Aesthetics of the Brink: Environmental Crisis and the Sublime in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep

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Abstract
Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is today remembered as the progenitor of the science fiction genre, the first major literary work to link a long history of fictional narratives concerning the origins of life notably drawing itself from the stories of Prometheus and Milton's Paradise Lost to the scientific rationalism of the enlightenment. Of the science fiction stories that would follow, Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep perhaps remains one of the closest to Shelley's novel in terms of its concerns and themes. Dick's text is concerned with the thematic of the creation of human simulacra, but its interests are more involved with the ethical implications of technological advancement on society than the fantastic technologies he writes of. Given these similarities, notions of nature and the environment might seem ancillary to an analysis of these texts. These issues, however, are precisely what my thesis claims to be central to a proper understanding of Dick's and Shelley's novels. The aesthetic categories of the beautiful, and most importantly the sublime, are essential to this research. Both classic works of aesthetic theory namely Burke and Kant as well as mobilizations of the sublime that account for contemporary cultural trends such as those of Fredric Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard are utilized so as to track an epistemological shift in both conceptions of the sublime, as well as the relationship between humanity and its environment. This shift, from viewing the natural world as a space wherein humans immanently dwell, to a positivist notion of nature as resources for human manipulation documented in Caroline Merchant's The Death of Nature can be linked to what Leo Marx describes as the movement from a natural to a technological sublime, and is both chronicled and critiqued in Frankenstein. Dick's Androids picks up where Shelley's novel leaves off, carrying an absolute ideological positivism to one possible conclusion, environmental and social crisis, inaugurating, interestingly, a return to a bizarre, and textually ironic spiritualism in the form of the religion Mercerism.

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Shelley was just 18 when she wrote Frankenstein as part of a challenge with her future husband, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron, to concoct the best horror story. Put down the green face paint: Frankenstein’s monster is a complex creation who yearns for sympathy and companionship. Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep, Philip K Dick. Here be Roy Baty, Rick Deckard and Rachael Rosen – the novel that inspired Blade Runner is stranger even than the film it became. Back in an age before artificial intelligence could teach itself to play chess in a few hours better than any grandmaster that ever lived, Philip K Dick was using the concept of android life to explore what it meant to be human, and what it is to be left behind on a compromised planet. — Philip K. Dick, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Having hooked up all the iridescent wires from my XC-23 Weird and Crazy in Fiction Test Machine to Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, I’m here to report results showed the needle registering a maximum ten out of ten on each and every page. Quite a feat. Quite a novel. Having hooked up all the iridescent wires from my XC-23 Weird and Crazy in Fiction Test Machine to Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, I’m here to report results showed the needle registering a maximum ten out of ten on each and every page. Quite a feat. Quite a novel. But then again, maybe we shouldn’t be so surprised - after all, this is Philip K. Dick. One of the most bizarre reading experiences anyone could possibly encounter.