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# From Ramble City to the Screening of the Eye: *Blade Runner*, Death and Symbolic Exchange

***Marcus A. Doel and David B. Clarke***

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# From Ramble City to the Screening of the Eye: *Blade Runner*, Death and Symbolic Exchange

*Marcus A Doel and David B Clarke*

**Tyrell:** What seems to be the problem?
**Roy:** Death.

(*Blade Runner*)

**FORGET *BLADE RUNNER***

Early in the 21st century, THE TYRELL CORPORATION advanced robot evolution into the NEXUS phase—a being virtually identical to a human—known as a *Replicant.*

The NEXUS 6 *Replicants* were superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who created them.

*Replicants* were used Off-world as slave labour, in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets.

After a bloody mutiny by a NEXUS 6 combat team in an Off-world colony, *Replicants* were declared illegal on earth—under penalty of death.

Special police squads—BLADE RUNNER UNITS—had orders to shoot to kill, upon detection, any trespassing *Replicant.*

This was not called execution.

It was called retirement.

(*Blade Runner*, opening text)

What possible justification could there be for yet another work on the much laboured *Blade Runner* (1982; 'The Director's Cut,' 1992)? The most defensible reason for us is quite simply that *Blade Runner* is not what you think—particularly if you think that it is an exemplary *mirror* of our own postmodern condition (which gives back from a fictive elsewhere the image of a space-time that will have been ours here and now). In our engagement with the film, we will insist that *Blade Runner* is not a mirror but a *screen.* Cinema does not re-present, re-produce, re-play, or re-flect. Hence, as Deleuze (1986; 1989) demonstrates, conceptualization should work 'alongside' rather than 'on' the cinema: resonance rather than reflection; encounter rather than capture; invention rather than re-presentation. In other words, whilst the mirror is always already given over to and territorialized by something other—which invariable turns out to be a repetition of the Same—the screen is always already immanent to itself. Accordingly, we will not attempt to identify the structure, meaning, location and significance of the image in the mirror but rather to resonate productively with the cinematographic conceptualization inherent to *Blade Runner*: our thoughts on the film will have been an externalized flow, set in motion alongside the flow of illuminated celluloid.

None of this is, of course, to deny that *Blade Runner* has already achieved the oxymoronic status of a canonical postmodern cultural artefact.[1] Its relation to the postmodern stems in part from its splicing of different filmic genres, particularly science fiction and *film noir* (McCaffery, 1991; Grist, 1992). But its status as a postmodern classic cannot be accounted for by its cinematic qualities alone. Thus, in addition to the film's hybrid genre and the double coding of its cinematography, *Blade Runner's* many commentators have remarked upon: its fractal geography; the interruption of temporality; the triumph of flexible accumulation within the hollow husks of global corporations; the fusion of the mechanisms of capital accumulation and governance; the adsorption of referentiality and representation through a proliferation of simulacra and simulations; the lack of authenticity and the indeterminacy of identity; the short-circuiting of memory, genealogy, and history; the omnipresence of the Fourth World; the slow motion catastrophe of space-time decomposition; and the banality and fatality of living on in the hereafter.

In a wider frame, the disjunctive temporality inherent to the generic hybrid of science fiction and *film noir*—a fusion sometimes dubbed 'Tech Noir' after the bar featured in *The Terminator*—has received significant theoretical attention (Penley, 1991). Needless to say a considerable amount of this has certainly focused directly on *Blade Runner*; in the diegesis of this film, the Los Angeles of 2019 is nothing other than the almost total realization of the dystopic horrors that remain only virtual today. Hence, the world of *Blade Runner* is not a space-time to come but a space-time that *will have been*. The future is today, and today has always already fled back to the future (im)perfect; these are truly sliding times (Doel, 1992; 1994). In parenthesis, let us note that this aphanisis and retroflex punctuation of the present—its ghosting, or hauntology (Derrida, 1994), so to speak—resonates perfectly with the ontological flicker of both subjectivity and moving pictures: motionless (s)trips drifting in p(l)ace. In fact, the film's director, Ridley Scott, has himself described *Blade Runner* as 'a 40 year-old film set forty years in the future' (Kennedy, 1982: 66). And so, 'at once archaic and futuristic' (Alliez and Feher, 1989: 41), *Blade Runner* implies that, somewhere along the line, the circuits of space-time have been crossed. It has deconstructed its entire universe. Yet as if to prevent this short-circuit from electrocuting the future in a veritable ex-termination of all signs of life, *Blade Runner* acts as an untimely Earth, running this apocalyptic dis-charge to ground. So, whilst we might hanker after a lost utopia where the virtual retains its specificity—as that which can always be actualized otherwise—or cling to the sweet dream that the future is yet to come, the dystopic world of *Blade Runner* suggests that these very possibilities will long since have been (retroactively) scrambled and disseminated.

It is in this context that *Blade Runner* has been held up as perhaps *the* exemplary mirror of the postmodern (Bruno, 1987; Harvey, 1989; Wakefield, 1990). But there is something of a supreme irony to all of this. For, in the very opening sequence of the film, we are presented with the image of a *false* mirror, figured as an anonymous, unblinking eye, transfixed on infinity, in which we see the infernal reflections of an inhuman cityscape—complete with plumes of flame—as if alluding to what Baudrillard (1993a) refers to as 'The Hell of the Same.' And so, where the burgeoning orthodoxy on *Blade Runner* has seen a mirror in which to view the material and social infrastructure, and the socio-political epiphenomena, of a postmodernized capitalist city (Alliez E and Feher M 1989; Bruno, 1987; Harvey, 1989), a decentred (in)human subjectivity (Silverman, 1991), and a crisis of representation that serves to short-circuit the teleological metanarratives of History and the real (Marder, 1991), we find a screen that ex-terminates these very problematics themselves—problematics that

nonetheless continue to circulate as so many hauntings and phantomalizations. Initially, therefore, we attempt to explicate how these mirroring-effects break down, in both their originary conceptualization and their supposed exemplary depiction in *Blade Runner*. In their stead, we suggest that the film will have been screened from an altogether different perspective—in accordance with the principle of *symbolic exchange* (Baudrillard, 1993b)—by moving towards a consideration of the economies of death that circulate through(out) the film.

## THE FALSE MIRROR: *BLADE RUNNER*, CAPITALISM AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

'Ramble City,' Giuliana Bruno's seminal essay on *Blade Runner*, marked the first attempt to elaborate the film as 'a metaphor of the postmodern condition' (Bruno, 1987: 62). Drawing on Fredric Jameson's account of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1983; 1984; see also 1991), the postmodern is implicitly theorized by Bruno as an historically specific mo(ve)ment, colonizing the space-time of a receding modernity. David Harvey's (1989) variation on Bruno's analysis—theorized in relation to a new mode of 'flexible accumulation' deriving from Aglietta's (1979) regulation theory rather than Mandel's (1975) 'late capitalism;' and inflected through the trope of space-time 'compression' rather than space-time 'colonization' (Lefebvre, 1991; Kirsch, 1995)—similarly affirms the idea that postmodernism is but the cultural clothing of a qualitatively different phase of capitalist development. Indeed, 'compression' would appear to be one of the most enduring motifs of the film, in the sense that everything appears to be in absolute proximity; everything seems to be overexposed in a veritable pornogeography of obscene promiscuity.[2] Yet compression can take place if, and only if, something remains exterior to it, which thereby undergoes a corollary de-compression. Compression can never be total and all encompassing; it is always relative, a relation of speed and slowness. Moreover, compression changes nothing—and this is a decisive weakness for any engagement with either *Blade Runner* or postmodernity. For despite the variegated circulation of terms, the terms themselves remain the same. They only ever enter into new arrangements. This is why we prefer Baudrillard's (1994) notion of space-time *implosion*—the volatilization and ex-termination of terms—and Derrida's (1994) notion of space-time *disadjustment*—the destabilization which is always already *in* the terms, and not merely *around* them (Clarke and Doel, 1994; Doel, 1992; 1994; 1996).

Now, despite Harvey's forceful reaffirmation of such a base–superstructure relation, it is arguably Bruno's account that has set the parameters for all subsequent discussion of the film—particularly in terms of its spatiality (characterized by the city's architectural pastiche) and temporality (marked by a schizoid experience of time). Underwriting much of the literature, therefore, has been a conceptualization of postmoderni*ty* as an epoch progressively instituted in space-time in accordance with a logic of de-differentiation, which explodes the relative autonomy of the distinct spheres of economy, polity, civil society, culture and so on, through the negatory process of postmoderni*zation*; and from which a correlative cultural logic or 'structure of feeling' (postmoderni*sm*) may be directly discerned. *Blade Runner* may then be viewed as an exemplary mirror of the essential, latent and virtual horrors of our own postmodern condition ramified to the $n^{th}$ degree—in which the fractal stage of value reigns supreme and the cultural logic of everyday life is triangulated by banality, fatality and simulation (Clarke and Doel, 1994; Doel and Clarke, forthcoming). Now, whilst we do not

necessarily dissent from such an understanding of the fissiparous present, we see none of this exemplified in the film itself.

Mike Davis (1992: 1), too, remains incredulous to what he describes as 'L.A.'s own dystopic alter ego.' Noting that whilst 'Ridley Scott's particular 'gigantesque caricature' may capture ethno-centric anxieties about poly-glottism run amuck,' Davis (1992: 2) suggests that 'it fails to imaginatively engage the real Los Angeles landscape—especially the great unbroken plains of aging bungalows, dingbats and ranch-style houses—as it socially and physically erodes into the 21st century.' For Davis (*ibid.*), the film 'remains yet another edition of [a] core modernist vision—alternately utopia or dystopia, *ville radieus* or Gotham City[3]—of the future metropolis as Monster Manhattan.' And so Davis yawns at the way in which the film stages the future 'as a grotesque, Wellsian magnification of technology and architecture,' preferring to conjure a 'Gibsonian' map of the future, which unfolds through delicate extrapolation rather than crude magnification (*ibid.*).[4] Nevertheless, whilst eschewing the obsession with dystopic gigantism in favour of careful extrapolation, Davis persists in viewing *Blade Runner* as an attempt to mirror the essential, latent and virtual Los Angeles of today. At bottom, he tells us to forget *Blade Runner* insofar as it is a mirror with distortions: when you refuse to be seduced by 'the mile-high neo-Mayan pyramid of the Tyrell Corp. [which] drips acid-rain on the mongrel masses in the teeming Ginza far below,' and remove 'the overlays of 'Yellow Peril'... and 'Noir'... as well as a lot of high-tech plumbing retrofited to street-level urban decay, what remains is recognizably the same vista of urban gigantism that Fritz Lang celebrated in *Metropolis*' (Davis, 1992: 1–2).[5] Hence, Davis persists in conceiving of *Blade Runner* as a mirror in which to find reflected the alternative futures of Los Angeles, failing to make a decisive move from mirror to screen. Before summoning such a move ourselves, however, it is worth summarizing those features deployed in *Blade Runner* that have been marshalled in the reading of the film as an exemplary mirror of the postmodern. For, we wish to argue, whilst the film *appears* to reflect something of capitalism, subjectivity, history, and the real, these are simply so many false mirrors—so many hauntings or spectral manifestations.

For Bruno (1987), *Blade Runner* provides a powerful vision of the postindustrial city: as the city in ruins. On this account, the relation between postmodernism and late capitalism is evident particularly in the film's representation of postindustrial decay, the proliferation of waste having come to serve as an index of the accelerated turnover time of a new phase of capitalism. This, in turn, is reflected in an aesthetic of pastiche—evidenced, for instance, in the costumes of the *Replicants* Pris and Zhora, where 'consumerism, waste, and recycling meet' (*ibid*: 64). However, 'It is in the architectural layout of *Blade Runner* that pastiche is most dramatically visible and where the connection of postmodernism to postindustrialism is evident' (*ibid*: 62)—pastiche being, for Jameson (1983: 113), the aesthetic form that articulates 'the postmodernist experience of space.' Accordingly, the film portrays the city as 'a synthesis of mental architectures, of *topoi*' (Bruno, 1987: 66), which provides an excess of scenography; references that are simply there, for no apparent purpose (save, perhaps, for a game of recognition on the part of the spectator: Umberto Eco's 'double coding').[6] Thus, whilst 'The city is called Los Angeles … it is an L.A. that looks very much like New York, Hong Kong or Tokyo' (*ibid*: 65–6).[7]

Drawing on Laporte (1978; see also Thompson, 1979), Bruno implies that waste attains a new specificity within the postmodern city—as the return of everything that was hurled

outside of modernity's performative criteria of order, efficiency, purity and stability. Whereas the modern city was manifestly based upon a hierarchical logic of binary opposition (an ordering principle predicated on the repression of difference and the subordination of heterogeneity to a single, positively valorized term; cf. McArthur, this volume), the postmodern city is witness to the flattening of such hierarchies and the implosion of such oppositions. 'The postmodern aesthetic of *Blade Runner* is thus the result of recycling, fusion of levels, discontinuous signifiers, explosion of boundaries, and erosion' (Bruno, 1987: 65). Much of the city appears to be in a state of advanced decay, paralleled in the 'accelerated decrepitude' or premature ageing of J. F. Sebastian, the genetic engineer through whom the renegade *Replicants* seek to make contact with Tyrell, their maker. But whilst the urban backdrop of *Blade Runner* reeks of decay, the marked contrast between J. F. Sebastian's apartment (in the otherwise deserted shell of L.A.'s Bradbury Building) and the high-tech pyramidal structure that houses the Tyrell Corporation speaks of more than simple urban deindustrialization. The archetypically hollow Tyrell Corporation implies monopoly capitalism disseminated to the $n^{th}$ degree through subcontracting and outworking; whilst the explosion of a Fourth World underclass in the interstices of the city speaks of the hyper-deskilling of labour—to the extent that even a genetic engineer such as Sebastian is forced to seek residence in a decaying shell. Indeed, the spatialization of *Blade Runner's* social relations are characteristically heterotopic, permitting waste and decay to be juxtaposed with the architectural splendour and plush interior of the Tyrell headquarters. However, as Culler (1988: 182) remarks, any sense of a distinctively postmodern 'return of the repressed' with respect to waste is mistaken: it is 'not that the economic system has brought the postmodern world an increase of rubbish, and that art has participated in this, but that the element of rubbish ... [has] long been a part of sign systems and systems of value all along.' Or again: 'we cannot dispose of rubbish with a narrative about its emergence or new role in the postmodern world but must reflect on the structure that locates this sludge or dross within or at the heart of systems of value or language' (*ibid.*).[8] Clearly, then, there is something unconvincing about the equation of *Blade Runner's* postindustrial urban pastiche with the postmodern.

Without further ado, therefore, let us turn to *Blade Runner's* treatment of temporality, and in particular its relation to the real. For, according to Bruno (1987: 67), 'The narrative 'invention' of the replicant is almost a literalization of Baudrillard's theory of postmodernism as the age of simulacra and simulation.'[9] Sadly, however, there has been considerable confusion and misunderstanding on this matter. For example, most commentators assume that the *Replicants* want to become human; that they desire a *human* lifespan and subjectivity. To some extent this is supported by Roy Batty's characterization of the *Replicant's* existence in terms of labour and slavery, evoking memories of emancipation and freedom, but this may only be because the addressee of the characterization (Deckard) is assumed to be a human, who may therefore find the actual *Replicant* existence unintelligible in any other terms. Indeed, Roy says as much, repeatedly emphasizing that humans and *Replicants* occupy different universes. As Roy puts it to Deckard: 'I've seen things you people wouldn't believe ... .' Yet the intonation here is more of despair than of accusation; evoking the injustice of being unable to put into phrases what *ought* to be presented in the available idioms (Lyotard, 1986; Lyotard and Thébaud, 1984). And even whilst this remark smacks of despair, it echoes Roy's earlier encounter with the genetic creator of his eyes at the Eye Works, where he jokes about precisely the same situation, remarking 'If only *you* could have seen what *I've* seen with *your* eyes.' It seems far from certain, therefore, that the renegade *Replicants* want to

simulate perfectly the human condition (and so become indistinguishable from humans), or to have the same 'rights' as humans (and so become equal to humans), or even really to become human (whatever that might mean). To the contrary, we suspect that what the *Replicants* want is something that is otherwise-than-being. Specifically, they want something otherwise than being-towards-death (which would be anything but human). We shall return to this under the themes of undecidability and symbolic exchange below. Yet as we shall see, undecidability and symbolic exchange are interlaced within a specifically disadjusted temporality.

As a way into the question of temporality, consider Jameson's (1983) linking of postmodernism to consumerism. The *Replicants* are characterized by built-in obsolescence. Their being-towards-death is literally encrypted into their flesh (cf. Oncomouse™; Haraway, 1992). And it is the difference between their restricted four-year lifespan and their desire for an unrestricted longevity that motivates the narrative of *Blade Runner*: they want to be de-crypted and re-coded. In other contexts, one might say that they want to be understood. For the moment, however, we will stick with Bruno's suggestion that the restricted lifespan of the *Replicants* accords with a specifically postmodern temporality: 'The replicant affirms a new form of temporality, that of schizophrenic vertigo' (Bruno, 1987: 69).

On Jameson's account, schizophrenia is the result of a language disorder, the schizophrenic being 'condemned to live in a perpetual present' as a result of a breakdown in the normal process of accession into the symbolic order (Jameson, 1983: 119). Since language signifies by means of syntagmatic chains of signifiers, subjective experience of temporality—specifically its linear continuity, running from the past, through the present, to the future—is immanent to signification. Hence, the failure of the schizophrenic to accede properly into language accounts for the disadjusted experience of time as a 'perpetual present.' But this discontinuous experience of time is simultaneously endowed with a shimmering intensity unbeknownst to normal subjectivity, where the present 'is always part of some larger set of projects which force us selectively to focus our perceptions' (*ibid.*).[10] Some of this arguably accords with *Blade Runner's* representation of *Replicant* subjectivity: as Tyrell remarks to Roy, 'a light that burns half as long burns twice as bright. And you have burned so very, very brightly.' On this reading, the *Replicants'* desire to overturn their artificially restricted lifespan amounts to a desire for normal subjectification. Pris, however, appears to insist on this latter in advance: 'I think, Sebastian, therefore I am' is her response to J. F. Sebastian's indelicate request to 'show' him what they, as *Replicants*, can do—and, as Lacan (1977) has argued, the *Cogito* is the exemplary, rationalized manifestation of the *méconnaissance* by which the subject misidentifies itself as fully coherent and self-present. The *Replicants'* apparent striving after a normal, human subjectivity would thus amount to a desire to accede into the symbolic order, necessitating an 'Oedipal journey' (Bruno, 1987: 71).

Developing this line of thought, Silverman (1991) has detailed *Blade Runner's* psychoanalytic resonances. Rachel, for example, is an experimental *Replicant* that has been programmed with artificial memories in an effort to prevent her own self-recognition as a *Replicant*: 'If we give them a past, we create a cushion or pillow for their emotions, and consequently we can control them better' remarks Tyrell. When the blade runner, Deckard, recalls for Rachel 'her' memories of playing 'doctor' with her brother ('He showed you his, and when it got to be your turn you chickened and ran'), and of the spider that lived outside her window (whose egg hatched, yielding 'a hundred baby spiders,' who proceeded to devour their mother), the implication is clear: 'Those aren't your memories, they're someone else's;

Tyrell's niece' states Deckard. Rachel musters a photograph in her defence, which she imputes to represent herself as a child with her mother, thus providing positive proof of her authentically human identity.[11] As Silverman (1991: 120) notes, these elements 'provide Rachel with an entire ... Oedipal history,' through which she has been cybernetically constituted as a subject—following precisely the same trajectory as the human child engendered as a female subject.[12] The way in which Rachel repeatedly submits to Deckard reinforces this. Replaying the Oedipal drama, Rachel re-assumes the definition of Woman (*La Femme*) in accordance with the phallocentric ordering of the symbolic.

In contradistinction to Rachel, however, the *Replicant* leader Roy—who exhibits what according to Bruno (1987) is the *Replicant's* form of schizophrenic subjectivity—clearly fails to submit to the Name-of-the-Father, in that he blinds, then murders, Tyrell. As Silverman (1991: 121) notes, 'Not only does he literally murder the figure who produced him, but he kisses him passionately first, in an astonishing condensation of both the negative or homosexual, and positive or heterosexual versions of the male Oedipus complex.'[13] According to Silverman (*ibid.*), it is 'his refusal to relinquish one [version of the male Oedipus complex] on behalf of the other' that results in Roy's inability to undergo a process of Oedipalization, which culminates in patricide and the subsequent acceptance of terminal breakdown. Now, whilst Silverman (*ibid.*) sees Roy's patricidal actions as the 'unpredictable consequences' of 'Tyrell's dream of controlling the replicants through their implanted memories'—revealing that Tyrell is 'profoundly misbegotten'—this neglects the fact that it is Rachel, and not the renegade *Replicants*, who has the particular status of an 'experimental' *Replicant* with artificial memories. And whilst Leon has a collection of photographs—which Deckard does equate with Rachel's, judging them to be 'just as phony'—Leon's do not appear to be Oedipalizing 'family snapshots' in the manner of Rachel's. One of Leon's photographs, for instance, is a shot of a seemingly empty hotel room—which, when Deckard subsequently analyzes it using an Esper machine (in an obvious reference to Antonioni's *Blow Up*: see Easthope, this volume), reveals the shimmering image of Zhora, reflected (ironically) in a mirror. Moreover, unlike Rachel, the delusion that they are authentically 'human' is absent in the case of the rebellious *Replicants*. Nor are we told that Rachel has (knowledge of) a limited lifespan.[14] The renegade *Replicants* know what they are. But as for Rachel ...

> **Deckard:** She doesn't know?
> **Tyrell:** She's beginning to suspect, I think.
> **Deckard:** Suspect! How can it not know what it is?
> **Tyrell:** Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell; 'More human than human' is our motto.
>
> (*Blade Runner*)

For Bruno (1987), however, the sense of schizophrenia is not restricted merely to its personification in the form of the *Replicants*. Rather, the presence of the *Replicants* serves to affirm 'the fiction of the real' (*ibid.*: 67) throughout the diegesis of the film. The category *Replicant*, one might say, amounts to 'a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp' (Baudrillard, 1994: 13). For Baudrillard (1988: 27), 'The schizophrenic is not, as is generally claimed, characterized by a loss of touch with reality, but by the absolute proximity to and total instantaneousness with things.' He is 'Stripped of a stage and ... cannot produce the limits of his very being, he can no longer

produce himself as a mirror' (*ibid.*). Hence, the stable *méconnaissance* of subjectivity and representation characteristic of modernity are short-circuited by the postmodern screening of an open and deterritorializing schizoid subjectivity, which is always already becoming-other through 'a being-multiple, instead of a being-one, a being-whole or being as subject' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: viii; Doel, 1995). And yet, the necessity of the 'retirement' of the renegade *Replicants*, and the obsession with enforcing the distinction between them and humans in the film, speaks more of paranoia (the pathology of organisation) than of schizophrenia. So, whilst Bruno suggests, with respect to Baudrillard's (1994: 2) account of the simulacrum as 'an operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfect descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes,' that 'it would be difficult to find a better definition of the nature and function of the replicants and their capacity of simulation in the narrative function of *Blade Runner*' (Bruno, 1987: 68), this is to miss the obsession with, precisely, the *difference* between *Replicant* and human within the film. Indeed, as we shall go on to argue, much of the film is concerned with establishing, testing and verifying the difference between real, authentic human life on the one hand and the *Replicant* simulation of human life on the other: organic presence (to live, experience, remember and die) *versus* machinic reproduction (to function, operate, encode and break down).

Accordingly, whilst *Blade Runner's* component parts might appear to mirror certain aspects of our own allegedly postmodern epoch—where space-time has become qualitatively different through the fissiparous process of de-differentiation, which serves to bring different elements into almost absolute proximity, thereby threatening to short-circuit and earth their polarity and charge—the film's diegesis is far from breaking with the desire to assign each element an appropriate identity or location within the Order of Things. To the contrary, both the space-time of *Blade Runner's* diegesis and its cybernetic mimicry of subjectification remain conventional, banal, and predictable inasmuch as they are essentially combinatorial and kaleidoscopic. As with 'compression,' the margins of difference may have been diminished, but everything remains frozen in the categories of the Same. For all the supposedly heterotopic juxtaposition and superimposition of diverse elements in social space, the resultant amalgam offers no resistance to comprehension and analytic dissection: bodies remain divisible by gender, ethnicity, class and brain structure; the cityscape remains divisible into discrete zones (the Eye Works factory; the Tyrell Corporation Building; Apartment blocks; China Town); temporality remains an irreversible, universal and linear flow (where, subjectively, its end—terminal breakdown or death—has come to determine the meaning of life); and images and implants remain inauthentic in relation to experience and memory. In short, the account of the postmodern supposedly reflected in *Blade Runner* does nothing less than domesticate it, in line with a thoroughly modernist logic. This is not a world of undecidability, clandestinity, and becoming, but of massive overdetermination. *Replicant* and human are not categories which emerge from a cognizing of the world; they are order-words which must be re-cognized and obeyed.

To escape such a logic, the '*Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)' (Lyotard, 1984: 81): it *will have been*. And whilst this disadjusted temporality may seem to resonate with *Blade Runner's* contraction of time, space-time would here embody a truly fractal quality; an alchemical and lycanthropic becoming-other—rather than a rigid grid for the location and unfolding of immutable beings—which differs and defers the presences and identities upon which all architectures of

periodization rest (Doel, 1992). Hereinafter, 'There is no more system of reference to tell us what happened to the geography of things' (Baudrillard, 1987: 126). For us, however, *Blade Runner's* combination of *film noir* and science fiction engenders nothing more than a context ripe for nostalgic extrapolation: a perfect backdrop for a homely yet heroic stroll through a trying rather than a malicious world. The fusing of detection and invention ultimately ensures that nothing will escape recognition and comprehension; everything comes back to a dissimulation of truth behind a veil of counterfeit images and false mirrors. *Blade Runner* will have been continuously and eternally returned to the safety, order, stability, and coherence of the modern.

## EX-TERMINATING THE SIGNS OF LIFE

'In history books he's the kind of cop who used to call black men niggers.' So remarks Deckard—in one of the voice-overs subsequently removed from the Director's Cut—commenting on Bryant's, his boss's, reference to *Replicants* as 'skin-jobs.' But, despite the film's potential for a 'racialized' development of the difference between human and *Replicant*—evident in other sci-fi films, such as the *Alien* trilogy—it is arguably in relation to sexual difference that *Blade Runner's* narrative operates.[15] According to Penley (1991: 72), science fiction film frequently displaces questions of sexual difference 'onto the more remarkable difference between the human and the other.' And in the case of *Blade Runner*, the *Replicant* clearly adopts the position of Woman—repeating Woman's 'originary displacement,' conceived as the capacity for masquerade (Riviere, 1929). It was Nietzsche (1974), arguing within the historical understanding of his time, who suggested that Woman, supposedly incapable of orgasm, derives pleasure soley from the *impersonation* of sexual ecstasy. As Spivak (1983: 170) puts it: 'At the time of the greatest self-possession-cum-ecstasy, the woman is self-possessed enough to organize a self-(re)presentation without an actual presence (of sexual pleasure) to represent. This is an originary displacement.'[16] Within *Blade Runner*, the difference played out between human and *Replicant* parallels exactly this structure of displacement. The *Replicants* are ultimately distinguished by their self-possessed capacity to 'fake it'—to simulate (is) their own being. Moreover, as Deckard's manliness is repeatedly questioned throughout the course of the film, this amounts to the displaced questioning of his human status. This occurs principally through the character of the police officer, Gaff, who at three different points in the film secretes tiny symbolic models within Deckard's immediate vicinity: first, a minute origami chicken, when Deckard is reluctant to take on the assignment of 'retiring' the renegade *Replicants*; second, a phallic match-stick man, when Deckard searches Leon's hotel room; and, finally, a tiny origami unicorn. But Roy, too, appears to cast such aspersions, saying at one point in his final encounter with a gun-toting Deckard, 'You'd better get it up or I'm going to have to kill you.' After this final encounter between Deckard and the *Replicants*, which leaves Pris and Roy dead but Deckard alive, Gaff congratulates Deckard, saying 'You've done a man's job, sir'[17]—and then immediately redoubles the ambiguity of Deckard's identity by commenting, with respect to Rachel: 'It's too bad she won't live. But then again, who does?'[18] The supposedly determinate distinction between human and *Replicant*, therefore, is above all produced by a categorization that perpetually breaks down. And, as we shall see, its significance is established in the film through the recurrent motif of the Eye.

The *Replicants* produced by the Tyrell Corporation are, first and foremost, *products*. Moreover, they are mass produced products, which roll off the assembly line according to precise specifications and by way of a complex network of subcontractors, evidenced, for example, in the small 'Eye Works' factory tucked away in the backstreets of Chinatown. As a product, then, the industrially produced *Replicant* lends itself to all of those nostalgic laments for a bye-gone age of authentically crafted *works*—one-off, spontaneous, and context-bound productions, whose unique quality and originality can only be counterfeited. Needless to say, such a counterfeit will always be inferior to, and parasitic upon, its original. From such a perspective, the industrially produced product is invariably judged to be a poor imitation of, and somehow less worthy than, the original work which it comes to supplement, and increasingly to displace. According to this script, then, the *Replicant* appears as the ultimate moment in the colonization of the lifeworld by counterfeited signs of life (Kearney, 1988; Lefebvre, 1991). The *Replicant* stands as a post-humanist figure for an inhuman(e) world—but only on condition that this figure remains flawed in relation to the wholesomeness of real [human(e)] life.

In this way, the industrially produced *Replicant* also lends itself to all of those critiques of everyday life under capitalism as one of alienation, reification, and fetishism, so beloved by humanists and Marxists alike. For the *Replicant* is not a product that is unintelligible to us, despite its 'animation.' To the contrary, it is all too familiar—a product *like any other*. In fact, the *Replicant* is a commodity *par excellence*—since, like all commodified objects, *Replicants* have business, commerce, and intercourse amongst themselves. They take on a life of their own, and converse with themselves in the market of equivalences. To that extent, the *Replicant* is a perfect encapsulation of the vampiric form of capital accumulation—the ossified out-turn of past human labour feeding off the present toil of living human labour. *Replicants*, like capitalism itself, are nothing but so much dead labour simulating life. Now, all of this fits neatly into the common-or-garden desires of so-called modernists: they want their objects, products, commodities, and machines to be efficient, exchangeable, durable, and on occasion intelligent—but they also want them to be deprived of their own will, desire, sexuality, and destiny (Baudrillard, 1995). They want their objects to function *as objects*, and never as subjects. For the modernist, the only good object is a dead object: cold, passionless, and calculative—a machine for (the) living; rather than a truly living machine (Latour, 1992).

From the modernist perspective—whether nostalgic, humanist, or Marxist—the interest of *Blade Runner* derives largely from the *Replicants'* apparent transgression of the pact between humans and objects. For the *Replicants* do not simply express the fetishism of commodities through the adoption of so many social relations amongst themselves, they also aspire to become fully fledged subjects, thus erasing the qualitative distinction between real [human(e)] life and the counterfeited signs of life. The transgression which the *Replicants* threaten is therefore not between good and bad copies of an original; whether in terms of the first, natural form of simulation or the second, industrial form of simulation; but between copying as such and the third, simulacral form of simulation (Baudrillard, 1993b; 1994). In aspiring to become pure simulacra, the *Replicants* are endeavouring to sever themselves from all reference to an original, and thus to attaining a specificity all of their own. For a simulacrum cannot be re-turned to *its* original, insofar as it is that for which there is neither original nor equivalent. A simulacrum has only itself. No longer a copy of something other than itself, a simulacrum is that which is always already reproduced. Indeed, it is this possible, retroactive occlusion of an original, human(e) life which serves as the all-pervasive

sense of ambient fear that saturates *Blade Runner*. Lurking in the background is the fear that 'we' are all *Replicants* now—that we will never have been 'human,' let alone 'modern' (Latour, 1993).

With typically modernist bravado, *Blade Runner* seems to want to assure us that *Replicants* are not simulacra but copies; and that, by the same token, 'we' remain something other than mere signs of life: human(e) subjects; living beings. And just to reassure us of the difference between humans and *Replicants*, active subjects and (in)animate objects, *Blade Runner* brings centre stage a certain test that can detect and verify the difference. This test—the Voigt-Kampff test—seems to be the last line of defence between the logic of originals and copies on the one hand, and the undecidability of simulacra on the other. Yet as we shall see, this line of defence, like the distinction itself, is an illusion.

The modernist reading of *Blade Runner* rests on the assumption that *Replicants* are near perfect *copies* of human beings, and that in many respects—such as strength, constitution, and agility—they surpass human capabilities. 'We're no computers,' Roy tells J. F. Sebastian—'we're physical.' As a simulation, the *Replicant* is in a sense hyperreal—'More human than human,' as Tyrell puts it in the film. And yet, no matter how perfectly the *Replicant* copies the human, there will always remain a fundamental distinction between the two. *Replicants* and humans are inalienable and immutable forms; one cannot *really* become the other, but can only enter into relations of analogy—it is *as if* the product *were really* human, but we know that it is not. Now, given that the renegade *Replicants* have superhuman powers—Roy smashes through walls and withstands being battered by iron bars; Leon's hand is immersed into liquid nitrogen without ill effect; and Pris' hand bears being plunged into boiling water—it may seem somewhat implausible that the authorities should resort to the time-consuming and essentially probabilistic Voigt-Kampff test for discerning the difference between *Replicants* and humans. Wouldn't a more straightforward physical test be more appropriate—such as exposure of the skin to temperature extremes, or detection of the product's serial number genetically etched onto its component parts? Indeed, the Philip K. Dick novel (1972) on which *Blade Runner* is based refers to a bone marrow test and to the 'Boneli Reflex Arc Test,' which rests on the fact that response to an electrical stimulus in the upper ganglia of the spinal column is fractionally slower in *Replicants* than in humans. However, none of these tests would suffice in the long run because the manufacturers are working according to the premise that these more obvious signs will be systematically erased from their products (Alliez and Feher, 1989). Indeed, the Dick novel makes it absolutely explicit that the Rosen Association—the counterpart of the film's Tyrell Corporation—is seeking to produce products that will be undetectable and indiscernible. Once produced, they will no longer 'be' *Replicants* at all. Rachel, for example, as an experimental Nexus 6 *Replicant*, is hyperreal not through superlative powers, but through being all too human. Repeatedly, the film dwells on 'her' human flaws, fallibilities, and fears (and, ironically, she seems to attain such a 'human' status in Deckard's eyes by killing the *Replicant* Leon, who attacks Deckard immediately after he has 'retired' Leon's partner, Zhora).

Yet Deckard, too, is beginning to suspect that he may not be who he is—or so we are led to think. And some of the more explicit signs of this creeping doubt paralysis were expunged from the version of the film that went into general release, only to be reinstated in the Director's Cut. Clearly, both the audiences at the film's disastrous test previews, and the Ladd Company (who distributed the film through Warner Brothers), were unnerved not only

by the implication of Deckard's likely *Replicancy*, but also by the refusal of the film to make a final arbitration (Instrell, 1992; Salisbury, 1992). Like so many moderns, they were no doubt under the illusion that order, stability, and constancy are the rule, rather than the (forced) exception; and that undecidability *should* give way to a final solution (Clarke *et al*, 1996; Doel, 1994; 1996).

The key sequence to be reinstated in the Director's Cut was Deckard's dream featuring a unicorn. As noted above, the last of the models Gaff places for Deckard to come across is a tiny origami unicorn, which Deckard finds as he and Rachel flee his apartment. His memory of Gaff's last words—'It's too bad she won't live. But then again, who does?'—are replayed in voice-over, and the implication is that Deckard's dreams, like Rachel's memories, are not private and personal but issue from some kind of implant—such as those manufactured by the Tyrell Corporation, or the collective unconscious, for example. Gaff has seemingly had access to Deckard's dreams—or has dreamt them himself—implying that Deckard, too, is a *Replicant*.[19] And it is perhaps no coincidence that this origami unicorn is folded from a relatively lustreless piece of tinfoil, whose multiple folds do not so much focus the light into a coherent whole, as separate it into an infinitely disadjusted, spectral presence. It is as if this final sign left by the agents of the dominant, molar order were alluding to the aporetic status of the tain of the mirror, which is the condition of possibility of visibility, reflection and recognition, and yet remains invisible and unrepresentable within the mirror-play of identity itself (Gasché, 1986; Kearney, 1988). And insofar as the tinfoil unicorn alludes not to a secure *ontology* of unchanging forms, but to the undecidable *hauntology* of real becomings, the agents of the molar order admit not only the contingency of their own Will to Power, but also that responsibility can only take place by way of the undecidable—without which, responsibility would simply be determination, deontology, and obeyance. In their undecidability, which suspends a final solution, Deckard and Rachel respond responsibly to each other (Derrida, 1988). But we have moved too fast, since we have not yet explained why Deckard and Rachel will have been undecidable rather than determinable as either this or that; as either human or *Replicant*.

So, let's return to the assumption that the Voigt-Kampff test remains the most plausible basis for discerning the difference between Humans (the Real) and *Replicants* (the Hyperreal). This test relies on a table-top apparatus, which records the continuous variation of 'capillary dilation in the facial area' and 'fluctuations of tension within the eye muscle' as indexical signs of the body's involuntary response to a series of hypothetical questions that are designed to elicit an emotional response from the subject. The questions conjure scenes that are supposedly 'morally shocking' to human beings: cruelty to animals; infidelity; lesbianism; etc. By cross-referencing these data, the operator should be able to determine whether or not the subject is a *Replicant*, since *Replicants* are deemed to lack an adequate empathetic capacity. The key word here is *should*, since some *Replicants* have already acquired enhanced empathetic capabilities, whilst some humans—most notably schizophrenics and sociopaths—lack a 'normal' dose of empathy. For empathy is not a genetically given trait; it is a product of effective socialization and normalization. Hence the significance of the fact that Rachel's stock of Oedipalizing memories were *implanted*, post production—'it' was cybernetically socialized into 'she,' and so quite literally en-gendered. (But then again, who isn't?) Likewise, insofar as the Voigt-Kampff test is spoken, it relies on an ideal speech situation of precise and transparent communication. Both Leon and Rachel, however, attempt to subvert the testing procedure through the deployment of copious

quantities of 'semantic fog.' In effect, they attack the medium itself, rather than merely engaging with the message. Rather than offer an answer to a set question, they respond in such a way as to render the question itself unintelligible.

Nevertheless, the Voigt-Kampff test seems to be able to distinguish a Nexus 6 *Replicant* from a human. Whilst a conventional Nexus 6 *Replicant* such as Leon is seen to require only twenty to thirty cross-referenced questions to disclose itself, an experimental one such as Rachel requires over a hundred. Thus, after ten questions both Leon and Rachel were confirmed neither human nor *Replicant*—they were both undecidable. After thirty questions, Leon had been identified as a *Replicant*, but Rachel was still undecidable. After over one hundred questions, Rachel was confirmed as a *Replicant*. But what of another subject? After how many questions should they be confirmed *human*—two hundred? One thousand? Ten thousand? Paradoxically, the Voigt-Kampff test can *never* confirm a human being as human; it can only produce *Replicants* (the falsified) and Undecidables (the not-yet-falsified) at an arbitrarily set level of resolution.

Now, it should be evident that at no single point is the status of a body disclosed, since the test relies on cross-referencing. Rather, disclosure is probabilistic—and this probability varies continuously in relation to the accumulating data. As we have seen, any decision requires arresting the test at some arbitrarily defined point, insofar as subsequent data may always suggest otherwise. Further questioning may evoke shock and empathy—or not. Still further questioning may alter the probability distribution—or not. And so it goes, on and on interminably. This is why the test result is quite literally a resolution of undecidability; it re-releases and unfastens it again. The arbitrarily foreclosed determination opens in and of itself onto indeterminancy and undecidability. It is a mistake to believe, therefore, that the Voigt-Kampff test leads a body to one of two terminals: either *Replicant* or Undecidable; and still less to either *Replicant* or Human. What it actually does is ***suspend determination in the realm of the undecidable*** because the apparently falsified may become *un*falsified at a higher resolution, and vice versa. Paradoxically, then, rather than returning a body to its essential terminus, the Voigt-Kampff test literally ex-terminates the difference. Since the test is probabilistic, it only ever produces undecidability. Such a state of radical exception is synonymous with terror, a state which suffuses the quotidian with ambient fear (Clarke and Doel, 1994; Doel and Clarke, forthcoming). Hereinafter, one will never know if a body is *really* a human or a *Replicant*—only whether or not it expresses signs of *Replicancy* or humanity at various levels of resolution.

Here we arrive at the central paradox of the film. Whilst the leading protagonists agonize over the status of (their) bodies, the dominant order remains ambivalent. For as we have seen, the Voigt-Kampff apparatus does not so much detect difference as erase it—but it erases it in a very particular way. By retroactively negating the essence of things through a wave of undecidability, the dominant order produces its own product—an amorphous surface upon which it can impose order. In this sense, the Voigt-Kampff test is a perfect encapsulation of what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) call the 'Terrible Ray Telescope,' which is not used to see with, but to cut with. (In this sense, the Will to Truth is nothing but the Will to Power.) The test apparatus acts on the flesh, cutting out identifiable figures that can be accepted or rejected at various—arbitrarily set—resolutions. It is no small coincidence that the Voigt-Kampff apparatus works by piercing the subject's eye with a beam of light. Moreover, as if to underscore the ambivalence of the established order towards the so called 'reality' of the

referent, it is worth noting that the monitor attached to the Voigt-Kampff apparatus always renders the subject's eye as green, even when in actuality it is not (Leon's eyes are blue; Rachel's are brown) (Silverman, 1991).

The Voigt-Kampff test, with its focus on the Eye—and the I—is, therefore, absolutely pivotal to the world of *Blade Runner*. As it recurs throughout the film, the test amounts to the moment where the forces of the molar order attempt to normalize and stabilize a single instance of the continuous variation of a molecular flow—a seizure of power that overcodes and normalizes in its attempt to encode everything in its own image. It is the imposition of a statistical norm or majoritarian standard around which deviations and deviances will be distributed. For, as Lyotard reminds us, 'majority does not mean great number but great fear' (Lyotard and Thébaud, 1984: 93; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). And so, as we have already noted, the Voigt-Kampff test is precisely *indifferent* to the actual status of any body's identity. There is no fixed, authentic human identity; no fixed (in)authentic *Replicant* identity. Both are held in a suspended state of indeterminacy and undecidability; both only ever will have been. Thus, the Eye/I becomes the terrain upon which the molar forces of order do battle with the molecular forces of becoming, dissemination, and undecidability. The stability of identity, which the molar order persistently attempts to impose, always already fails. Hence, the film is entirely consumed by the tension between a yearning for clearly defined and immutable identities—figured by the eternal recurrence of an interminable blink, which ceaselessly strives for, yet ultimately suspends, the self-secured closure of the Eye/I around itself—and the fact that there are no inalienable forms or fixed partitions—as figured by the explosion of becomings along the dimension of the Eye/I (cf. Bataille, 1982; Barthes, 1982).

*Blade Runner* thus proceeds through a screening of the Eye/I, which is always already other than what it will have been. Indeed, from its very opening shot, the film is saturated by this metamorphosis. Not only does the centrally important Voigt-Kampff test focus on the eye; the apparatus itself has eyes. In addition: vehicle headlights and street lights constantly evoke eyes; the eyes of the *Replicants* glow menacingly or mysteriously (Deckard's eyes at one point glow in this way); in the Eye Works factory, Leon places genetically engineered eyes on the shoulders of a terrified worker, whose thermal suit resembles nothing so much as an eye, its dangling optic nerve—the suit's electrical cables—severed by the *Replicants*; when Deckard questions Zhora about her treatment as an entertainer he refers to tiny peep-holes drilled into the dressing room walls; eyes transmogrify into eggs in the scene where Pris—who has painted out her eyes—plunges her hand into the pot of boiling water on Sebastian's stove; Roy jokes with Sebastian by holding glass eyes in front of his own; the powerful, varifocal lenses of Tyrell's glasses magnify his eyes before Roy blinds him—recalling Leon's attempt to put out Deckard's eyes after his 'retirement' of Zhora; in one of Leon's photographs, Zhora is reflected in a fish-eye mirror; etc. Hence, from the opening reflections of the cityscape in the false mirror of an unblinking Eye, to the closing sequence of the Director's Cut in which Deckard and Rachel are enveloped by the contracting aperture of an elevator shaft, the Eye proliferates across the screen. To that extent there is an homology between the undecidable, disseminating Eye and the undecidable, disseminating I. And this twofold uprooting of the centred subject brings us to perhaps the most puzzling dimension of the film: Death. But as with Eyes and Is, this is not really death of a mortal kind; nor is it the death of an individual. For as we shall see, death is always already both symbolic and collective. And it is this which enables the apparent apoliticism of *Blade Runner* to offer a glimmer of emancipatory promise.

## 'TO LIVE IN FEAR'—THE REVERSIBILITY OF LIFE IN DEATH

There is a strange dialectic played out by Roy and Deckard towards the end of the film, which hangs on the reversibility of life in death—and the way in which capital has sought to render this relation irreversible. It concerns the status of the *Replicants'* lives as slave labour in the Off-world colonies. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993b), Baudrillard opposes labour as slow death not to 'the 'fulfilment of life,' which is the idealist view' (*ibid.*: 39), but to *violent* death: 'Labour is opposed as deferred death to the immediate death of sacrifice' (*ibid.*). This he derives from the genealogy of the slave:

> First, the prisoner of war is simply put to death (one does him an honour in this way). Then he is '*spared*' [*épargné*] and *conserved* [*conservé*] (= *servus*), under the category of the spoils of war and a prestige good: he becomes a slave and passes into sumptuary domesticity. It is only later that he passes into servile labour. However, he is [not yet] a 'labourer,' since labour only appears in the phase of the serf or the *emancipated* slave, finally relieved of the mortgage of being put to death. Why is he freed? Precisely in order to work.
>
> (*ibid.*).

Hence, we can distinguish between two regimes of death: the *economic* (the attempt to render life an irreversible form) and the *sacrificial* (founded on the reversibility of life in death). 'We live irreversibly in the first of these,' notes Baudrillard, 'which has inexorably taken root in the *différance* of death' (*ibid.*). Hence, labour amounts to being judged worthy *only* of life; capital primarily inflicts upon the labourer the refusal of death. Accordingly, power is defined not by the taking but by the giving of life; not by the giving of death but by its taking—its refusal or deferral (Derrida, 1992). This is pointed up far more clearly in the case of the *Replicants* than in human labour, inasmuch as the *Replicants'* function as labourers is their sole reason for being produced; their very existence is a poisonous gift from capital in the shape of Tyrell. Thus, as Baudrillard (1993b: 41) notes, 'Contrary to all appearances and experiences (capital buys its labour power from the worker and extorts surplus value), capital gives labour to the worker… . In German this is *Arbeitgeber*: the entrepreneur is a 'provider of labour;' and *Arbeitnehmer*: it is the capitalist who gives, who has the initiative of the gift, which secures him, as in every social order, a pre-eminence and a power far beyond the economic.' The symbolic relation of the gift is thus the locus of terror: as Roy says to Deckard—echoing but completing Leon's earlier words—'Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave.' Indeed, Roy sardonically remarks, as he enters Tyrell's room in a doomed attempt to request of Tyrell an extention to his life, 'It's not easy to meet your maker.' This strange return of the prodigal son almost literally brings home the message that the whole of a *Replicant's* life is lived on 'given' or 'borrowed' time. The rebel *Replicants* have come to Earth to extend their credit, but in doing so would merely increase their debt to capital, to Tyrell.

The symbolic act that Roy goes on to commit—the murder of the Father—thus goes beyond the Lacanian symbolic. And it does so in precisely the direction of Baudrillard's concerns with symbolic exchange: '*The refusal of labour, in its radical form, is the refusal of* ...

*symbolic domination* and the humility of being bestowed upon' (*ibid.*: 41). In murdering Tyrell, Roy performs the symbolic act of liberating himself from 'The gift and the taking of labour [which] function directly as the code of the dominant social relation, as the code of discrimination' (*ibid.*)—thereby gaining a kind of subjectivity, defined in relation to his own death. It is only following this act that the encounter between he and Deckard can take on the form it does. In effect, Roy's subjectivity is that of something *more* than just a (hu)man.

In the sequence in which Roy chases Deckard through the deserted Bradbury Building, Roy undoubtedly enacts a cruel revenge on those social forces which enslaved him. Roy himself enslaves Deckard—the agent *par excellence* of the molar order—but this is complicated by Deckard's role as, in effect, a sacrificial agent. Roy is no longer struggling to catch up with Deckard, struggling to take his life; he surpassed him long ago. Rather, Roy *gives* Deckard time—time to live; and time to die. It is Deckard who is now living on borrowed or given time, as Roy exerts the power he has obtained from his symbolic challenge to the dominant order. Roy removes the immediacy of Deckard's death, and holds it over him. Here, for the first time in the film, the sacrificial regime of death in which Deckard, as a blade runner, is implicated, surfaces explicitly. And its primordial status is alluded to in the primal screams issued by Roy and, to a lesser extent, Deckard in this scene.

By giving Deckard life, therefore, Roy does not simply adopt the position of the Father in the (Lacanian) symbolic order. Rather, he affirms a symbolic register that cannot be 'circumscribed ... within an individualised unconscious, thus reducing it, under the Law of the Father, to the obsessional fear of castration and the Signifier' (*ibid.*, 1). Indeed, Roy's rebellious characteristics cannot be formulated in accordance with an Oedipal process insofar as he is *produced* as a *Replicant*, rather than reproduced as a human. The fact that Roy is *beyond* the human is, moreover, reinforced by the religious symbolism that is brought into effect in this scene: At one point, Roy drives a nail into His hand, ostensibly to bring about sufficient pain to ward off His final seizure and terminal breakdown. But in so doing He assumes the position not of the Father but of the Son: the symbolism of the crucifixion, of the sacrificial lamb. Accordingly, He takes His position as a subject, but a subject who has demanded the honour of sacrifice rather than subjection to the deferred death that is afforded to the life of a slave. This symbolism is, of course, highly ironic insofar as Christ was the ultimate obedient Son.

When Roy finally brings his teasing of Deckard to an end—a coaxing which forces Deckard to act like a 'real man'—He literally holds Deckard's life and death in His hands. For as Deckard barely hangs on to the façia at the top of the building, to which he has attempted a death-defying leap, one might expect Roy to let him plummet to his death. One might expect Roy to secure his revenge by exchanging a life for a life, his life for Deckard's death, His immanent slow death for Deckard's temporarily suspended violent death. But Roy catches him as he falls—just as the symbolic order catches the subject—again reinforcing the relation by which Roy gives Deckard his life (takes his death). Thus, and in contradistinction to Harvey's (1989) claim that their are no alliances amongst supposed humans and *Replicants*, Roy emancipates Deckard. For if Roy liberated Himself by adopting the position of the Father in enslaving Deckard, Roy now escapes the Law-of-the-Father by taking back the life which He had given Deckard, but in a way that also gives back the death which was taken from Deckard. Henceforth, the symbolic debt which both Roy and Deckard carry for living on borrowed time is cancelled. In the closing moments of the rooftop scene, upon which

Ridley Scott plays out his Death Drive, Roy *lets himself die* as something more than a (hu)man; He gives Himself entitlement to give His own life, and to take His own death. All of this is crystallized in the *longue durée* of Deckard's blink at the film's moment of greatest intensity: the breakdown of Roy, head down, face flooded with rain and tears, and eyes sealed against the torrent of fleeing memories. And finally, here, the logic of the religious symbolism is finally consummated, as Roy's death coincides with the release of a white dove from His grip, completing the Trinity as His Spirit ascends towards the darkened heavens. He has finally overcome His *Replicant* status as a being-towards-(a slow)-death.

Paradoxically, then, there are not two endings to *Blade Runner* (1982; 1992): one of Rachel and Deckard descending into the abyss of the dead-eye of power; the other of their fleeing into those spaces that subsists beyond the reach of Los Angeles 2019. For both endings amount to the same: a deep ambivalence with respect to the null hypothesis of what it is to be(come) human; and a deep ambivalence towards its others (*Replicants*, schizophrenics, 'little people'...). In the lift-shaft descent into the nether regions of the 'not-yet-falsified' of 'borrowed time,' Deckard and Rachel are swallowed and consumed by the dominant order. In the meandering drive through the ex-urban countryside, they are (temporarily) expelled and exiled from the dominant order—although there is nothing in the film to foreclose the possibility that this 'escape' is itself a staged experiment by the Tyrell Corporation, or that the film in its *entirety* is an implanted memory. Whether swallowed, expelled, on the run, or experimented upon, both Deckard and Rachel are given (borrowed) time, and are thereby obligated to live to the full the life that is credited to them on account of their enslavement to a slow death. 'Only the counter-gift, the reversibility of symbolic exchange, abolishes power' writes Baudrillard (1993b: 49). Only Roy manages to achieve the symbolic violence of ex-termination through his acceptance of death: 'Perhaps death and death alone, the reversibility of death, belongs to a higher order than the code' (*ibid.*: 4). There is more than a measure of irony, therefore, in the way in which virtually all existing readings of the film have missed the permeation of the world of *Blade Runner* by death, ex-termination, and symbolic exchange—and have merely contented themselves with the documentation of the sightings of the ghosts of the symbolic, around which all modern critical theories have continued to gravitate.

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## NOTES

[1] Peter Wollen (1991), for instance, has cited *Blade Runner* as the only canonical film of the 1980s.

[2] This situation is characterized by both an intensity and a tension—a pervasive sense of ambient fear—that saturates the city streets. Even the language of the street has evolved into a 'mish-mash' of Japanese, German, Spanish and English referred to as 'cityspeak.'

[3] According to Salisbury (1992: 94), before the title *Blade Runner* was finalized, Ridley Scott 'was ... keen on the title *Gotham City* but Batman creator Bob Kane refused permission to use it.'

[4] For his part William Gibson is obviously amused by rather than incredulous towards dystopic visions of Los Angeles: 'Town planners of LA have six scenarios of the way that the city could turn out and one of the worst ones is the 'Blade Runner Scenario,' which I think is great' (Gibson, 1993: 13).

[5] Zizek (1992: 217) also notes that 'Ridley Scott's films display a vision of a corrupted and decaying megalopolis,' commenting that 'in *Black Rain*, he finally stumbled upon an object whose reality itself gives body to this vision: today's Tokyo—no need, there, to take refuge with dystopian visions of Los Angeles in 2080 [*sic*], as in *Blade Runner*.' Scott's 'exact specifications' for the *Blade Runner* set are elsewhere recorded as: 'Hong Kong on a bad day' (see Salisbury, 1992: 96).

[6] *Blade Runner's* commentators frequently list: neo-Mayan architecture and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (both of which are, in fact, signifiant of an hierarchically ordered society); Great Universal Studio's 'New York Street' set, used in such films as *The Big Sleep* and *The Maltese Falcon*; the Ennis-Brown House designed by Frank Lloyd Wright; Classical, Oriental, Greek, Roman and Egyptian styles; and so on.

[7] We might add Scott's native Middlesborough in the North East of England to this compilation.

[8] This is precisely the point made in Baudrillard's (1993b) development of Saussure's theory of the anagram.

[9] As Marder (1991: 97) notes, the term '*Replicants*' shows its etymological connection to 'replicas' but becomes '*replicants* thereby echoing from the Latin the present active participle *ans*.' Alliez and Feher (1989: 55) were amongst the first to identify the *Replicant* as a *simulacrum*, 'a usurper who passes himself [*sic*] off as the real thing or, worse, blurs the distinction between the model [or original] and the copy.' There is an evident similarity between the *Replicant* and Haraway's (1985) 'cyborg' (cybernetic organism).

[10] Jameson's reading of Lacan arguably misspecifies the *disadjusted* temporality of 'normal' subjectivity, which issues from the *retroactivity* of the process of signification.

[11] A number of commentators on the film have, following Barthes (1981: 76), stressed the particular status of photography in this respect: 'in Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past.' As a fuller explication, Barthes (*ibid.*: 77) writes: 'The name of Photography's noeme will therefore be 'that-has-been,' or again the Intractable. In Latin, this would doubtless be said: *interfuit*: what I see has been there, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred.' None of this is to deny, of course, that the referent may be mistakenly believed to be other than what it is—as in Rachel's case.

[12] As Silverman (1991: 120) notes, in this interchange in the film the mother–daughter relation, as imaged in Rachel's photograph, is ruptured by Deckard in a manner which condenses the Oedipus complex. The game of 'doctor' metonymically reproduces the female castration complex; the spider story—a fantasy about killing and ingesting the mother—the rivalry specific to the positive Oedipus complex, where Woman is figured as lacking the phallus.

[13] Freud (1962: 23) writes: 'the simple Oedipus complex is by no means its commonest form, but rather represents a simplification or schematization... . Closer study usually discloses the more complete Oedipus complex, which is twofold, positive and negative, and is due to the bisexuality originally present in children,' explaining that 'a boy has not merely an ambivalent attitude towards his father and an affectionate object-choice towards his mother, but at the same time he

also behaves like a girl and displays an affectionate feminine attitude towards his father and a corresponding jealousy and hostility towards his mother.'

[14] Such differences are a source of disagreement between Massey (1991) and Harvey (1989). We would note that, whilst the gender politics of the asymmetry between Rachel's and Roy's Oedipalization is notable, Harvey has picked up accurately on this aspect of the film.

[15] Both Marder (1991) and Silverman (1991) discuss this issue a little, but most of their attention is given over to sexual difference.

[16] This relation between the originary displacement of woman and the *Replicants* was first suggested to us by Antony Easthope at the 1993 Leeds International Film Festival 'Screenscapes' Conference.

[17] 'You've done a man's job.' This could mean either: Yes, you really are a man; Yes, having done a man's job, you have proved yourself a man; Yes, having done a man's job, you have proved yourself to be equal to a man; Yes, having done a man's job, you have become a man; or Yes, you, who are not a man, have done a job which should have been a man's job.

[18] 'She won't live.' This could mean either: She will be *killed*; She will be '*retired*' by a blade runner; She will be '*retired*' at the expiry of her restricted lifespan; She will *break down* when her components fail; She functions, experiences, empathizes, etc., but this is not *living*; She will not be *allowed* to live—only to function, exist, survive, etc.; She *refuses* to live; She *will* refuse to live; She refuses to live life as it *should* be lived; or She, Rachel, will no longer be the *same woman* after this experience. 'But then again, who does?' of course transfers all of these possibilities not only onto Deckard but onto everyone else as well.

[19] We are agreed, then; the Director's Cut makes it abundantly clear that Deckard really is a *Replicant*. And yet, as we shall see, things are not quite so straightforward; not least because Roy and Deckard fail to re-cognize each other until the bitter end—it is as if their beings-in-the-world were entirely different.

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