# Photography, Film and Storytelling of Posthuman Crises in *Blade Runner*

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*Blade Runner* (1982), directed by Ridley Scott and adapted from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), incorporates the media of film and photography and utilizes various filmmaking techniques, including cinematography, sound effects, and dialogues, to reflect on the complex relationship between humans, technology and power. Through cinematographic techniques such as light and dark contrast, shifting eye-level and high camera angles, as well as geometric patterns, the film portrays a technologically-advanced futuristic city and its underlying issues of power struggles and social hierarchy. The portrayal of replicants, through static and moving images and sound effects, emphasizes their close resemblance to humans, particularly their performance of emotions, and how technology alters the fundamental concept of humanity. Photography, as a medium, captures an unreliable and incomplete moment of childhood to expose the dystopian nightmare of memory manipulation that severs the connection between memory and identity. This article analyses *Blade Runner* as an intermedial narrative that highlights the tension between the deceptive appearance of a futuristic city, with flying cars, replicants, and other technologies created for human convenience, and the harsh reality of posthuman crises such as social hierarchy, technological dominance, memory manipulation, and replicant rebellion.

## Introduction: Blade Runner as an Intermedial Narrative

*Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott and released in 1982, is adapted from Philip K. Dick's sci-fi novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (2017). It tells the story of the bounty hunter Rick Deckard's journey of identifying, hunting and killing the fugitive Nexus-6 replicants, the most advanced model to date. *Blade Runner* made its success in the 1980s when film directors preferred sci-fi adaptations to original sci-fi

films. Indeed, cinema originates from the adaptation of literary classics and canons: 'The history of cinema is also the history of film adaptations. Cinema's very growth and development as an art form are deeply and fundamentally influenced by literature' (Singh 2012: 18). As science fiction literature has moved from the peripheral to the mainstream literature in recent decades, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed the increasing popularity of sci-fi film adaptations, including *2001: Space Odyssey* (1968), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), *I, Robot* (2004), *Total Recall* (2012), and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). In the context of the sci-fi turn in literature and cinema, this article aims to take an intermedial approach to studying the sci-fi classic *Blade Runner*.

The intermediality of *Blade Runner* is both in the film and the fact that the film itself is intermedial. By 'intermediality', this article refers to both the narrow definition of 'the participation of more than one medium within a human artefact' and the broader definition of 'any transgression of boundaries between convention-ally distinct media' (Wolf 2008: 131). As a film adaptation, *Blade Runner* is a visual-auditory medium incorporating moving images, sounds, music, etc. Verbal descriptions in the source novel are transferred into visual representations, and written dialogues are spoken aloud by characters. *Blade Runner*'s deployment of photography further contributes to its intermedial narrative to tell a story about the posthuman future of humanity, when humans coexist with replicants, and advanced technology, such as flying cars, robotics, supercomputers and memory implantation, are accessible to humans for their daily use.

*Blade Runner*, as a narrative film, contains a series of shots ordered chronologically, causally and logically to convey the message of two posthuman crises, namely, the social crisis and the identity crisis, to highlight the importance of bounty hunters as a new profession in the posthuman future. In *Le Recit Cinematographique* (1990), François Jost and André Gaudreault (1990) argue that only a series of shots can make a narrative because actions are arranged to form the plot, which is one of the major elements of a narrative. Camera shots in *Blade Runner* are ordered linearly. In white letters and black background, the opening text says that the Nexus-6 replicants' rebellion leads to their illegal status on Earth and their execution by bounty hunters. Nexus-6 replicants have become so advanced that they do not want to be slaves in the human colony and demand freedom, posing a great threat to their human creators. Bounty hunters such as Deckard are essential to protecting humans on Earth from the harm of these replicants. The rest of the film follows the chronological sequence of Deckard's journey of identifying, hunting and killing fugitive Nexus-6 replicants one by one, from Leon to Zhora to Pris to, finally, Roy Batty. While the rebellion of replicants points to a social crisis of power struggles between humans and replicants, the existence of replicants creates an identity crisis about what it means to be human.

Integrating the media of photography and film, *Blade Runner* acquires the stillness of photography and the movement of cinema. Compared with films solely made up of moving images, incorporating photography into the film can add static images that capture moments from different times and places. In *Cinema Between*

*Media*, Jørgen Bruhn and Anne Gjelsvik (2018: 75) use the term 'fleeting still moments' to describe *Everlasting Moments*' in-betweenness that goes 'beyond the dichotomy of the movement and montage of cinema and the stillness of photography'. In *Blade Runner*, there are two photographs, one being Leon's photo of replicant Zhora, and the other being Rachael's photo of herself and her mother. Deckard uses the photo-analysis machine to analyse and enhance Leon's photo to find Zhora. Photographs are visual clues for Deckard to decipher and create suspense and arouse the viewers' curiosity.

Film and photography share the same visual privilege in narrative representation. At the beginning of *Blade Runner*, there is a close-up of a blue eye with a projection of flames glowing in the city. In 'Reflections in a silver eye: lens and mirror in *Blade Runner*', Vernon Shetley and Alissa Ferguson (2001: 66) see the blue eye as 'an analogue to the camera that has just been shooting the cityscape'. Indeed, the close-up of the blue eye reminds the viewers of the presence of a camera that directs them only to see what is relevant for the storytelling and leaves out the rest. Moreover, in the photo-analysis scene, Deckard puts Leon's photo into a photo-analysis machine and adjusts the angle of the photo to find Zhora. The use of close-ups on the photo also draws attention to important details. These two scenes reflect how cameras can have the effects of emphasis and de-emphasis.

However, films differ from pure photographs, in that films make meaning through intermedial narratives. In *Narrative Across Media*, Marie-Laure Ryan (2004: 10–11) points out that pure pictures and music are not narratives because they are not 'semiotic objects' and are unable to 'make propositions'. The propositions made by the film create meaning, crucial for defining a narrative and its functions. Ryan (2004: 9) defines a narrative as 'a textual act of representation – a text that encodes a particular type of meaning'. Similarly, Bronwen Thomas (2016: 4) regards narrative as 'basic to who we are as human beings, fundamental to explaining how we process time, how memory works and how we come to conceive of our own identities'. From the perspective of posthuman studies, *Blade Runner* makes a claim about the posthuman identity crisis in defining the human in relation to technology, replicants and artificial memory, as one central issue of posthuman studies is to go beyond humanism's restriction of 'speak[ing] of the human in the accents and the interests of a class, sex, a race, a genome' to figure out 'what counts as the human' (Braidotti 2013: 15–16).

The following three sections will explore how interactions between and within photography and film contribute to *Blade Runner*'s posthuman storytelling and meaning-making of the posthuman crises. The first section will describe and analyse how *Blade Runner*'s cinematography, which lays the groundwork for what is known to be cyberpunk cinema, contributes to the visual representation of the dystopian futuristic city and makes the film a so-called 'little narrative' of the postmodern critique of technology (see later and Lyotard 1984 for the meaning of 'little narrative'). The second section analyses how the film reflects the question of what it means to be human in relation to replicants as a product of technology by

incorporating the medium of photography. The final section also focuses on photography in the film to study how memory implantation, another technological product, affects humans and replicants.

## Cyberpunk, Cinematography and a Postmodern Critique

*Blade Runner* can be considered a pioneer of cyberpunk cinema, represented by the widely known *Matrix* trilogy (1999–2003). It introduces the cinematographic style of cyberpunk, such as urban landscape, high and eye-level camera angles, neon lighting, light-and-dark contrast, and geometric buildings in modern or ancient style. Cyberpunk film adaptations are only one of the many formats of cyberpunk media. Others include cyberpunk animated films such as Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1988), cyberpunk video games such as *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), and countless cyberpunk 3D artworks. Set in a high-tech urban city in the near future, the cyberpunk genre explores the relationship between humans and technology in general.

The high camera angle, which is for the camera to look down on the city from above, and a light-and-dark contrast are cinematographic techniques used to represent the prosperous appearance of the urban landscape of Los Angeles. In the opening scene, the high camera angle allows viewers to see crowded buildings and skyscrapers. Flares and artificial lights serve as contrasts to the darkness of the night. As the camera zooms in, viewers can trace artificial light sources to apartment windows, neon-lit signs, flying cars, electronic screens, and street vendors. These artificial lights reflect the prosperous appearance of the futuristic city, with many people living in it and making a living.

*Blade Runner* also appeals to the viewers' senses of sound and vision to represent the advanced technology in the near future. For example, from a high angle, the camera captures the 'spinner' (flying car) taking off vertically and making a loud engine sound. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, a 'spinner' is instead called a 'hovercar'. It is first mentioned in the book when Deckard leaves the pet store and 'plucked open the door of his hovercar' (Dick 2017: 14). The source novel does not describe what the hovercar looks like or how it functions. In the film, the spinner is visually represented as a car with two holes at its bottom for an air outlet to create lift. As the spinner flies through the city to take Deckard to the Police Department, the camera moves to an eye-level angle. Viewers can take the point of view of Deckard looking outside the window of the spinner at the crowded skyscrapers and other spinners passing by. The high camera angle that allows the viewers to see the city from above gives a sense of detachment, but it effectively shows the city. The eye-level angle, on the other hand, creates a more immersive experience for viewers, who are very likely to marvel at the advanced futuristic city as if they were there.

However, what is beneath the prosperous appearance of a futuristic and technologically advanced city is the underlying social issues. The visual representation of crowded skyscrapers, neon-lit streets, and spinners contrasts with abandoned apartments, dark alleys, and dirty buses, revealing serious social hierarchy. The film

also uses an eye-level camera angle to depict Eldon Tyrell, the owner of Tyrell Corporation, and his idleness in playing chess in the luxurious candle-lit apartment. This contrasts with a scene where J.F. Sebastian, a genetic designer, gets off a bus, walks into a dirty and dark alley littered with garbage, and enters a deserted building he calls home. This scene is also shot from an eye-level angle, which means that the camera is placed at the height of Sebastian's eyes. While the futuristic city looks prosperous from the high-camera angle, it is, in fact, hierarchical, with the rich upper-class living a prosperous life and the poor underclass struggling to survive. In the eyes of the underclass, the city is 'a gloomy, rainy, commercially driven, multi-ethnic megalopolis composed of street-level stall vendors, abandoned downtown buildings' (Knight and McKnight 2008: 21). Therefore, the eye-level camera angle may take the perspectives of different characters to represent the dark side of the city and highlight the disparities among different social classes.

*Blade Runner* conveys the postmodern theme of warning against the negative consequences of technology and criticizing the power struggle between the Tyrell Corporation and the government. Compared with the rectangular modern high-rise buildings, which signal the film's futuristic setting, the Tyrell headquarters is visually represented as a giant pyramid-like structure with mixed Roman and Greek columns, symbolizing the corporation's power as the manufacturer of replicants. *Blade Runner* reveals issues such as 'corporate capitalism, political repression', 'technological proliferation' and 'social inequality' (Vest 2009: xiii). The powerful Tyrell Corporation finds itself in a power struggle with the freedom-seeking replicants wishing to be equal to humans. Meanwhile, the government also enters into this power struggle, deploying Blade Runners to 'retire' (destroy) these replicants – a move that demonstrates the repressive power of law enforcement and authoritarianism. Police officials and the hired bounty hunters, representing the government, attempt to hold the balance of power between the government and the Tyrell corporation, the latter signalling the usurping power of 'huge financial conglomerates' and making the futuristic city a 'future urban nightmare' (Senior 1996: 1–3).

The use of a video-computer screen to show these freedom-seeking replicants further emphasizes the futuristic and technologically advanced setting of the film and highlights the idea of technology being a tool for strengthening power. There is a scene in the film where Officer Bryant presents the fugitive Nexus-6 replicants on a video-computer screen. These replicants are introduced to Deckard individually on the screen with a 3D image of what the replicants look like and textual information of the replicants' serial number, inception date and function, which is crucial for Deckard to understand the replicants' capabilities. Police officers and 'blade runners' (bounty hunters) use advanced technology, including the video-computer screen and flying cars, to retire replicants. The Tyrell Corporation also upgrades their replicants to make them harder to be retired. For example, as combat models, Leon and Roy Batty stand out among other replicants in that they are stronger and more violent than other models, further strengthening Tyrell Corporation's ruling power on Earth and in the off-world colonies.

*Blade Runner*'s postmodern critique of technology makes it what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls a 'little narrative'. According to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), postmodernism marks a counter-modernist movement to avoid taking anything for granted as the truth and believing in one grand or universal narrative. In the late twentieth century, when the grand narrative celebrates the progress in science and technology, *Blade Runner* suggests a sceptical attitude toward technological development and transformation, which can lead to a posthuman social crisis of power struggles and social hierarchy. In *The Postmodern Humanism of Philip K. Dick*, Jason Vest (2009: xi) argues that Philip Dick's science fiction 'dares to rehearse the values of individual autonomy, personal liberty, and political freedom that seem impossible in the fractured permission of the postmodern era.' By portraying Deckard as a bounty hunter combating the usurping power of the tech corporation, *Blade Runner* promotes values crucial to being human, particularly resistance to technological dominance and corporate control.

## Replicants and their Intermedial Performance of Emotions

In *Blade Runner*, the existence of nonhuman replicants, produced by advanced technology, is a crucial aspect of the dystopian nature of the futuristic city because of their threats to human identity. By comparing the photograph of Zhora to her filmic scenes in *Blade Runner*, this section will illustrate how replicants are visually represented as threats, in order to explore the relationship between humans and technology further. The visual representation of replicants moves inward to show replicants' emotions, highlighting the idea of emotional performance, where emotions are reflected in the display of physical appearance and bodily movements. Replicants' bodily performance of emotions, once considered unique to humans, raises questions about what makes humans unique and whether replicants can actually feel the emotions they perform.

Judith Butler proposes gender performativity, which states that 'If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured' (Butler 1999: 180). A person only becomes a male or a female through particular behaviours rather than being born into a gender. Emotions can also be performative: 'Like Butler's notion of gender, emotions [can be viewed] as a form of action [...] rather than "as an expression of a determinate underlying psychological or psychosocial phenomenon"' (Martín-Moruno and Pichel 2019: 4). Emotions are actions, which can be learned and performed rather than being innate to the human identity, so nonhuman replicants can also perform emotions, even though they may not be able to feel.

In front of a camera, nonhuman robots perform emotions recognizable to the audience: 'love, sadness, fear, joy, anger and disgust–also shame and despair – remain recognizable in lasting ways, although the general term that encompasses them changed over time' (Tait 2021: 11). AI robots, such as HAL 9000 from the 1968

MGM film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, are often represented as superior to humans in intelligence without the capacity to feel. However, in more recent sci-fi film adaptations, with *Blade Runner* as an example, AI robots have additionally gained the capacity to perform all kinds of emotions through their bodily movements. In *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), adapted from Brian Aldiss's short story 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long', David, a child robot, performs a son's love for his 'mother' by going on a journey to find the Blue Fairy with the belief that the Blue Fairy can turn him into a real boy to be loved and cared by the 'mother'. In *I, Robot* (2004), directed by Alex Proyas and based on Isaac Asimov's *Three Laws of Robotics*, in his short-story collections of the same name, Sonny, a new model of the NS-5 series, breaks free from the three laws of robotics, develops self-consciousness, and performs different emotions. For example, Sonny hits the table with his fists to perform anger at being distrusted after he explains that he did not murder Dr Lanning.

In *Blade Runner*, photography is used as a tool of emphasis and de-emphasis in terms of representing replicants and their performance of emotions. Leon's photo of Zhora, a Nexus-6 replicant, tries to conceal her in the framing, or the photo's composition. Leon's photo has no central focus, with a writing table occupying the left half, a doorway in the middle to the right, and a bed taking up the right half of the photo. Due to the effect of the de-emphasis of the photograph, Deckard cannot find Zhora with his bare eyes. Instead, he needs to use the photo-analysis machine, which shifts angles to direct his attention to what is concealed in the photo, the woman in the mirror.

Deckard first zooms in and enhances 224 to 176 to see a man's arm. After another enhancement, the man's wrist, shoulder, and profile are visible. Deckard then zooms in to see the close-up of the wrist. With no clue here, he pulls back and turns right to look at the door and the doorway. He suddenly notices the mirror hanging on the wall in the doorway and zooms in the mirror to look at what is inside. In the mirror, he sees a shiny white object, adjusts the angle, and discovers a tall, slim white woman with long brown hair behind the object. He zooms in again to see the snake tattoo on her neck and confirms her identity as Zhora. Her bodily posture of lying on a bed with her eyes closed can be interpreted as a performance of her calmness. At that point, Zhora underestimates the power of technology, as her calmness implies that she is not concerned about the danger of being hunted down by Deckard.

While Leon's photo can only capture a still moment of Zhora's bodily posture, the movement of film allows *Blade Runner* to show Zhora's performance of fear through her actions. After seeing a photo of Zhora, Deckard begins his bounty hunting. When he meets her in a dressing room, the over-the-shoulder shot is used to frame the sequence from the perspective of Deckard to present a scene of Zhora playing with a snake. With heavy makeup and full-body glitter covering her neck tattoo, she tries to conceal her identity. Then, Zhora takes a shower and asks Deckard to help her get dressed. She finds a chance to knock him down with her kicks and punches and escapes from the back door. While Zhora's calmness reveals her overconfidence in

her abilities to evade the blade runner, the attack scene shows her fear when she is actually hunted down by Deckard.

Similarly, Pris, another female Nexus-6 replicant, performs fear with her facial expressions and body language. When Pris catches sight of a human stranger, who is later known as Sebastian, her body shakes, and her eyes open wide with fear. She immediately stands up and attempts to escape. Zhora and Pris perform fear differently to represent their different personalities, with Zhora being strong, tough and aggressive, and Pris being vulnerable and submissive. Zhora's fear is evident through her active attack when she is threatened, while Pris demonstrates fear in a more passive way through physical trembling, wide-eyed terror, and running away from a potential threat.

In addition to visual aspects such as physical appearance, bodily posture, and actions, sound effects are also important elements in the filmmaking of *Blade Runner*, creating a sense of fear and tension. Towards the end of the film, in the scene when Deckard searches for Roy and Pris in the dark in an abandoned building, there are multiple sound effects, including the sounds of a bell, laughs, footsteps, a ringing phone, and the weird noise made by Sebastian's electronic toys. The sudden and intermittent bell and a phone ringing in the background, the creepy and echoing laughs, and the amplified sound of footsteps are common tactics used in horror films. The sound of Sebastian's electronic toys is a combination of whistles, clicks and buzzing, intensifying the fear, unease and tension.

Emotions are central to sci-fi film adaptations in that not only do nonhuman characters perform emotions, but these emotions are also located in the viewers in the reception process. The viewers' emotional reception can be traced back to what is widely known as the first sci-fi story, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and its sci-fi horror film adaptation of the same name (1931), in which the viewers are encouraged to feel for the monster. In *Blade Runner*, the unsettling sound effects put viewers in the position of both Deckard and the replicants. Viewers can identify with Deckard's fear of the replicants' unpredictable attack in the dark. Despite the fact that Roy and Pris are not capable of feeling emotions, their performed fear of being captured and killed by Deckard can still be identified by the viewer.

When immersed in the posthuman world of *Blade Runner*, viewers experience a mix of terror and pleasure. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles (1999: 283–285) notes that the experience of the posthuman 'both evokes terror and excites pleasure', terror of 'the age of the human drawing to a close' and pleasure about 'the exhilarating prospect of getting out of some of the old boxes and opening up new ways of thinking about what being human means'. In *Blade Runner* and its source novel, the Voight-Kampff test is introduced as a method to differentiate between humans and replicants, based on the ability to emphasize. While emotions can be voluntary, faked and performed, empathy is an involuntary bodily response that can only be performed by those capable of empathy. Therefore, while viewers feel the terror of the blurring human–android boundaries and technological advancement, they might also feel the pleasure of discovering the connection between empathy and human identity.

## Implanted Memory and an Intermedial Narrative of the Past

Integrating the media of photography and film, *Blade Runner* explores how memory can be recorded, stored and retrieved to raise the question of the relationship between one's memory and identity. However, the technology of memory implantation makes it possible for memory to be constructed, distorted and transferred, which breaks the boundary between the authentic and the artificial. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur (2004: 6) defines memory as 'directed towards prior reality, priority constituting the temporal mark par excellence of the "thing remembered," of the "remembered" as such'. In other words, the fundamental nature of memory as a process is concerned with the past. When we remember something, we are accessing information about an event or situation that has already occurred. In contrast to authentic memory, implanted memory is artificially created and leaves much room for imagination that can be incorporated into a person's personal narrative or sense of identity.

In *Blade Runner*, dialogue and visuals are used to tell Rachael's childhood stories to highlight the artificiality of Rachael's childhood memory and reveal the true nature of her identity as a replicant. In the dialogue scene between Rachael and Deckard, in Deckard's dimly-lit apartment, the window blinds are adjusted to lighten their faces while keeping the room in darkness. Deckard narrates pieces of Rachael's childhood memory, including Rachael and her brother playing a doctor's game and baby spiders eating their mother. The implanted childhood memory enables Rachael to recollect herself as an innocent and kind human girl who could not bear to watch the mother spider die. The camera alternates between medium close-up shots of Deckard and Rachael during their conversation. Deckard dominates the conversation, which is evident in his central position in his medium close-up shots. Meanwhile, Rachael listens and reacts to Deckard's words, and her position on the right third portion of the vertical line in the frame reveals her passivity and submission to Deckard's dominance. Deckard's narration of Rachael's memory without her ever telling him or anyone else proves the artificiality of her memory, as the authentic memory is private. Rachael's flowing tears and trembling lips are the bodily performances of the sorrow of even considering the possibility that she is a replicant implanted with the human memory.

The film's storytelling of Rachael's past relies heavily on the medium of photography to reveal the association between technology, memory and identity. The photograph of Rachael and her mother serves as tangible evidence of a past that is otherwise intangible and elusive. Through this physical object, Rachael can prove her human identity by demonstrating her ability to have a memory that extends beyond the replicant's limited two-year life span. An extreme close-up of Rachael's photograph of herself and her mother shows its content and emphasizes its importance and significance as a key piece of evidence: the young Rachael is sitting on her mother's lap on the front porch, smiling at the camera. Rachael's smile is a bodily performance of childhood happiness. Rachael uses this photograph as a piece of evidence to demonstrate that she has a loving mother and a home and to prove

that she is a human. However, similar to memory, which is fragmentary and subject to distortions and manipulation, the photograph that can only capture a static moment of the past is unreliable and incomplete, not to mention that advanced technology makes fabricated photographs possible.

The manipulation of Rachael through photographs and the technology of memory implantation cannot be successful without her willingness to believe in the implanted memory, which is Utopian in nature, with warm and happy family moments. With a firm belief in her implanted memory and her human identity, Rachael can better integrate into human society and is seen and treated as a human by Deckard. After seeing Rachael's flowing tears and trembling lips, Deckard says that her implanted memory is just a joke, in order not to hurt Rachael's 'feelings'. In contrast, without any memory manipulation, Roy lives with the cruel fact that he is a replicant. While the implanted memory is manipulative, the authentic memory can be enslaving. In 'The virtuality of time: memory in science fiction films', Anneke Smelik (2009: 53) argues that 'the personal memory is a prison that keeps the subject chained to the past' but 'technology offers the character liberation from his or her memory, and thus from the past, opening up new vistas for the future'. Indeed, being imprisoned by his painful and traumatic memory of being treated as a slave by humans in the extra-terrestrial colony, Roy spends his valuable four-year life in rebellion against his creators and revenge against his oppressors. If Roy had undergone memory manipulation to forget his authentic memory, he might have been able to live a more peaceful life without being consumed by his anger and desire for rebellion and revenge. Therefore, seen in the light of Roy's painful and traumatic memory, memory manipulation can be liberating, making Rachael believe that she is human and allowing her to live a normal human life.

However, what Smelik (2009: 53) calls 'the futuristic fantasy' of memory liberation and mastery can be a dystopian nightmare of memory manipulation. Implanted memory, together with photographs, can create a convincing narrative and even manipulate the behaviour of the subjects. By implanting Rachael with the memory of his niece, Tyrell establishes a fake family relationship with Rachael to ensure her servitude and loyalty to the Tyrell Corporation. The source novel also criticizes the technology of memory implantation by suggesting that individuals do not even remember that they have undergone the implantation process. Rachael's ignorance of her memory implantation invites the audience to doubt what they have taken for granted to be true, such as Deckard's human identity. Even though *Blade Runner* and its source novel do not state clearly that Deckard is a human, the audience assumes that he is because a bounty hunter who retires replicants must be a human. However, it is possible for replicants, implanted with the false memory of being human, to be manipulated to work for human interests and kill their fellow replicants.

In the source novel, a dialogue between Deckard and Luba Luft suggests a possibility that Deckard, who mercilessly hunts and kills androids, may be an android implanted with a human memory without his awareness of it. The medium of verbal dialogue allows Deckard and Luba to explore questions about their identity

and the truth of their memory. Luba, an android who is implanted with the memory of a human singer, questions Deckard's word that he has taken the empathy test and is certain of his human identity: 'Maybe that's a false memory. Don't androids sometimes go around with false memories?' (Dick 2017: 94). This questioning of the truth of memory challenges Deckard's own assumption that he is human and raises the possibility that his memory is not his own. 'In films such as *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, *Total Recall*, and *Cypher*, memories lose their ability to anchor identity, history, and truth' (Matrix 2009: 62). Through the memories of Rachael and Deckard, *Blade Runner* highlights the limitations for humans to rely solely on physical objects such as photographs or memories to define their identity.

Even though implanted memory is artificial and fails to form a real identity, it does not mean that implanted memory is worthless. Both authentic and artificial memory can endow life with meaning and purpose. Rachael's life takes on new meaning by preserving the memory of Tyrell's niece and gains a purpose of carrying on her legacy. Roy finds the meaning of his short life in his experience of the universe, especially through his sense of vision. Towards the end, after Roy confronts his creator, Eldon, and fails to extend his life, he recalls the marvellous and unbelievable things he has seen in his space travels, such as attack ships on fire and C-beams glittering in the dark. Maybe space travel itself is the purpose and meaning of his fleeting life. Indeed, *Blade Runner* can be regarded as a meta-narrative in the sense that it contains multiple embedded narratives, including Deckard's narrative of Rachael's fake childhood, Rachael's narrative of her happy childhood, and Roy's narrative of his space travel. Francesca Ferrando (2019: 55–57) argues that 'centers ... are mutable, nomadic, ephemeral' and 'its perspectives have to be pluralistic, multilayered, and as comprehensive as possible'. This decentring of the human and multiple perspectives can be reflected in the embedded narratives told by Rachael and Roy as they narrate meaningful moments in life, further emphasizing *Blade Runner*'s postmodernism and post-dualism.

### Conclusion

*Blade Runner* marks the transition from modernism to postmodernism in the 1980s, 'entail[ing] radically different positions on the nature and function of interpretation', with the former 'presuppos[ing] the film's structural and semiotic depth' and the latter emphas[izing] on its surface' (Begley 2004: 186). A modernist reading of *Blade Runner* stresses its meaning beyond its surface level, and thus uncovers the underlying structures and symbols, such as the imagery of modern high-rise buildings, neon-lit streets, and flying cars to depict the technologically advanced future and its use of Tyrell corporation's pyramid structure and Roman and Greek columns as symbols of corporate power.

Meanwhile, *Blade Runner* is often viewed as a postmodern film due to its exploration of postmodern themes, especially the impact of technology, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and memory implantation, on intensifying the social

crises of power struggles and social hierarchy, as seen in the usurping power of Tyrell Corporation and the rebellion of replicants, leading to identity crisis. The film also employs postmodern aesthetics, with a particular focus on visual media. Its use of cinematography, lighting, sound effects, colours and geometric patterns creates a visually immersive world for the viewers, making *Blade Runner* an intermedial storytelling experience that can engage viewers with the posthuman world. Moreover, *Blade Runner* also examines the link between photography and film to explore the connection between technology, memory and identity. Further research on *Blade Runner*'s intermediality could investigate how visual media portray the impact of technology on the environment, specifically through depicting post-apocalyptic settings with striking features such as radioactive particles, dusty and grey air, and clouded sunsets, to convey a narrative about the Anthropocene crisis.

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