

Posthuman Identities: Exploring Cyborgs, Hyperreality and Transhumanism in *Autodale*

This paper examines the *Autodale* series, a dystopian animated collection by David James Armsby, through the lenses of posthuman and critical posthuman theories. It investigates how cyborg identities, hyperreality, and transhumanism are portrayed to critique societal conformity and the blending of human-machine boundaries. The analysis draws on insights from theorists such as Donna Haraway, Jean Baudrillard, and Katherine Hayles to explore how *Autodale*'s characters, especially figures like the Mayor, the Exceptional Woman, and Shadow, embody the complexities of posthuman identity. Through these cyborg characters, the series critiques the ethical and moral compromises inherent in a technologically controlled society, where personal autonomy and individuality are systematically undermined. By presenting a hyperreal environment in which artificial constructs are accepted as reality, *Autodale* raises questions about the cost of transhuman ideals and the dehumanisation that can result from extreme technological advancement. This study contributes to posthuman discourse by highlighting the intersections of identity, technology, and social control in dystopian narratives.

Keywords:

Posthumanism, Cyborg Identity, Hyperreality, Transhumanism, Social Control, Dystopian Society

The *Autodale* series, created by David James Armsby, available on YouTube, is a collection of dystopian animated short films set in a fictional and outwardly perfect society. This series has seven episodes that delve into themes like societal conformity, individualism, transhumanism and posthumanism. Autodale is a city that thrives in what seems like a post-apocalyptic world ruled by strict societal norms. It is portrayed as a utopia where being

“pretty”, which fits into society, is of the highest value. However, in reality, the film reveals a deeply controlled, dehumanised and oppressive world. Each episode explores brainwashing, gender norms, innocence, fear, imagination, societal mechanics, the blending of human and machine and the societal cost of a perfectly ordered system in an imperfect world. In *Autodale*, David James Armsby critiques societal norms through a posthuman lens, revealing how the interplay between cyborg identities and technological control complicates notions of individuality and autonomy in a hyperreal dystopia.

This research will use posthuman and critical posthuman theories to analyse *Autodale*. This is most relevant since the series’ central themes include dystopian control, cyborg identities and social conformity. Posthumanism will guide the analysis and help to deconstruct how the series redefines the concept of human identity in relation to machines. The analysis will look into cyborg identities, transhumanism, and the enhancement and decentering of humans. Critical posthumanism will add more depth to the analysis by focusing on the series's social and political forms of power, control and technology. It will also look into how technological control reinforces power structures. This will guide the analysis of power, surveillance, control and subjectivity. The key concepts that will be focused on are the cyborg theory, hyperreality and deconstruction of grand narratives.

In the posthuman framework, *Autodale* gives more insight into how the transformation and manipulation of humanity work in a technological world with strict societal control. In his *Posthumanism*, Pramod K Nayar, explains how posthumanism as a discourse challenges human superiority and autonomy. Nayar describes posthumanism as something that emerges as a response to technological advancements and their impact on human life, identity and society. It also challenges the traditional definition of being human by discussing hybridity, and the

entanglement of humans with technology, animals and the environment (Nayar). *Autodale* gives a glimpse into a world where the boundaries between humans and machines are blurred. The series also challenges traditional humanist concepts of individuality, agency and identity. Posthumanism also critically examines how technological advancements, societal changes and evolving relationships between human and non-human entities shape humanity.

In *Autodale*, the societal expectations are imposed by the ruling figures like the Mayor, who represents the control mechanism of the city, while the “handymen”, the robots that do the daily check-ins and aid the humans in other aspects, make sure that these societal expectations are maintained. The Matriarch also plays a major role in the series. These elements reflect the posthuman theme of cyborg identity, where the boundaries between humans and machines are blurred. Characters such as the “Exceptional Woman”, who undergoes transformation into a cyborg and Shadow, who has been stripped of half of his humanity to play the role of police, are representations of this hybrid identity, which is a central focus of posthumanism. In *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway talks about how the cyborg, as a metaphor, is used to understand the complex relationship between humans and machines. Here, the cyborg represents a new, hybrid identity beyond the traditional binaries. Haraway also argues that rather than fearing technology, it should be embraced to reshape human identities and relationships. This perspective challenges the idea that technology is inherently oppressive or dehumanising (Haraway). This notion is embraced and contested in the series in several scenes. In some scenes, this opinion is embraced, for instance, when the “Exceptional girl” sees the Mayor beyond his cruelty and the real reason why he had to construct realities, she is impressed and becomes a cyborg by her own will, even though she is burdened by reality.

Katherine Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics*

Literature and Informatics, talks about how the cyborg overlooks the importance of the material body and lived experiences that inform identity. Hayles says that the utopian vision of the cyborg must not be encouraged, and it should be considered that the cyborg can also be a symbol of surveillance and control, not only a symbol of resistance (Hayles). In *Autodale*, the transformation of humans into cyborg-like entities strips them of their unique identities. Not only are people physically transformed into cyborgs, but they are also metaphorically transformed into cyborgs. For example, in *Being Pretty*, the citizens are visually and ideologically reduced to being components of a well-oiled, machine-like society, which becomes a metaphor for erasing personal autonomy and the dominance of technology.

The series also explores the deconstruction of grand narratives, such as the ideals of beauty, normalcy and social perfection. *Being Pretty*, the first episode of *Autodale* reflects how being pretty is to follow the strict rules of society and maintain the status quo, while being ugly meant the person was not fit to live in Autodale. The ones who were ugly bore the labels: Disfigured, retard, deaf, fat, depressing, crippled, old, divorced, sterile, unemployed, sick, blind, gay and more. The series also engages with the blurring of reality and simulation. In *Autodale*, the citizens live in a constructed reality where the truth of the hopelessness of the post-apocalyptic world and the dangers that exist outside Autodale are hidden from them. The people are constantly assured that “there are no monsters”, but the *Friendly Shadow* episode reveals the government's deception. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard talks about how simulations precede and determine reality in the postmodern world. Media, advertising and technology create narratives that shape people’s world perception. Therefore, people live in simulations when they are constructed representations. Baudrillard also talks about how meaning and whatever was believed in by many will become unstable. When everything is a copy of

something else, individuals lose the ability to distinguish between the real and the fake (Baudrillard). This applies to the people of *Autodale* as they all live in such a simulation without realising that they are living in a constructed reality.

This also highlights Rosi Braidotti's argument in *The Posthuman* that the traditional notion of a stable and autonomous human subject is outdated. She advocates for a view of subjectivity that is relational, dynamic and intertwined with non-human entities and the environment. This shift highlights the interconnectedness of all life forms and how human identities are shaped by these relationships (Braidotti). Similar to this, Francesca Ferrando in *Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations* talks about how transhumanism remains a focus on human superiority and individual enhancement and not for embracing the postmodern condition. Ferrando's argument helps to frame the critique of transhumanism in *Autodale* where technological advancements come at the cost of dehumanisation, social control and loss of moral and ethical boundaries (Ferrando). In addition to this, Cary Wolfe's idea of decentering the human, which is going against the anthropocentric perspective that places humans at the centre of existence, advocating for a decentered view that recognises the significance of non-human entities, also comes into focus. In *Autodale*, this entire notion of human superiority is challenged.

Similar to Hayles, Wolfe is also concerned with how technology is used for control and surveillance, which is portrayed in the actual sense in the series (Wolfe). In the series, every aspect of life is tightly regulated by technology. In *Model Citizen*, the citizens' every move is monitored, and any deviation from the rules is punished. This shows the control that technology has over human life, which also reduces humans to just subjects of a larger system. Similar to Wolfe and Nayar's idea of decentering the human subject, Richard Lewis, in his *Technology*,

Media Literacy, and the Human Subject: A Posthuman Approach, talks about how the human must be decentralised and situated in a larger interconnected system. He also talks about how technology changes how one experiences the world and oneself (Lewis). In *Autodale*, a technological system strictly controls human identity, which can strip people of their autonomy and reshape their experiences in a controlled and oppressive manner.

This paper will undertake a textual analysis of the series, which will include a detailed analysis of the plot, characters, symbols and themes of each episode. Moreover, the dialogues, characters and symbolic representations will be interpreted through the lens of posthuman theories. The analysis will take on a theoretical approach. It will consider the theories of several posthuman thinkers and analyse the ideas of cyborgs, transhumanism, hybrid identities and societal structures in a hyperreal and dystopian future in the series. The analysis will be organised thematically to focus on the posthuman themes present in the series. There will also be a few insights from the creator, David Armsby, to support the analysis by looking into how his intentions manifest in the work. This method works best for this research since it allows for a deeper examination of the text. This method is also effective for interpreting the complex ways *Autodale* integrates theoretical concepts such as Haraway's cyborg, Baudrillard's hyperreality, and Ferrando's critique of transhumanism into its story.

This research will focus on the following questions: What characters in *Autodale* embody cyborg identities and reflect human enhancement, and what complexities of autonomy, individuality and ethical implications of transhumanism do they reveal? This question will explore the characters and narratives in *Autodale* that embody cyborg identities by examining how they reflect the merging of human and technological elements. This question will also delve into how these characters highlight the complexities of identity in a posthuman context by

revealing more information about autonomy, individuality and the implications of technological integration in society. This question will also investigate the transhumanist ideas related to immortality and enhancement. This will also cover the ethical implications of pursuing technological advancement at the expense of human values, morality and authenticity. What is the portrayal of hyperreality in *Autodale*, and why do its characters accept artificial constructs as reality? This question will focus on how *Autodale* engages with the concept of hyperreality, where constructed experiences replace human experiences. By analysing this, the reason behind the characters' acceptance of these artificial constructs can be investigated, which will give more insight into themes of control and the impact of media on the perception of reality. How does technology shape identity, power, and social hierarchies in *Autodale*, and what are the posthuman implications of these dynamics? This question will look into the relationship between and social structures in *Autodale*. The concerns regarding autonomy and control in a conformed society can be investigated by exploring how technology influences identity and power dynamics. This will help to understand the broader implications of technological advancements in societal organisations and human experience.

This research is significant since it will contribute to posthuman and critical posthuman discussions by examining the intersection of identity, technology and societal control in a dystopian context. This analysis will highlight the complexities of cyborg identities, the impact of hyperreality and the ethical implications of transhumanism, through which it will contribute to broader discussions about how technology shapes human experiences and relationships. In addition, the research will also discuss the consequences of technological control and surveillance, emphasising the need to reconsider the role of technology in shaping social hierarchies and power dynamics. This study aims to investigate the cyborg identities and reflect the merging of human and technological elements, revealing the complexities of individuality

and autonomy. Moreover, the paper will analyse the portrayal of hyperreality in *Autodale*, focusing on accepting artificial constructs as reality, their implications for societal control, and the media's impact on perception. In addition, the paper aims to explore how technology shapes identity, power, and social hierarchies in *Autodale*.

CYBORG IDENTITIES AND HYBRID FIGURES

In the series, cyborg identity and hybrid figures are significant symbols that reflect and critique the merging of the human and the machine. Through characters like the “Exceptional Woman” and the “Shadow”, *Autodale* gives a narrative of identity in a highly mechanised society. This aligns with the posthuman perspectives on technology, control and the reformation of human identity. In the episode *Exceptional Woman*, the exceptional woman’s voluntary transformation into a cyborg reflects Donna Haraway’s idea of the cyborg as having a hybrid identity, as she merges her human agency with technological augmentation. This voluntary self-modification symbolises a larger picture, that is, individuality in the series exists only within what is allowed by *Autodale*’s surveillance. The Exceptional woman sees beyond the oppression to the “necessity” of such constructs in place, and she becomes complicit in this reality. This gives a complex perspective on transhumanism, which also aligns with Ferrando’s warnings that while transhumanism provides human enhancement physically, it might lead to the depletion of the aspects of humanity, including personal identity.

While the Exceptional woman represents voluntary transformation, Shadow represents forced hybrid identities. Shadow loses his individual identity and becomes one of the instruments of societal control and order. This aligns with Hayles’ perspective in *How We Became Posthuman*, where she warns against the utopian vision of cyborgs, urging people to see the cyborg as a potential tool of surveillance and control, not merely a figure of liberation.

Shadow has humanity left in him, but his failure in “rescuing” the child in the episode *Friendly Shadow* leads to him facing the consequences of the humanity left in him. In addition to these two characters, the Handymen function as both literal and symbolic enforcers of conformity, embodying the dehumanising aspects of cyborg identity that Hayles critiques. Their mechanical routines, daily check-ins, and impersonal interactions with citizens reduce them to one of the “cogs in the machine” within Autodale.

In the episode *Being Pretty*, the citizens are encouraged to have machine-like uniformity in appearance and behaviour. This strips them of anything that makes them human. In *Autodale*, the Mayor and the Matriarch embody technological control. Through them, Wolfe’s concept of decentering the human, where technology is no longer a mere tool for human use but instead dominates and controls human life, can be seen. Cary Wolfe critiques the anthropocentric perspective that elevates humans as the central actors in existence, instead advocating for a posthuman view that recognises the influence of non-human entities. In *Autodale*, this idea comes to life as citizens are reduced to subjects in a larger mechanised system that systematically erodes individual autonomy.

The Mayor in *Autodale* is a complex and significant figure who represents the paradoxical nature of posthuman ideologies. As the creator and enforcer of *Autodale*’s simulated reality, he is both monstrous and forgotten. The Mayor’s own physical form blurs the line between human and machine, aligning with Haraway’s “cyborg” concept and reinforcing the theme of identity as an amalgamation of biological and technological elements. His body, which has drooping, fleshy tubes and battery packs, suggests that though he has become something more than human, he has been enslaved by his own creation. His transformation into the disgusting state parallels the dystopian consequence of unchecked technological integration, a

critical reflection of Hayles' perspective that such hybrid identities can often overlook the importance of lived experiences and moral concerns.

Through its cyborg figures, *Autodale* challenges viewers to question the implications of technological progress on human identity and societal control. It aligns with Haraway's view of the cyborg as a figure that disrupts traditional boundaries, but it also serves as a cautionary tale that echoes Hayles' and Wolfe's concerns about control, surveillance, and the decentering of human agency. By presenting hybrid identities such as the Exceptional Woman, Shadow, the Handymen and Mayor, *Autodale* critiques the utopian view of cyborgs, revealing instead a dystopian reality where technology, rather than liberating, ultimately diminishes human autonomy, leading to questioning of the true cost of integrating humanity with machines. Through this narrative, *Autodale* offers a powerful posthumanist reflection on the evolving nature of identity, autonomy, and control in an increasingly technologized world.

HYPERREALITY AND SIMULATION

Autodale showcases blurred boundaries between humans and machines, with citizens becoming components of a larger mechanised system. In *Being Pretty*, the citizens are told to be compliant, uniform and hardworking. This behaviour ensures that they will be "pretty" and will fit into society. Failing to do so and being anything other than perfect will mean that they will be labelled "Ugly" and they will be killed. Some of the indicators of being ugly, according to the series, include being disfigured, retard, deaf, fat, depressed, crippled, old, divorced, sterile, unemployed, sick, blind, gay and more. This kind of a reality has been constructed for the people of Autodale by the great inventor. Like this, the citizens of Autodale live a programmed existence even without being aware of it.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where simulations precede and determine reality, manifests strongly in *Autodale*, where artificial constructs become indistinguishable from what is real. The characters live in a simulacrum, a carefully constructed reality that hides the truths of the outside world and reinforces a false sense of "normalcy" within the walls of Autodale. The repetitive assurance that "there are no monsters" in episodes like *Friendly Shadow* serves as a form of social conditioning, reinforcing the illusion that the artificial world they inhabit is the only one they should know. Baudrillard's idea that in a postmodern world, individuals are conditioned to accept simulations and replicas as real aligns closely with how the citizens of *Autodale* view their reality. When society itself is a simulation, citizens lose the capacity to distinguish between genuine experiences and false ones, creating a hyperreal world that shapes their identity and perceptions without their realisation.

The citizens adhering to Autodale's ideology without questioning it is a result of this controlled hyperreality, which makes artificial constructs more meaningful than authentic experiences. The simulation is designed to appear natural, so it prevents citizens from perceiving themselves as anything beyond components of the system. This ideological conditioning strips them of autonomy, leading them to accept artificial constructs without questioning their authenticity, aligning with Baudrillard's notion that hyperreality leads to the dissolution of the distinction between the real and the fake. In *Autodale*, hyperreality is not just a state but a form of control, shaping citizens into compliant subjects unable to imagine or desire anything beyond the system's manufactured reality.

In addition to this, the Mayor, as the city's unseen architect, designs an environment where citizens blindly adhere to his ideologies of beauty, normalcy, and societal perfection, unable to distinguish between the imposed "reality" and genuine existence. The

Exceptional Woman's encounter with the Mayor demonstrates his seductively convincing rhetoric, as he draws her into his ideology with an aura of nobility. However, it is unclear if he was genuine with her or if he had the motive of convincing her cunningly. This is a direct portrayal of how artificial constructs can be accepted as reality when packaged as the greater good, even if at an enormous human and ethical cost.

TECHNOLOGY SHAPING IDENTITY, POWER AND SOCIAL HIERARCHIES

In *Autodale*, the interconnections of technology with identity, power, and social hierarchies serve as a commentary on the posthuman condition and offer a transhumanist critique. This portrayal is seen through the actions of characters like the Mayor and the Handymen, as well as through the socially regulated ideals of beauty, compliance, and obedience. Technology in *Autodale* shapes individual and communal identities, creating a model of society where humanity is intertwined with machines and citizens' existence revolves around the boundaries technology imposes. This dynamic relationship raises questions about autonomy, agency, and the moral implications of a technologically controlled society.

In posthumanist thought, as explained by Pramod K. Nayar, the definition of "being human" becomes fluid when technological advances reshape life, identity, and societal expectations, leading to hybrid identities and challenging human autonomy. In *Autodale*, this fluidity is embodied by characters like the Exceptional Woman, who transforms into a cyborg willingly, highlighting both the allure and costs of technological integration. However, despite her agency in choosing this path, she experiences a deeper loss of autonomy, caught within a system where her transformed identity reinforces the social hierarchy instead of liberating her. This aligns with Katherine Hayles' warning that cyborg identities can become tools of control rather than symbols of resistance, as the Exceptional Woman's transformation only binds her

more tightly to Autodale's rigid expectations.

Technology in *Autodale* is used both as a tool for maintaining social order and as a means of surveillance and control. Cary Wolfe's concept of "decentering the human" echoes this theme, as the anthropocentric perspective is dismantled, where humans in Autodale are rendered mere components of a highly controlled system. The Handyman, for instance, micromanage people and make sure they are compliant through surveillance and reinforce Autodale's ideals, which strips residents of individual identity and reduces them to replaceable, obedient units within the larger social machine. This aligns with Richard Lewis's perspective on how technology, especially within posthumanist frameworks, restructures how individuals experience themselves and society. Autodale's citizens are conditioned to accept pre-constructed technological identities, like "Model Citizens" who show submission and compliance.

In conclusion, *Autodale* serves as a powerful exploration of posthuman themes, particularly hyperreality, cyborg identities, and the deconstruction of individuality. Through the meticulously crafted, simulated reality that enforces ideals of beauty, normalcy, and societal conformity, the *Autodale* series illustrates a society where artificial constructs are so deeply embedded that they replace authentic human experiences. The characters who are conditioned by technology and ideological control embody a loss of autonomy and agency, becoming "cogs" in a well-maintained machine.

By erasing the boundaries between human and machine and concealing the truth of the outside world, *Autodale* blurs the line between reality and simulation, echoing Baudrillard's hyperreality where citizens accept manufactured ideals without question. The series thus critiques transhumanism's potential dangers, including dehumanisation, control, and the ethical

implications of a technologically dominated society. Ultimately, *Autodale* invites viewers to question the nature of identity, autonomy, and reality in a world increasingly mediated by technology, challenging us to recognise the fragility of these constructs and the ease with which they can be manipulated.

Works Cited:

- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. University of Michigan Press, 1994. Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. John Wiley and Sons, 2013.
- Dead Sound. “‘Being Pretty’ | Dystopian Animated Short Film (2017).” *YouTube*, 31 Aug. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=44Vh_w_Qb1A.
- . “‘No Monsters’ | Dystopian Animated Short Film (2017).” *YouTube*, 11 Nov. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EemY2GVMiql.
- . “‘Children’s Toys’ | Dystopian Animated Short Film (2018).” *YouTube*, 20 July 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2ByYKNXTsI.
- . “‘Don’t Feed the Freaks’ | Apocalyptic Animated Short Film (2018).” *YouTube*, 14 Sept. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hx5ubE6wAdI.
- . “‘Model Citizen’ | Dystopian Animated Short Film (2020).” *YouTube*, 10 Jan. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVLrBJYGxk4.
- . “‘Friendly Shadow’ | Dystopian Animated Short Film (2020).” *YouTube*, 25 June 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0sCsXFAdjY.
- . “‘Immortal Machine’ | Dystopian Animated Short Film (2021).” *YouTube*, 22 Jan. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeQSpZ3gUjU.
- Ferrando, Francesca. “Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations.” *An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics, and the Arts*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2013. *JSTOR*, existenz.us/volumes/Vol.8-2Ferrando.pdf.
- Haraway, Donna J. “A Cyborg Manifesto.” *Manifestly Haraway*, University of Minnesota Press,

2016,

[warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnarrativemedi
a
andtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_----_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_
a_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf](http://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnarrativemedi
a
andtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_----_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_
a_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf)

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Lewis, Richard S. *Technology, Media Literacy, and the Human Subject: A Posthuman Approach*. Open Book Publishers, 2021.

Nayar, Pramod. *Posthumanism*. Polity Press, 2014.

Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* U of Minnesota Press, 2013.