Android Matters:
Apocalyptic Technology and Hegelian Dystopia in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*

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ABSTRACT

This essay critically evaluates the present moment of representation in social media of various subjects by looking back and interrogating past representations of technology and otherness in Hollywood cinema. Specifically, I argue that Ridley Scott's cult classic film *Bladerunner* (1982) offers us a window into thinking about technology-as-other as portrayed in a historical moment that charted out the rise of neoliberalism under Ronald Reagan in the USA and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. I draw on G.W.F. Hegel's theorization of human subjectivity and power relations in his master-slave dialectic to analyze the relationship between humans and synthetic androids, also known as replicants, in the film. In engaging Hegel's analysis of power and servitude, I reveal myriad discourses of gazing that structure power not only within the narrative of the science fiction film, but moreover between the audience and the images. I conclude that the network of gazes between androids and humans highlight the ways in which human consciousness too is fabricated as well as mediated in and through the other(s).

Keywords: Hegel, Android, *Blade Runner*, Dystopia, Servitude, Masculinity, Technology

Perhaps more than ever before, global movements for social justice that center around race and gender, like hashtag activism movements including #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, have proliferated from technologies that pundits predicted would fail in the wake of a Y2K holocaust 18 years ago. Indeed, when we reflect upon it, national identities from India, the

USA, and the nations in between seem over determined by doomsday scenarios characterised by technological innovation. Technology seems ubiquitous, and punctuates daily life in tacit ways that normalize the most mundane moments in which we take for granted the electronic and cybernetic hands that guide us so. In meditating on how past representations of apocalyptic technology have shaped the ways in which we think of science fiction film, humanities computing, and what is now called "digital humanities" today, I want to open with a historiographical query. In seeking a panoramic view of these social movements and technology today, I want to ask: how did we arrive at a moment when Facebook is globally scandalized and the 1% deploy technology to secure global capital? More specifically, how have representations of technology during the rise of neoliberal capitalism portrayed technology, gender, and race?

This question is especially important today when we excavate the daily ways in which technology reveals and/ or conceals human identities. As I have elsewhere argued, even diasporic sexualities are worth examining in the representation of digital media (Gairola 2018, 55). Reflecting back upon American cinematic productions that depict the future, for example, there appears to be a conflation of global dystopia with the so-called Third World though, predictably, through a hegemonic lens of heteronormative, white male privilege. This lens seems to produce identification with certain audience members that necessarily indexes racial affiliation while it solicits, even in its over determined, spectacular fiction, a particular return gaze of the audience. This visual transaction is akin to Louis Althusser's famous notion of "interpellation" wherein a police officer "hails" a person in the street, thus confirming his/ her "fixed residence" or designation in the world (Althusser 2001, 121). Seeking to move beyond Karl Marx's conceptualization of base and superstructure as the ultimate vertical horizons of human experience, Althusser outlines the interlinked societal mechanisms that deploy ideas or force to naturalise assimilation. Interpellation is self-recognition at the same time that it demarcates human subjugation beneath the sign of assimilation into a proper order – be it gender, race, class, caste, nationality, sexuality, religion, colour, creed, etc.

The interpellative act in a cinema hall, rather than on the street, occurs when the images can retain representational authority over audience members where the depictions become larger than life rather than simply imitating life. Identification occurs precisely where "visibility is a trap" (Foucault 1979, 200). In the case of Ridley Scottt's magnum opus *Blade Runner* (1982), identification with a character amounts to disidentification with the world. The film is arguably the forerunner of a long line of subsequent films including *Short Circuit* (1986), the *Transformers* franchise (2007 – 2017), and the recent, its sequel *Blade Runner 2049* (2017),

and African American superhero film *Black Panther* (2018). Such science fiction films are timely interventions in social politics on the silver screen that indict the profit and destruction motivations of technology in the wrong hands. Scottt's film braids together robotic masculinities with white servitude, portraying as a viable option migration to the "off-world colonies" (Scottt, 1982). This gaze of recognition ensconces a moment of internalized otherness that, like traditionally racialized, queered and pathologized deviants, fixates on futuristic androids. This pathologization of android subjects is particularly evident during the rise of neoliberal Reaganomics in the U.S.A. and Thactherism in the U.K. that influenced the liberalization of the market in India about a decade later.

Scott's *Blade Runner* appears to speak directly to Reaganomics' "trickle down" view of the global market in a dystopic future swamped by acid rain and Asian labourers. In this dark vision of Los Angeles, technological hybrids of the future are part human and part technology wherein they are superior to humans in stamina as machines yet far inferior to humans for lack of pathos. Against the backdrop of this dark dystopia, Deckard (Harrison Ford) is a "blade runner" of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) whose job involves "retiring" formidable androids that have been produced by the almighty Tyrell Corporation. The company produces these super-human androids, some of which display some emotional capabilities (that serve as major themes structuring plot). These androids, which humans refer to as "replicants" and, in a pejorative sense, "skin jobs," serve as historical citations for us today that illustrate how the robotic other was imagined in 1982 along with the filmic techniques that underscore these representations. An added irony here is that Deckard himself is a replicant, as we learn at the end of the film, while simultaneously serving as a violent agent of the dystopic city's pogrom of transgressive, cybernetic forms.

As such, *Blade Runner* espouses the sentient goodness of some characters that are technological products of the surgically hubristic Tyrell Corporation. Yet, on the other hand, its marketable androids are the target of human xenophobia wherein, paradoxically, their technological sophistication marks them as savage, subhuman, other. We have seen this familiar pattern also in the *X-Men* franchise, most recently in the film *Logan* (2017). As I will further demonstrate, the construction of these fraught others, which at once represent the future and the inhuman, is proportional to the special effects and film technique invested in visualizing the evil "nature" of non-human harbingers of a digitalized and metallic destiny that marks doomsday for the human race. Despite their technological innovation, replicants are nonetheless beholden to sentient humans that are "weaker" given their composition of flesh and blood

despite containing souls. These androids are, in other words and *other* worlds, akin to Shake-speare's Caliban from *The Tempest* (1610), or Mary Shelley's monster from *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), non-flesh mendicants whose human counterparts fear and revile. Filmic versions of this menace that are contemporary to *Blade Runner* include *Re-Animator* (1985), *Pet Sematary* (1989), and *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990).

Such popular mistrust of corporate innovation in film narratives from the early 1980s into the 1990s is a veritable reflection of global economic policies at that time while foreshad-owing darker times to come. The rise of cultural studies in the 1980s carefully excavated the ways in which visual representations forged manipulative identificatory relationships with viewers. This shows us that filmic narratives reflect the critiques of cultural artifacts that depict the complexities of skewed power relations and resistance to oppressive mechanisms of society as we tangibly live it. For Todd McGowan, "science-fiction cinema…[allows us] to see ideol-ogy in a way we would not ordinarily see it" (McGowan 20). These new ways of visualizing ideologies by extension also create new ways of identifying with the characters on the big screen, even as the filmic narrative portrays them in the future or past. These identificatory relationships and unique configurations of android figures as all-powerful subjects arguably articulate in the realm of apocalyptic visions some philosophical traces of Hegel's key ideas.

Famous for his notion of idealism that accords complete agency to human sentience in opposition to Karl Marx's materialist conception of history, Hegel's master-slave dialectic here offers us a lens for rethinking species of technological others and symbolic acts of gazing. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel describes a reciprocal process in which two subjects encounter on another, both emanating a distinct consciousness. For Hegel, the master is a subject who holds a consciousness that "exists for-itself," the slave is that subject whose con-sciousness is structured around "existence-for-an-other" in relation to the master (57-8). That is, a being's self-consciousness only attains enlightened knowledge upon recognizing the self-consciousness of another, and this psychic transaction can be profound and traumatic. In other words, one's recognized differences in the other have always already invoked one's similarities with the other and thus existence and power is constructed around subjectivity and the con-scious recognition of it. Hegel details the nuances of this when he writes, "On approaching the other [slave] it [the master] has lost its own self, since it finds itself as another being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other, for this primitive consciousness does not regard the other as essentially real but sees its own self in the other" (Hegel 1977, 111).

This is to say that the master-slave relationship balances itself upon a mediated gaze: the gaze of the slave *as reflected back to him/ her by the returned gaze of the master* reformulates the dependence of the slave on the master for the master's very life is at stake only in and through the existence of the slave. Likewise, the master engages in an "existence-for-self that is for-self only through-another" (58) as a necessity since s/ he too requires a subject against which his/ her own consciousness is juxtaposed and thus realized. Consciousness exists by itself only in so far that it can be recognized as such, and thus the recognizing consciousness wields a kind of cryptic power in subordination since its very existence makes possible the position of the master that lords above the slave. Yet what is mediated in this dynamic is the raw level of animality that one or the other can accord to its other in the interest of wielding "the greater" power. Here, we get to the root of Hegel's master-slave dialectic that can give insight into the apocalyptic visions of the future depicted in the film. In *Bladerunner*, this reciprocal transaction of recognition is fraught because weaker humans symbolically castrate the more sophisticated machine, who is nonetheless haunted by fabricated memories and dreams. These psychic components always remind androids that they are merely "replicants," or bad copies, of humans that will never possess a soul despite having better looks and endurance than humans.

This reciprocal and constitutive self-consciousness that exists in and through the eyes of the other as obscurely described by Hegel appears in black theorizations of difference, including the racialized relationships in the power dynamics of colonialism described by Franz Fanon (Fanon 1967, 62). Cinema imbibes, like a hall of mirrors, a network of gazes that are exponentially manifest as characters view one another, as viewers gaze upon them through mediated POVs (point-of-view shots) of the kino-eye. The gazes and return-gazes in the film construct doomed visions of the earth through technologies that contradict Hegelian idealism but underscore Marx's worst nightmares of capitalist innovation. In "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers" (1990), Katherine Hayles observes, "It is no accident that the vaguely apocalyptic landscapes of films such as *Terminator*, *Bladerunner* [sic] and *Hardware* occur in narratives focusing on cybernetic life-forms. The sense that the world is rapidly becoming uninhabitable by human beings is part of the impetus for the displacement of presence by pattern" (36-7). Hayles' larger project here operates under the assertion that presence has given way to pattern and randomness in postmodern movements of the twenty-first century, which films like *Tron* (1982), *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), and *The Matrix* (1999) depict through computerized graphics and imagery.

However, I am particularly interested in Hayles' critical contention because it presents a quagmire when using a Hegelian lens to read android figures in *Blade Runner*. If, as Hayles suggests, the earth is uninhabitable and there is no reason to live in these films that render Los Angeles uninhabitable, then why should there be any stakes at all for its human (master/ maker) and android (slave/ creation) inhabitants? That is, if the slave exists in relation to the master's existence and its own non-threatened life as the master's subject, can the Hegelian dialectic apply to android-human relationships? I would suggest that this very discrepancy, the urgency of the android to live in a world that is essentially doomed, fleshes out the applicability of the Hegelian dialectic even in the futuristic face-off between man and machine, given man's assumption that the human shall always out-live the inhuman. To put this another way, the battery will always wear down, and where the power source does not would be the cause of great anxiety indeed as machine becomes the master of man. This anxiety indeed drives the plot of *Blade Runner*, and perhaps also partly explains why there is so much negative insinuation embedded around "skin" when humans pejoratively refer to replicants.

Yet in addition to compelling the audience to critically interrogate the androids' loyalty to humans, the film also problematizes that which perhaps most defines humans – the ability to have their own memories. For as McGowan notes, the Tyrell Corporation designs Deckard's memory implants to purposefully fool him into thinking he is human, thus exposing "the ideological nature of memory itself" in the film (McGowan 2009, 26). In addition, there is always the fear that our own creation of a prodigal form of technology may efface the human race but find, through the superior brilliance bestowed upon it by a human, a means to survive mechanically while the earth as an organic whole begins to wilt due to nuclear war, global warming, etc. As Michel Foucault has noted, one technology of society that ensures procreation of economy is the institution of marriage underpinned by heteronormative romance (1990, 36-37). Marriage as such promotes a disciplinary function of the nation state in the manufacture of docile bodies to constitute a "democratic citizenry." While Scott's 1982 film only touches upon this theme, *Bladerunner 2049* (2017), the former's sequel, moves in this direction by blurring the boundaries that divide human and machine, while emptying out reproduction's need for amorous sex or kinship relations based on blood and caste.

However, Deckard and antagonist Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), a replicant which Tyrell himself designs as the epitome of racialized masculinity, both inhabit spaces outside of human law and matrimony in the first film. Marriage here is key since it is the nexus as which humanity, love, and reproduction cohabitate and allow flesh and blood humans to produce memories

together rather than singularly. Deckard and Roy's existence as master and slave, hunter and hunted, consequently pose a threat to these societal institutions because they symbolize the evolution of non-human reproductive possibilities beyond blood kinship and the obliteration of the line that divides the human from the android. The stakes for these androids are high in the context of Hegelian dialectics for the destruction/ mutation of the earth does not equate to death, thus its consciousness *is* and *is not* dependent on the human/ master. In other words, while android/ slave (also creation) requires the human/ master (also creator) to affirm its existence at some level, it is the *life of the master* that becomes threatened by the presence of the android/ slave. That is, the precarious state of life inverts on the very pivot that one demarcated the line between man and machine.

In *Bladerunner*, the hunted replicants (androids) become rogue hunters against the backdrop of a Third World mash-up of Asia and Central America. As Lisa Lowe puts it, "In *Blade Runner*'s version of the 21st century, it is no longer necessary to travel out to see 'the world': 'the world' has come and now inhabits, indeed possesses, Los Angeles" (Low 1996, 84). The dystopic sheen of the future is waxed heavy by a Third Word future in which androids/ slaves, or "replicants" as the protagonist Deckard calls them, seem to fit right in. That is, cybernetic criminality and servitude seem befitting to this version of Los Angeles as the Third World while rich citizens await migration to the "off-world colonies." Perhaps this inclusion among humans is the resultant success of Tyrell's motto of "More human than human" (Scottt, 1982). The proud father of the Aryan-looking Nexus 6 model Roy, Tyrell faces his creation towards the end of the film when Roy approaches him in search of "more life" after learning that the Nexus 6 models all have a built-in shelf life.

Here, the master/ slave dialectic visually plays out between the intensities of the two characters mutual gazing as mediated to our own eyes through the kino-eye of the camera, overlapping the tropes of looking. Scott tightly frames this sequence but utilizing close-shots that highlight the anxiety produced by this exchange: Tyrell brushes Roy's head while urging him to "revel" in his time, and Roy draws him close and plants a kiss on his lips. Against the backdrop of flickering shadows and candlelight, Roy forces his thumbs into the struggling man's eyes, killing him by blinding him. Scottt heightens the anxiety of this telling moment by framing the entire sequence in extreme close shot-reverse shots between Roy and Tyrell with close shots of an artificial owl, eyes glowing in the dark, and horrified Sebastian witnessing the murder. This scene presents a complex of gazes ricocheting within the scene, mediated by the eye of the camera and filtered through our own. This network of gazes, with the exception

of Roy's, absorb the fear that has been displaced on them from the "retirement" of the subject as object of that gaze. Like the homoerotic/ incestuous thrill shared for a moment between the creator and his creation, the film medium sends ripples of this same thrill through viewers as the shock of taboo becomes a visual adhesive that transfixes viewers.

Perhaps this is the potentially negative aspects of the current "real time" that we consumers live in. In "The Ecstasy of Communication" (1983), Baurdrillard has complained that flat, non-reflective surfaces that profoundly affect the reticent consumer have taken over "truthful" (read as "metaphysical" in my context) sign systems. He writes, "The subject himself, suddenly transformed, becomes a computer at the wheel, not a drunken demiurge of power. The vehicle now becomes a kind of capsule, its dashboard the brain, the surrounding landscape unfolding like a televised screen (instead of a live-in projectile as it was before) (127). While Baudrillard's implication in this piece is that technology as such is a "bad thing," I would offer that the very problematic aspects of technology also provide the amenities of it that we love so much. Returning to the notion that Ridley displaces on viewers the homoerotic/ incestual anxiety between Roy and Tyrell just before the latter's death, viewers may enjoy the fantasy of this sequence but never indulge in one like it or ever have the opportunity to. If film was not one such capsule capable of transforming the brain into a dashboard, what would be the point? Would the signification of the formal aspects of the sequence (extreme close shots with darkly lit backgrounds) hold any ground without the displacement of anxiety and emotion?

My sense is that such displacement of anxiety and emotion is necessary to remotely enjoy science fiction noir films though its existence would trouble Baudrillard since this implies (like romantic relationships between cyborgs and humans) that humans can establish an audiovisual cathexsis with an inorganic and/or unnatural entity. For we are staring into an unflinching abyss of images in which we identify aspects of our own subjectivity. The troubling anxiety emanated from the murder of Tyrell arises from our witness of the death of the master by the hands of the slave, who has used the life given to him to kill its creator. Since there is no life to be had and the master himself is expendable, suddenly he occupies the slave-as-object position as commodity to be fetishized in relation to the configuration of his equally dependent subjectivity. But without the loaded "return gaze" of the co-subject, Roy is no longer dependant on the creator he once thought could supply him with more life -- the master who "exists-for-itself" no longer exists for anything in death as the slave finds that the "existence-for-an-other" also dies along with the master. Perhaps this is why Roy kills his maker by

gouging out his eyes, which betray the synthetic lives of replicants when scanned by detecting tools.

But the Tyrell Corporation, the metaphorical master, lives on and Roy dies like a martyr in a crucifixion style that illustrates the master's (human's) ultimate control over the slave (cyborg) though he has been killed. The ideology of the master outlives his body and takes the life of the slave, which we see in *Blade Runner* when Roy tells Deckard, "It's quite an experience to live in fear. That's what it is to be a slave" before retiring (Scott, 1993). As such, Roy embodies aspects of what Haraway (1985) has famously defined as a "cyborg." In her celebrated essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," Haraway writes, "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction…The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation . . . The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (67).

Though it is unclear to me exactly *how* a cyborg is "our ontology" (whose?), it seems safe to expand Haraway's definition from post-gender, cybernetic organism to most urban human beings on earth. We are all mired in technological appendages that bind us to various roles of master and servant across our short lives, prisoners in "off-world colonies" due to the devices that have interfaced with flesh and bone. As we see in the opulent technoscapes, to use Appadurai's term (1990, 98), of *Blade Runner*, the hyperreal circulation of capital around the world has ensured the mass proliferation of technology, and most people around the world regularly carry on their bodies an electromagnetic apparatus (credit/ bank card, cell phone, beeper, etc.). We may even consider the PC with its myriad programs an extension of the self, the mouse simply a third hand, the clicker merely a sixth finger. Following this logic, neither cyborg nor android can always be post-gender - in fact, such a claim would undermine the upright shape and form a cyborg mimes as the product of a human being whose body is heavily encoded by gender. For gender is always also mired in power relations, as is the master and slave relationship; even the fact that Roy and the other replicants have a shelf life indicates that they are emasculated by their limited time in a Third World Los Angeles.

Gender is moreover significant here in the context of Deckard and Roy's android masculinities and the ways in which other characters like Tyrell and Sebastian die off in the film. Indeed, for these characters, death is a form of emasculation; erasure from the film operates as a symbolic castration of agency, visibility, patriarchy. For now, let us concede that an android and/ or cyborg, in my own hybridized formulation of Haraway's, is any futuristic subject whose very subjectivity depends upon technology to sustain its daily practices. The nexus point is an interface between flesh and the body (a hand on a mouse, a bankcard in the wallet, etc.) that is not overdetermined by genetic engineering or the physical fusion of flesh with mechanics. Let us consider the replicant "skin jobs" manufactured in 2019 by the Tyrell Corporation in *Bladerunner*. These beings are a product of "robot evolution" whose genetically engineered bodies are not metallic bone structures overlaid with flesh, rather humans designed with superior strength and agility powers for use as slaves in the exploration and colonization of other planets. As beings that embody a great deal of their makers' traits, Nexus models like Roy and Pris feel physical pain, can bleed, and as we learn in the beginning of the film and witness towards its end, also feel emotion.

The ability, perhaps I should rather say privilege, of androids to pass as human in *Bladerunner* depends on the extent to which they look and act just like humans, and hence, as masters, versus "bad copies" of humans. In "Making Cyborgs, Making Humans: Of Terminators and Blade Runners," Pyle notes that, in films like *Blade Runner*, "we may start out with our assumptions of a clear distinction between human and machine in tact; but through its representation of the hybrid figure of the cyborg, the film 'plays' on a borderline that we come to see as shifting and porous, one that begins to confuse the nature of opposition and the values we ascribe to it" (1993, 229). It follows that the more riddled the boundaries between man and machine are, the more complicated become the politics of gazing and ensuing paradigms of domination and subordination -- this naturally disrupts any clear way of neatly applying the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. Roy's emotive speech after saving Deckard's life and soon before proclaiming his expiry date and dying powerfully illustrates the impossible distinctions between humans and "skin jobs." In the film's finale, Roy and Deckard finally face-off, and the good android/ cyborg prevails because though it is not human, it emulates humanistic character traits. And, as Pyle further notes, *Blade Runner* destabilizes the concept of the human by using the cinematic spectacle of the movie (231).

Filmmaking technology thus facilitates character construction, hence formal aspects of filmmaking are a discursive strategy in the cinematic visualization of the terminators' characteristics and the reflection of narrative. The state-of-the-art filmmaking technologies that create the vivid illusions of Hollywood cinema take an integral role in the visual construction of both Deckard and Roy replicants, and, subsequently, the characteristics of both. At the end of *Blade Runner*, when Roy saves the life of Deckard and delivers his famous "tears in the rain" monologue before shutting off, we see that the Nexus-6 model is perhaps "more human" than the "more human" model that is Deckard. The death of murderous perfection witnessed by its own kind – a slave dying before a slave, that is – revises the earlier scene in which the slave kills its master. One of the slaves that humans once used as forced labour to colonize off-world planets has saved the master's life before succumbing to death. To understand the Hegelian dialectic in the context of android/ human relations is to survey the evolution of social ideology in relation to technology that morals could never before have imagined. Although this may seem to be a futile task since I am casting a pan-historical eye over the treatment of species of others (otherworldly aliens, racialized others, queer subjects, monsters, colonized peoples, cyborgs, etc.), it can be important for critics to do in the prediction of how tropes of othering will evolve.

In other words, master/ slave binaries operate upon the same yet masked ideologies of bias that fortify the dividing lines between white/ black, straight/ queer, human/ cyborg, etc. Yet we see in the signs generated by technology, whether they be on the screen, orbiting the earth, awaiting mass murder or re-defining capital, the absorption and reformulation of otherness. The politics of difference are complex when the other is an appendage of us, and wherein representation in science fiction film suggests that death in the company of an *other* can be a kind of epiphany in comparison to death by gouging out one's eyes. It is precisely, in other words, abjection of the technological other that cements a cathexsis between it and the human agent who wishes to reject it only in so far at it is a "bad copy" of the human – a trait that can only be measured through the eyes of the skin jobs. For on-screen simulations or "real" processes involving the "cyborgification" of the human race and the erotic fusion of flesh and metal, the technology fueled by transnational capital promises the potential to become a common earthly experience. From Scottt's dreary 2019 that reflects the year in which *Blade Runner* was released, 1982, to the present, the blurring of man and machine makes it ever more questionable exactly who is subject to who or what.

In the 2017 sequel, the urgent quest of Officer K the bladerunner (Ryan Gosling) is to destroy all evidence that replicants can reproduce on their own, and hence blur the line between master and slave (Villeneuve 2017). The sequel complicates the Hegelian dialectic as it situates reproduction as the mediator between master and slave with an impending, and parlays into the filmic narrative the familiar anxieties of miscegenation between black and white Americans from the late 19th century into the late 20th century. When the face of the other shifts from an in-person experience to one facilitated by an ethernet connection, indeed, as Hayles argues in "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers," that "pattern and randomness becomes an overarching effect of life" (1999, 25). Ironically, this dehumanization of humans, the uprise of pattern and randomness, is a liberating process that deconstructs the metaphysical values that characterize the human (thus non-human, thus monster, queer, racial other, etc.). Such patterns are intertextual and multilayered, like skin tissues layered upon each other that return us to the most basic functions of organic life and its material needs that both Marx and Althusser outline in their major works. Marxist concerns appear to surface at the end of Blade Runner 2049 with an organised resistance against to the corporate behemoth.

In his Marxist study of textuality *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Frederic Jameson has argued that "texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or--if the text is brand-new--through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions" (1981, 9). Jameson's contention, written the year before Scottt's film appeared in theaters, describes the relationships between texts as they build upon one another in a way that resembles both subjects of Hegel's master-slave dialectic as they simultaneously construct one another's subjectivity and agency. Yet, at the end of the day, Roy demonstrates the superior virtues of both the master and slave against the dystopic slum of Los Angeles – the on-world colony turned into an Asian slum in contrast to the galactic colonies that advertisements loudly glorify. In the words of Vijay Mishra, who compares the film to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Roy challenges "the moral primacy of humans and their proprietorial claims to complete emotional plenitude… In the case of Roy Batty the creator's refusal to grant him a longer life turns to violence as the son literally gouges his father's eyes out. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, then, turns the table on humans by giving the morally unimpeachable position to Batty who, in a further twist to the Monster's original dialogue, introduces the elements of slavery, fear, and death into the precursor narrative of Mary Shelley" (Mishra 1994, 210-211).

In and through his mercy for Deckard upon his own deathbed, Roy demonstrates that the subhuman technological miracle of AI is that which we can identify with and find deep within ourselves. Indeed, the audience's gaze comes to empathize with Roy, either through white privilege or a negation of white masculinity, even as it views the non-represented subjects of the off-world colonies as imagined others. That is, we identify with Deckard as the protagonist, the more-human android, and with Roy's merciful act in saving the master that he easily could have murdered. For, in the twenty-first century, most urban humans *are* cyborgs that emulate a sense of gender that technologies like those depicted in *Blade Runner* can help dissolve. Indeed, there seems to be more in common between Deckard and Roy than there is with the gritty Asians that populate futuristic Los Angeles and the unseen settlers who are choosing to call the off-world colonies "home." Though such possibilities will once more morph the master/ slave dialectic rather than fully overwriting it, its fluid play between contexts can perhaps provide humans with avoiding the inconspicuous pitfall of being fully devoted to any one way of thinking, living or being. I would argue that this is especially applicable to specious claims that a single woman character can represent "all women in general" (Maurya et al 2018, 213). Sweeping generalizations like these flatten differences by fetishising gendered body parts, and hardly make for solid scholarship in the realm of film analysis, nor do they do scholarly justice to second, third, and/ or fourth wave feminism.

Indeed, I would conclude that the gendered taxonomies that file beings as human or other are part of the problem rather than the myopic prescription for any kind of social justice – even for the replicants. For as Marleen Barr reminds us, "Although blade runners and humans are two types of humans, they are, nonetheless, all humans who possess memories and feelings…the notion that memory differentiates humans from metahumans is a myth used by the *Blade Runner* society to justify oppression" (Barr 1991, 28). Memories and the subjects they capture are always mediated testaments to the past. This may provide us insight into why Hegelian ideas about idealism and the dialectic are informative for analyzing the apocalyptic visions of the future since the 1980s; they are perhaps more important today, in the era of social media activism, than ever before. As we plunge deeper into sovereign regimes that aggressively cast humans as monsters to justify instutionalised genocides while human labour is further automated, we will need to be more aware and vigilant. For human consciousness and critique of the power relations that structure masters and slaves, and the representational histories that shape them, are vital in re-thinking the stakes of life in the 21st century.

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