for his deceased daughter, and names her Alita (played by Rosa Salazar). Fascinated by the violent, colorful world she discovers, Alita, after meeting a young man named Hugo (played by Keanu Reeves), begins participating in a sport called Motorball, showcasing her fighting talents. In this city, beneath the floating city of Zalem which feeds off the labor of its inhabitants, Alita fights in a Motorball tournament hosted by tycoon Vector (played by Mahershala Ali) for a chance to ascend to Zalem, only to be drawn into a vast conspiracy. This narrative introduces ethical dilemmas in technology:

**Human-Machine Integration and Identity:** Alita, reduced to just a head and given a new body, raises issues of identity after human-machine integration. How does one define their identity and existence when part or most of their body is mechanical? This question addresses the boundaries between artificial intelligence and biological entities, along with their legal and ethical status.

#### **Techno-Ethical Perspectives in "Ghost in the Shell" Live-Action**

The film probes the essence and identity of humans in an era of mechanization. Major Motoko Kusanagi, nearly fully mechanized, embodies the central issue of human nature and personal identity. Her journey to uncover her past and the potential manipulation of her memories highlights the significance of memory in shaping personal identity and history, and its impact on individual autonomy when controlled. "Ghost in the Shell" (2017) contributes significantly to Posthuman Film Theory, deepening the exploration of human-machine integration, especially in bodily modification and consciousness transfer. It presents a complex scenario where a nearly fully mechanized body is integrated with human consciousness and memory, questioning the fundamentals of human nature and identity.

In Posthuman Theory, memory and self-identity are key. The film, through its portrayal of the protagonist's quest for her memories and identity, reflects the individual's self-definition and the role of memory in identity formation in a highly technologized environment.

While showcasing the possibilities of advanced technology, the film delves into the ethical consequences, such as human body modification and consciousness control.

These issues are crucial for understanding the moral and ethical frameworks in the posthuman era, as the characters struggle with external control and predetermined destinies in their quest for self-identity and free will.

The film also explores how technology influences human physical and psychological evolution, reflecting deep contemplation on the coexistence of humans and technology in Posthuman Theory. By depicting a world heavily reliant on technology, it raises questions about identity, ethics, and the meaning of existence in the face of advancing technology.

"Ghost in the Shell" raises critical issues about personal privacy and autonomy, questioning the authenticity of human experience when memories can be altered. It sparks debate on whether artificial intelligences should have rights or recognition if they possess self-awareness and reflection.

The film's narrative, with its unique storytelling and visual representation, offers a vivid case study for Posthuman Film Theory, enabling a deeper understanding of human identity, ethics, and existence in an age of advanced technology.

### **Techno-Ethical Orientation in "Alita: Battle Angel"**

Set in an extreme technological advancement scenario, the plot raises profound questions about human identity, memory, artificial intelligence, and techno-ethics, increasingly relevant in today's technological landscape. Dr. Dyson Ido's act of bringing the mechanical girl, Alita, to life and providing her with a cybernetic body, though well-intentioned, sparks moral considerations regarding the use of technology, especially in modifying biologically or mechanically involuntary individuals.

The disparity between the Iron City and the floating city of Zalem symbolizes social inequality and resource distribution issues. This metaphorically reflects real-world wealth gaps and social inequities. The Motorball competition, overshadowed by the tycoons' conspiracies, demonstrates how individuals are often exploited as tools and commodities in a highly competitive, entertainment-driven society. Alita's journey of self-discovery and confrontation with external control versus internal autonomy highlights the tension between individual autonomy and societal control.

By exploring human-machine fusion, social inequality, individual autonomy, and techno-ethics in a fictional future world, "Alita: Battle Angel" offers significant insights into similar contemporary societal and technological issues. The film, through its imaginative setting and narrative, prompts critical reflection on the socio-cultural and technological challenges humanity may face in the future.

In "Alita: Battle Angel," the creative team delves into techno-ethical issues through the protagonist Alita's journey and her interactions with the world around her. The film focuses on Alita's emotional development and inner world as a cyborg, and the ethical dilemmas she faces in her quest for self-identity and memory. It raises questions about the nature of humanity and identity recognition, exploring whether a mechanized body can carry human emotions and memories and the impact of such integration on individual self-identity. Additionally, the movie portrays a stratified social structure, reflecting on social inequalities potentially exacerbated by technological advancements, demonstrating the team's concern for the relationship between technological progress and societal structure.

### **POST-HUMAN LANDSCAPES IN HOLLYWOOD ADAPTATIONS**

In the 21st century, sci-fi animations deeply explore the concept of "transcending subjectivity," especially in virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and cyberculture. "Alita: Battle Angel" examines how consciousness allows individuals to transcend their

physical bodies, challenging traditional definitions of "human" and self-identity amidst technological progress.

The film contrasts Iron City and Sky City, illustrating the diversity and complexity of post-human landscapes and uncovering hidden cultural and historical issues within technological and societal changes. Walter Benjamin's critical theory and "Ruinenlust" provide profound philosophical and cultural critique perspectives, deepening our understanding of cultural and social issues in the post-human era.

Donna Haraway's posthumanism, particularly her "Cyborg Manifesto," challenges traditional anthropocentrism. In "Alita: Battle Angel," Alita's hybrid cyborg identity blurs the lines between humans and machines, reflecting Haraway's exploration of cyborg identities and redefining traditional human boundaries.

Rosie Braidotti's posthumanism emphasizes symbiosis with non-human life forms. Alita's interactions in the film represent multispecies coexistence, embodying Braidotti's vision of interspecies relationships in the post-human era. Haraway's concept of the cyborg as an identity and existence challenges conventional roles and identities. Alita's journey of self-discovery and development mirrors the exploration of identity and self-awareness in posthumanism.

The film's depiction of Alita's body and her hybrid abilities reflects Haraway's discourse on the fusion of technology and biology, challenging traditional biological and technological boundaries. By portraying a highly technologized and stratified society, the film prompts critical reflections on contemporary social and cultural structures, resonating with the concerns of Haraway and Braidotti regarding the consequences of technological advancements.

Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" introduces the concept of the "cyborg," representing the fusion of technology and biology, challenging conventional definitions of gender, race, and species. Scholars like Katherine Hayles in "How We Became Posthuman" explore how information technology reshapes our understanding of the body and consciousness.

"Alita: Battle Angel" and "Ghost in the Shell" are films that explore post-human themes. Within the realm of post-human film theory, they exhibit both similarities and differences, as outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Hollywood Anime Adaptation Film Industry Analysis

Aspect	Ghost in the Shell	Alita: Battle Angel
Duration minutes	122	163
Production Country	USA	USA
Themes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Human-machine integration</li> <li>2. Defining human identity and self</li> <li>3. Impacts of technology on individuals and society</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Human-machine integration</li> <li>2. Defining human identity and self</li> <li>3. Impacts of technology on individuals and society</li> </ol>
Chinese Title	攻壳机动队	阿丽塔战斗天使
Release Date in China	07.04.2017	22.02.2019

Release Location	China	China
Douban Rating	6.4/10	7.5/10
IMDb Rating	6.3/10	7.3/10
Box Office in China	¥2.02 billion	¥8.96 billion
Global Box Office	\$169,801,921	\$404,980,543

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#### Similarities:

- 1) **Human-Machine Fusion and Identity:** Both films delve into the theme of human-machine fusion. Alita, in "Alita: Battle Angel," has a mechanical body with a human brain, while Motoko Kusanagi in "Ghost in the Shell" is a combination of a mechanical body and human consciousness. Both films explore how human
- 2) **Memory and Self-Discovery:** The protagonists in both works seek to understand their past and memories. Alita struggles to recall her past, while Kusanagi pursues her memories and identity. The importance of memory in constructing individual identity is a common theme.
- 3) **Techno-Ethics and Social Impact:** Both movies touch upon the profound impacts of technological advancements on individuals and society, especially in terms of human body modification and consciousness transfer. They explore the moral boundaries and ethical responsibilities of using technology.

#### Differences:

- 1) **Social Context and Worldview:** "Alita: Battle Angel" is set in a futuristic city amid ruins, featuring rich class conflicts and social stratification. In contrast, "Ghost in the Shell" focuses more on urban and cyber-technological environments, exploring issues related to cybersecurity and information control.
- 2) **Protagonist's Role:** Alita is depicted as a warrior, with her identity and abilities closely linked to combat. Conversely, Kusanagi, as the leader of a special forces unit, is more involved in political and cyber-espionage activities.
- 3) **Technology and Human Evolution:** The technology in "Alita" is closely associated with bodily enhancement and combat capabilities, whereas in "Ghost in the Shell," it emphasizes cybernetics, intelligence, and memory manipulation.
- 4) **Emotional Expression and Internal Exploration:** "Alita" delves deeper into the protagonist's emotions and relationships, especially her connections with other characters. "Ghost in the Shell," on the other hand, focuses more on Kusanagi's internal exploration of her identity.

Both films, within the scope of post-human film theory, share similarities such as human-machine integration and memory and identity exploration, but also possess unique themes and focuses like social backgrounds, character roles, and emotional expressions. "Alita: Battle Angel" and "Ghost in the Shell" are narratives woven around technological advancements and the human future, yet their creative teams approach techno-ethics differently. These differences are primarily manifested in the depth, focus, and presentation of techno-ethical issues.

## CONCLUSION

"Alita: Battle Angel" and "Ghost in the Shell" embody classical themes of post-human film theory, particularly in their exploration of the impacts of technological

advancement on the environment, society, and human nature. These films resonate with the environmental and techno-philosophical themes found in "Silent Spring" and "The Dark Side of Technology."

In "Alita: Battle Angel," Iron City's depiction highlights the interplay and adaptation between human society and the natural environment in a context of intense industrialization and technological development. The film examines technological moral responsibility, reflecting the interplay between humans and the environment, a concept echoed in "Silent Spring."

"Ghost in the Shell" presents a world dominated by advanced technology, examining how technology shapes society and individual experiences, reflecting critiques of technological determinism. It presents themes of human control over nature and self, raising ethical and existential questions, and explores individual identity in a technologically advanced world, aligning with Pete Townshend's exploration of technology's revealing role.

Both films offer profound insights into environmental ethics, techno-ethics, human behavior, and self-identity, deepening our understanding of the potential impacts of technological development. They explore themes like virtual reality, cyber space, and the philosophical considerations of human nature in an increasingly blurred line between virtual and real worlds.

These films provide rich insights into human-machine fusion, techno-ethics, war and peace, free will, and human essence, exploring in-depth issues such as technological development, environmental protection, and societal structure. They underscore the importance of post-human film theory in exploring the complex relationship between human future and technological development, offering profound understanding and reflection on human identity and social structures in an era of technological advancement.

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