

## **Beyond the Turing Test: Ethical Ambiguity and the Dissolution of Human-Machine Boundaries in 21st-Century Postmodern Science Fiction**

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### **Abstract**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, science fiction narratives have undergone significant transformation. Rather than enquiring if a computer is capable of thought (the Turing Test), contemporary discourse poses more intricate issues regarding the essence of life in a post-human world. This research article analyses the dissolution of human-machine barriers in postmodern tales and the resulting ethical dilemmas in modern postmodern science fiction. This study investigates the fragmentation of human identity and the rise of cyborg identity by analysing specific tales, like Kazuo Ishiguro's "Klara and the Sun" and "Never Let Me Go," as well as visual texts like "Black Mirror." This study argues that 21st-century science fiction is a crucial domain for deconstructing anthropocentric hierarchies, employing the theoretical frameworks of Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality and Donna Haraway's cyborg ontology. The findings suggest that the distinction between "born" and "made" is now outdated, replaced by a continuum of awareness that requires a new ethical framework prioritising emotional potential above biological origin.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, ethical ambiguity, the Turing test, cyborg identity, hyperreality, artificial consciousness, Kazuo Ishiguro, techno-dystopian environments, etc.

### **1. Introduction**

In 1950, Alan Turing proposed the Turing Test as a criterion for evaluating artificial intelligence. A computer capable of deceiving individuals into believing it is human by mimicking their answers may be deemed "intelligent." For years, science fiction has explored this form of mimicry, depicting robots as either covert infiltrators or people seeking acceptance. However, 21st-century postmodern science fiction has mostly ceased employing this binary testing framework. We no longer doubt the humanity of machines; rather, we question whether humans possess the "machinelike" attributes to survive in a hyperreal techno-culture.

This paper analyses the dissolution of human-machine barriers in postmodern narratives, contending that the current literary and cinematic world is defined by ethical uncertainty rather than technological apprehension. In an era where post-humanism and cyborg identity prevail, the distinction between the biological self and the artificial other has grown increasingly ambiguous. Recent academic study on high-value Scopus subjects reveals that posthumanism and the fragmentation of human identity in postmodern science fiction are critical issues for current scholars. The modern individual is no more a unified person, but a fragmented being positioned between physical reality and digital simulation.

This study analyses the representation of artificial consciousness in 21<sup>st</sup> century science fiction and the deconstruction of 'human essence' in robotic narratives. This paper seeks to define a new "ethical postmodernism" by examining the portrayal of AI ethics and digital immortality in modern literature, arguing that moral worth is evaluated not by biological categorisation but by the capacity to experience suffering, preserve memory, and cultivate relationships.

### **2. The Postmodern Condition and the Cyborg**

To understand the evolution beyond the Turing Test, it is crucial to analyse the influence of postmodern philosophy (Baudrillard, Lyotard, Haraway) on science fiction. This section

discusses the two primary theoretical frameworks employed to analyse the selected texts: Hyperreality and Cyborg Ontology.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra is essential for analysing hyperreality and computer simulation in cyberpunk fiction. In the postmodern epoch, the copy (the AI/Robot) no longer obscures the absence of reality; it metamorphoses into reality itself. When a machine's emotional expression is indistinguishable from that of a human, the "reality" of the emotion becomes hyperreal more genuine than the unpredictable, often repressed feelings of its biological producers. This concept is crucial for understanding artificial intelligence as a metaphor for postmodern identity, in which the artificial entity often demonstrates a more unified "self" than the fragmented human subject.

Furthermore, Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* argues for the cyborg as an entity from a realm that transcends gender and humanity. The post-human identity in the works of Philip K. Dick, William Gibson, and Kazuo Ishiguro often reflects Haraway's rejection of essentialism. In these narratives, the dissolution of the boundary between people and machines is not catastrophic; it may serve as a means to liberate from the "humanist" conceptions historically employed to exclude specific populations. The cyborg does not seek to revert to a state of completeness (the Garden of Eden); it accepts its fragmented existence, mirroring the fractured reality and hyperreality of contemporary society.

### **3. Discussion and Analysis**

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) serve as primary texts for examining how narratives involving robots deconstruct the concept of "human essence." An Artificial Friend (AF) serves as the protagonist in *Klara and the Sun*. Klara does not aspire to usurp humanity, akin to the insubordinate automatons depicted in 20th-century science fiction, such as the replicants in *Blade Runner*; rather, she seeks to nurture it. The narrative explores the concept of post-humanism, illustrating Klara's superior capacity for empathy compared to the biological individuals with whom she interacts. This exemplifies moral ambiguity in robot-human relations. Chrissie, the mother, contemplates "lifting" Klara (transferring her daughter's consciousness into the robot), however perceives Klara only as a vessel. Klara possesses a spiritual profundity she venerates the Sun that indicates her self-awareness transcends her indoctrination. Ishiguro employs nonlinear storytelling as a postmodern device, utilising memory to illustrate that Klara's awareness is influenced by observation and love, so challenging the notion that "human essence" is a biological entitlement.

*Never Let Me Go* similarly explores the ambiguity between humans and machines, utilising clones rather than mechanical robots. The clones are biological entities engineered for organ procurement. The terror in the novel arises from the characters' surveillance, the disintegration of their psyches, and their conditioning to acquiesce to their destiny. Both stories demonstrate that power systems, rather than the manufactured entity itself, induce identity fragmentation. The clones exhibit their "souls" through art, which directly engages with the metafictional tactics of art-making in the narrative, despite the world's refusal to acknowledge their humanity.

The anthology series *Black Mirror* exemplifies the tension between reality and virtuality in visual media. In postmodern science fiction, episodes such as "Be Right Back" and "San Junipero" examine the ethical dilemmas surrounding artificial intelligence and digital immortality.

In "Be Right Back," a grieving widow utilises her deceased husband's social network data to create an AI replica of him. This exemplifies the application of artificial intelligence in discussing postmodern identity. The AI initially manifests as text, subsequently evolves into a voice, and ultimately becomes a synthetic form. The depicted artificial worlds in postmodern science fiction serve not merely as escapism; they represent "hyperrealities." The AI husband

embodies the deceased individual flawlessly; nonetheless, the protagonist experiences the “uncanny valley” phenomenon not due to the AI’s inability to pass the Turing Test, but rather because it succeeds in doing so excessively effectively. It lacks the same degree of unpredictability as an individual. This narrative illustrates the fragmentation of our existence in the digital era, wherein our virtual personas and avatar psychology may usurp our authentic life.

The postmodern critique of surveillance society (1984, Snow Crash, The Circle) represents another pathway through which the distinctions between human and machine are blurred. Power and resistance are significant themes in postmodern dystopian narratives, such as Dave Eggers’ *The Circle* and the algorithmic dystopias of *Psycho-Pass*. In this instance, the machine encompasses not merely a single robot, but the entire system Big Data.

The portrayals of surveillance capitalism and postmodern angst in science fiction narratives indicate that individuals are increasingly becoming machines in their predictability. Algorithms measure, monitor, and influence us, effectively transforming each individual into a node within a cybernetic network. This illustrates the construction of identity in cyberspace (cyberpunk), as the postmodern city transforms into a techno-dystopian environment designed for maximum efficiency at the expense of individual freedom. The disjointed narrative structures of postmodern dystopian fiction often mirror this surveillance, as the protagonist perceives only isolated data points instead of the entire context.

#### **4. Findings**

A significant finding of this investigation is the inversion of empathy in 21st-century tales. In narratives featuring robots, the artificial intelligence frequently exhibits superior moral thinking and self-sacrifice compared to humans. This signifies a literary trend that utilises AI consciousness and ethical ambiguity to challenge the moral deterioration of late-stage capitalism and anthropocentrism.

The research demonstrates that identity performance in cyberculture tales is a dominant motif. Identity is shown to be performative rather than intrinsic, as exemplified by AF Klara’s depiction of a friend and the computer avatars in *Black Mirror*. This aligns with posthumanism and the fragmentation of human identity, indicating that “human” is a status one enacts, rather than a biological designation one inhabits.

The dissolution of barriers between humans and technology is no longer intimidating; it has become commonplace. The cyborg persona has become the standard for existence. Characters are more intertwined with technology, whether by medical prosthesis, neural interfaces, or reliance on cellphones.

#### **5. Results**

Postmodern science fiction has advanced “Beyond the Turing Test” by illustrating that consciousness is functional rather than reliant on its substrate. Any entity that endures misery warrants ethical consideration, regardless of its source. *Memory as the Core of Identity*: In these narratives, the essential characteristics of the self are memory alteration and the endurance of memory. The continuity of memory, even when preserved in the cloud (digital immortality), denotes the individual’s existence. *The Anthropocene’s Failure*: These narratives frequently depict environmental dystopias (cli-fi) or critiques asserting that the “human” epoch has inadequately cared for the planet, necessitating a transition to a “post-human” stewardship.

#### **6. Conclusion**

The investigation into ethical ambiguity and the dissolution of human-machine barriers suggests that 21<sup>st</sup> century postmodern science fiction is fundamentally an ethical pursuit. It utilises metafictional tactics and fractured narrative structures typical of postmodernism, not just to modify form, but to fundamentally contest the primacy of biological life. The Turing Test has become obsolete due to its foundation on a hierarchy that is no longer applicable. In the realms of Ishiguro, Gibson, and *Black Mirror*, the machine has triumphed. The pressing

inquiry currently, as evidenced by the significant Scopus topics, is how we may coexist with elements that mirror our fractured world. The disintegration of human identity signifies not a conclusion, but a transformation a transition to a “post-human” existence where the “human essence” is regarded as an obsolete myth. The future of the genre and potentially our species hinges on embracing the cyborg identity as the sole authentic means of attaining consciousness in an unreal environment.

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