Semblances of intimacy: separating the humane from the human in Blade Runner 2049

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SEMBLANCES OF INTIMACY: SEPARATING THE HUMANE FROM THE HUMAN IN *BLADE RUNNER 2049*

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ABSTRACT

Denis Villeneuve's film *Blade Runner 2049* can be read as a postmodern detective story that explores the indeterminacy of whether its protagonist, K, is human or replicant. I argue that it is through the search for clarity between these two ontological categories that the film concurrently investigates how the aesthetic and ethical category of the humane becomes, or can become, separate and distinct from the ontological category of the human. Through this separation, I argue that the humane is characterized by the desire to establish and build connections of emotional and affective intimacy regardless of whether a subject is, or can be, ontologically characterized as human. Furthermore, through my reading of the film's engagement with artificial memory, I argue that this allows us to reconsider the relationship between the notions of authenticity and intimacy, wherein the latter is not necessarily founded upon the former, but rather rests on the embodied capacity to feel and be affected. The construction of the humane in *Blade Runner 2049* consequently develops as a posthumanist critique of a humanist cultural imagination in which the humane necessarily would be the exclusive domain of the human.

KEYWORDS

aesthetics; affect theory; intimacy; posthumanism

INTRODUCTION

Denis Villeneuve's feature film *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) is a sequel to Ridley Scott's influential *Blade Runner* (1982). *Blade Runner* was in turn based on the science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick

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(1968). Dick's novel explores a dystopian future in which mankind has established off-world colonies and androids (called *replicants* in the *Blade Runner* films) are created to serve humans. The plot of the novel follows the replicants' rebellion and escape.

Released 35 years after the original *Blade Runner, Blade Runner 2049* engages with many of the topics explored in the first film: how we distinguish and create logics concerning originals and copies, man's relationship to (and possible mastery of) technology, and the nature and artificiality of memory. Its predominant concern, however, is the ways in which the "human" comes to define itself as such through its relationship and interaction with nonhuman agents. While both the original *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* thus engage with themes relevant to posthumanist theory, the latter was also released in a different era for sci-fi film. Recent sci-fi films such as *Ex Machina* (2015, dir. Alex Garland), *Her* (2013, dir. Spike Jonze), and Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013) all share an interest in exploring how intimacy is or can be established between human and nonhuman agents, and what this subsequently implies for how we may conceptualize intimacy through a posthumanist lens. *Ex Machina* follows a highly intelligent android who seduces a programmer, whereas Jonze's *Her* explores how a man establishes a relationship with a sentient operating system. *Under the Skin*, meanwhile, follows an unidentified female humanoid who picks up and then kills various men in a van. *Blade Runner 2049* may therefore be situated in contemporary sci-fi film's increasing interest in issues concerning posthumanist intimacy, as well as features we attribute to what I will call the humane.

In *Blade Runner 2049*, we follow K, a detective-replicant (bioengineered androids that look like humans) who sets out to find the supposed offspring of another replicant. This search is politically charged because replicants are considered unable to reproduce. During this search, K comes to believe he himself might be the child he is searching for. While the film has been read by Slavoj Žižek as focusing "exclusively on reproduction" (2017), in this essay, while acknowledging that the politics of posthumanist reproduction is a central concern of the film, I will explore how it also allows us to reconsider the way in which authenticity relates to intimacy. I argue that *Blade Runner 2049* reconfigures the relationship between these two terms, in such a way that the latter is not necessarily dependent on the former.

In my reading, I will be examining scenes between Joi, a holographic AI entity that acts as a romantic partner to K, and K himself. Joi's holographic (and therefore seemingly immaterial) nature casts a set of peculiar limits to the way in which the intimacy between these two characters can take shape, which the narrative of the film attempts to reconcile. Second, other relationships of

intimacy, such as those between the characters of Deckard and Rachael and Wallace, are important in my consideration of how the film may allow us to reconsider the *humane,* which I will consider as a predominantly aesthetic and ethical category, and the *human*, an ontological category. In his reading of the film, Žižek argues that

> It is all too humanist, in the sense that everything circulates around humans and those who want to be (or to be taken as) humans or those who don't know they are not humans. (Is the result of biogenetics not that we, "ordinary" humans, effectively are that—humans who don't know they are not humans, i.e., neuronal machines with self-awareness?) The film's implicit humanist message is that of liberal tolerance: we should give androids with [sic] human feelings (love, etc.) human rights, treat them like humans, incorporate them into our universe . . . But, upon their arrival, will our universe still be ours? Will it remain the same human universe? What is missing is any consideration of the change that the arrival of androids with awareness will mean for the status of the humans themselves. We, humans, will no longer be humans in the usual sense, so will something new emerge? And how to define it? (2017)

Žižek notes that the desire of the replicants to be human is itself constitutive of the film's supposed humanist agenda. His reading claims that the capacity of the replicant to have feelings is the ground on which their rights and the necessity to "treat them like humans" rests. Yet by claiming that "we humans will no longer be humans in the usual sense," Žižek reifies the critique of the film he offers: For what, if anything, may it mean to be "human in the usual sense"? It seems to me that Žižek's questions regarding what the arrival of androids would mean for the "status of the humans" are too narrowly formulated, because their formulations ("will something new emerge, and how to define it?") suggest the possibility of gaining definitive answers in themselves. Rather, the film could also be read as exploring how the category of the *humane* can be a transitive concept, originating from, but not definitively attached to, the species whose name it bears: the human. Furthermore, it is this transitive character of the humane which allows us to reflect on how we ordinarily attribute the humane to the human when we come to recognize it in another species.

Instead of following Žižek's line of argument that the capacity to have feelings is the replicants' desire to be human, I argue that this capacity can also be reread as our ability to recognize this capacity as a constituent for the shaping of our experience of the "humane." By arguing for the transitive character of the humane across different ontological categories, I contest the belief that the

values attached to this concept are the sole domain of humans and propose that it is an *artificial* category in artifice's etymological sense: the making of an art. By arguing for the humane's malleability, I am not concurrently arguing *against* authenticity per se, but rather against that particular understanding of the authentic offered by its own etymological root, *authentikos*, referring to the genuine or the original. The authentic is generally understood to be that which is neither artificial nor fictitious. This notion of authenticity, however, sets up a binary understanding of the authentic (the natural, nonmade) on one hand, and the artificial (the crafted, the devised) on the other. To consider the authentic as being definable contra the artificial is problematic in the context of the film, not only because of the transitive character of the humane between different ontological categories, but in that we may even consider the category of the *human* to be artificial in nature, through concepts such as the cybernetic and the prosthetic, for example, which can (permanently) alter a human body. Yet this does not automatically render them posthuman.

In Žižek's line of questioning, the issue of what would constitute a human is itself of a reductive nature, because this mode of enquiry begs for an essentialist answer that would take the form of a definition, thereby in itself (artificially) creating a linguistic device in order to discriminate between the human and that which is not recognized as such, for whatever reason. Here, then, we also see why a binary understanding of the artificial and the authentic might be of political interest: The argument that something or someone is not "authentically" human can be used to *create* differences between individuals and/or groups, as is done in the film. These differences in turn might then be used to regulate and maintain a particular political order.

Taking as my point of departure the notion that the authentic is, like the humane, transitive and susceptible to artifice, I instead argue that we may read the film as exploring how authenticity can be shaped and built. This in turn influences how, when, and where intimate relationships between the films' characters are constituted. As the title of this essay suggests, semblance, or *Schein*, refers to what something is *like*, but the specious nature of this term already establishes that it is not the actual, original, and seemingly inescapable referent (the *Erscheinung*, or appearance of something). Although I agree with Žižek insofar as characters in the film at numerous times appear to favor an understanding of the authentic (of memories, for example) as being nonartificial, this does not consequently offer the conclusion that we can only understand the film in traditional humanist terms such as Žižek formulates. Instead, we may also read the film "against the grain" in creating an understanding of how, if the experience of authenticity can be made, this allows us to reconsider our understanding of intimacy.

(IM)MATERIAL PERFORMANCES: WHEN AN ANDROID LOVES A HOLOGRAPHIC AI

The first time we see K interacting with Joi is when K comes home after work. The two engage in a dialogue where the camera follows K around as he puts on Frank Sinatra's rendition of the popular song *Summer Wind*, takes a shower and prepares a meal for himself.

> JOI: K? I didn't hear you. You're early.
> K: you want me to come back?
> [JOI CHUCKLES]
> JOI: Just go scrub.
> K: Yes ma'am.
> JOI: How was your meeting?
> K: The usual. How was your day?
> [JOl SIGHS]
> JOI: I'm getting cabin fever.
> K: I had an accident at work. I think I ruined my shirt.
> JOI: I'm sure I can fix that for you. Let me take a look at it.
> [K SIGHS]
> K: I need a drink. Do you want a drink first?
> JOI: Mmm-hmm. Pour me one, will you? I'm trying a new recipe. I just need a bit more practice.
> K: Don't fuss.
> JOI: l should have marinated it longer. I hope it isn't dry. Did you know this song was released in 1966 on Reprise Records? It was number one on the charts. It won't be much longer. Just putting on the finishing touches. Okay, it's ready. I hope you're gonna like it.
> K; I told you not to fuss.
> JOI: And yet... Voila! Bon appétit. I missed you, baby sweet.
> K: Honey, it's beautiful.
> JOI: Just put your feet up. Relax. Was a day, hmm?
> K: It was a day.

This scene is marked by its reference to and performative reenactment of 1960's American domesticity. This is first delineated through its setup: K, a man, comes home to his female partner supposedly preparing a meal for him. They engage in small talk about the events of the day, which initially appear somewhat trivial. Throughout the scene, however, the camera follows only K; Joi's voice is heard but she is not seen. When K asks whether Joi would like a

drink, he pours two glasses and drinks both of them. K has already prepared his own meal when Joi finally appears as hologram with the support of a projector attached to the ceiling of the apartment, placing a homecooked hologram meal over K's actual food. She then lights K's cigarette with her finger (Figure 1).

The scene establishes a relationship between what is supposedly real and what is illusionary that runs parallel to what is material and what is not. The dialogue cited above refers to the materiality of things: Joi's cabin fever suggests an ironic interpretation because she is attached to a projector that is in turn attached to K's apartment. She cannot have or enjoy a drink because she does not possess a material body, and the meal she claims to have prepared for K is not actual edible food. We can read this enactment of domesticity as performative in the way that term has been defined by Judith Butler (1993):

> Performativity is... not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). (1993, 12–13)

If we take this definition as our point of departure, perhaps it might seem counterintuitive to designate the scene as performative, since it does not conceal or dissimulate its reenactment of domesticity; on the contrary, it is overtly clear that this *is* a performance of domesticity. Instead, the historicity at stake in the performative nature of this scene is the *material* historicity that is necessarily involved in the enactment of domesticated life. It is not the fact that certain

Figure 1 Joi lights K's cigarette. *Source: Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve 2017).

rituals (small talk, a drink before dinner, a homecooked meal) are attached to domesticity, but rather that these rituals implicitly rely on their material reality, which becomes interrupted in the above scene. The absence of Joi's material reality makes this scene's "theatricality" readable as a performance of material and embodied domesticity, precisely because it gains an "act-like" status, as Butler (1993) formulates. The "act-like" can here be differentiated from an "act" through the difference in material reality: K pouring his drink is an act because *actual*, since the drink is actually being poured and drunk. Joi placing her holographic homecooked meal over K's simple food is "act-like" in that the food is immaterial and therefore cannot be eaten.

The relationship that runs parallel between the pairs of materiality-hologram and reality-illusion becomes disrupted by Joi lighting K's cigarette, as this act implies that her hologram possesses *a degree* of material reality. Of course, the fact that she is a projection already establishes a relationship between her holographic appearance and a material transmitter, but this disruption instead suggests that she could have a greater or lesser degree of material reality. In *Looking Away* (2009), Rei Terada develops a reading of *Schein* (semblance, illusion, or "mere appearance"), contrasting this with *Erscheinung* (appearance), basing her reading on Kant's conceptualization of these concepts. She writes that

> For Kant, the whole of the plenum is appearance (Erscheinung) by definition; what is not appearance is "merely intelligible." As Erscheinung, appearance is replete, lawful, and connotes no attenuation of the intensity or reality of what appears. In order to make this point, Kant stresses that Erscheinung differs from Schein (illusion or semblance, often translated as "mere appearance"). Unlike Erscheinung, Schein designates a sensory or cognitive aberrance, a wayward experience that really is an epistemological dead end. (19)

For Terada, the difference between these terms is accompanied by the idea of "the appearance of appearance," that is, the realization that one sees what one is seeing. *Erscheinung* itself is not necessarily problematic, since it simply asks for our affirmation of the reality of an appearance. But both *Schein* and the appearance of appearance require a degree of reflexivity; they often evoke a sense of epistemological indeterminacy, which itself has an affective effect, because one is unsure of what exactly it is that one is seeing.

In Figure 1, we can see how Joi's right hand is translucent, as the light shines through it, but it is simultaneously material, as it lights K's cigarette. The "appearance of appearance" here thus refers not to the reflexivity of *Schein* (the fact that we can grasp that Joi is a hologram), but rather to our attention being directed to a sudden degree of materialization that takes place. If an illusion,

as something that can be registered within our field of vision, is constituted by the fact that the illusion itself has no material reality other than stemming from a material referent that produces the illusion (for example, a projector), this materialization itself breaks that illusion *and* creates a rupture in the awareness of what we are seeing. This is why I want to suggest a particular relationship between materiality and *Schein* and *Erscheinung*, based on Terada's elucidation. Terada noted how, in her reading of Kant, *Erscheinung* is "lawful." It is lawful in the sense that the mode of appearance referred to in *Erscheinung* registers in our perception as unproblematic because it demands affirmation, which, when that appearance has material reality, may be granted. The material reality of the mode of appearance in *Schein* is often what is contested, because we question what the material nature of that appearance is, since it appears as being illusionary. Thus, we might question whether *Schein* is not only easily regarded as being illusionary, but also "unlawful" in that it does not (immediately) have a clear material referent. The material reality connoted with *Erscheinung* consequently becomes more closely associated with the "authentic" than the lack of material reality often connoted with *Schein*.

ILLUSIONARY KISSES AND MATERIAL MEMORIES

If the illusionary reenactment of domestic life is thwarted by Joi's lack of a (fully) material existence, how does this lack of material existence further impact the shaping of intimacy between K and Joi? As the scene continues, K tells Joi he has a gift for her for their anniversary, which is an emanator that allows Joi to be projected from a portable device. With the emanator, K is able to take Joi up to the roof where it is raining. As the rain falls on Joi, raindrops stick to her holographic body, eventually soaking her body. Her holographic body reacting to the rain suggests her body's further materialization, but this materialization remains incomplete. She approaches K and the two embrace in a kiss, but as he holds her head in his hands, Joi's face flickers and shimmers, disturbed further by the rain. See Figure 2.

There are several details in this scene that both accentuate and complicate the relationship between intimacy and materiality. The raindrops falling and sticking to Joi's body suggest that she is not wholly immaterial. Yet, as she approaches K, he cannot actually embrace her face; his hands can only make the suggestion of that act through caressing its silhouette. Finally, as the two kiss, we might consider the fact that kissing as an act of intimacy is marked by two bodies pressing their lips against each other. The question that the scene poses is whether K's and Joi's kiss is a failed performance of

Figure 2 Joi and K embrace each other for a kiss. *Source: Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve 2017).

intimacy, as only one of their bodies is wholly material. But this question in turn makes it possible to examine what "failing" a performance means in regard to performing an act of intimacy. Referring back to Butler's definition of performativity above, she distinguishes performativity from the singular repetition of a performance. As she argues, the theatricality of performativity is dependent on the historicity that remains dissimulated. In the case of this performance of intimacy between Joi and K, then, the theatricality that is apparent is that the kiss would not appear to be a successful kiss without the presence of two material bodies. But the *performativity* of intimacy would suggest something else, precisely because *in spite* of the fact of Joi not having a fully material body, the two kiss regardless, thereby enacting a performance of intimacy in spite of this lack.

This reading suggests that the conventions that K's and Joi's intimate act dissimulate here are precisely that through their immaterial and illusionary kiss, whatever is "act-like" in the performativity of intimacy is contested as necessarily relying on the existence of two material bodies as being constitutive for an intimate relationship. As the lack of material existence emphasized the theatrical enactment of domesticity in the previously discussed scene, I read Joi's and K's kiss as resistance to an understanding of intimacy that is constituted by its materiality, and as an affirmation of an understanding of intimacy's artificial potentiality. Since their kiss is bound to "fail" as performance given the absence of shared material existence, their continuation of their kiss may be interpreted as challenging the possibility of differentiating between the "act" and the "act-like." As Butler's definition of the performative relies on the repetition of norms to require an "act-like" status, Joi's and K's kiss is simultaneously both a repetition of the norm and its differentiation.

As K continues his inquiry, he discovers a lead that suggests he himself might be the replicant offspring he is looking for. One of K's artificial memories consists of his hiding a small wooden toy horse in a furnace as a small boy, when he was being bullied by other children. K retrieves the horse, and the horse's existence thereby suggests that K's memory is real rather than artificial. Joi, who is able to travel with K through the emanator, also follows the investigation and tells him that she always thought he was special, and that he was "born, not made." She then continues to state that "a real boy needs a real name" and gives him the name Joe.

From this brief sequence a set of dichotomies emerges: Concerning K's memory, the "authentic" is contrasted with the artificial through the material reality of the object appearing in that memory. K's retrieval of the horse, as a material artefact, confirms to him that his memory must be real. The reality of the memory affirmed by the materiality of the object, this then extends and informs the way in which Joi conceives of K: Rather than being a replicant, K becomes a "real" boy. Not only does this statement suggest a movement from the artificial (the android) to the real or authentic (the human), but becoming a real boy also is connected to two things: that K is born and not made, and that he therefore needs a name. Being born and not made strengthens Žižek's earlier statement regarding the film's concerns about the privileged status of reproduction, but it displaces rather than entirely removes artificiality. K being renamed "Joe" replaces K's model number "KD6-3.7" ("K" for short) with an actual human name. The act of replacing the generic nature of a generated model number with an actual human name combines an act of artificiality (the naming of someone) with a degree of authenticity, because naming heightens the particularity of the human being contra the generated model number of a replicant. This "givenness" of the name is how Barbara Johnson distinguishes between personification and anthropomorphism: "Anthropomorphism, unlike personification, depends on the givenness of the essence of the human; the mingling of personifications on the same footing as 'real' agents threatens to make the uncertainty about what humanness is come to consciousness" (1998, 573–74). According to Johnson's formulation, the anthropomorphic gesture of naming attributes to the nonhuman subject agency that in turn evokes uncertainty about "humanness." The replicant K is made but unnamed, whereas the human "Joe" is born and named. Confronted with Joi's act of naming him, K tells her to stop.

N. Katherine Hayles (2008) proposes that "if 'human essence is freedom from the wills of others,' the posthuman is 'post' not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will" (4). Hayles problematizes the idea that the

human subject would or should be able to clearly distinguish the source that the will originates from. In her reading, the posthuman subject may be contrasted with the liberal humanist subject, in that they have a different relationship to their embodiment of the will. Through Hayles's conception, the liberal humanist subject finds the origins of its own will within its own body, which is the conception that the notion of a posthuman subject contests, as its cybernetic nature implies that its body is marked by its connectedness to technologies and therefore subject to a variety of signals and commands. But it is precisely this notion of the liberal humanist subject that *Blade Runner 2049* here initially restores. Hayles pointedly remarks that the liberal humanist subject relates to its body through ownership over that body, rather than coinciding with that body (4), which thus suggests a modicum of distance and control over the body the subject inhabits. If K's memory is real rather than artificial, K embodies his memory rather than its being an implant and therefore artificial, arbitrary, and removable. The reality of the memory would imply that he is actually human, and therefore would seem to be able to become free from the will of others, unlike the replicants, who are designed to be bound to the will of the human. K's willful resistance to Joi's act of naming him disrupts the boundaries of his servitude as replicant and instead presents a world where K may get to live the life he chooses for himself because he is human. But this in turn is conflicting, because his subjectivity has been shaped through his identification as a replicant. If human essence may be construed as "freedom from the will of others," replicant essence may be conceptualized as an absence of such freedom. The posthuman subject comes to take shape within the ambiguity of being in doubt of one's ontological status. Stefan Herbrechter argues in *The Posthuman Glossary* (2018) that the "post" in posthumanism may refer to "an awareness that neither humanism nor the human can in fact be overcome in any straightforward dialectical or historical fashion (for example, in the sense: after the human, the posthuman)" (94). As such, the shaping of posthuman subjectivity takes place through its coinciding with the rupture of a presupposed ontological stability between the categories of the human and the replicant. Such a division could only remain stable when the two categories could be distinguished based on attributes that neatly separate one from the other.

As K desires to know the nature of his memory with the toy horse, he visits Dr. Ana Stelline, a replicant memory designer. K questions Stelline, asking her what "makes her memories so authentic." Stelline replies that "there is a bit of every artist in their work." As her designed memories are considered the best, Stelline tells K that "It feels authentic. If you have authentic memories, you have real human responses." What ultimately separates real memories from artificial ones, Stelline tells K, is not the level of detail in the memory, but that

we recall using our feelings. When K's memory is played to Stelline through a device, tears start rolling down her face and she explains that "Someone lived this. This happened," sending K into a frenzy, as it confirms his earlier suspicion that his memories are real rather than implanted.

If the human and the replicant may be ontologically distinguished based on separate attributes, this raises the question of what constitutes these attributes. "Real" human memories *feel* authentic, it is explained. This emphasis on feeling is important because it marks a shift from the logic of being able to distinguish an ontological category based on an attribute, which follows a particular logic of identity (*A* is defined as *A* because it possesses attribute *X*), to one in which the attribute is founded based on whether that attribute *feels* authentic. Since feeling is necessarily embodied, it is also more complex to treat or discern as an attribute of which a particular body is capable.

Eric Shouse delineates feelings as "a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled. It is personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling their feelings" (2005). If feelings are personal and autobiographical because feeling is interpreted based on previously felt sensations, not only is the inscription of feeling with meaning embodied, but also embodiment becomes constituent of the *possibility* of inscribing the feeling with meaning, since those other, previous sensations need to have been embodied as well. The film's conceptualization of memory as being transitive, so that it would be able to be transferred from one body to another, is challenged by the notion that the way in which feeling is attributed with meaning itself is intertwined with how memory is bodily experienced. Thus, Stelline's proposition that "authentic memories lead to real human responses" shows that instead, what is designated as "authentic" is itself artifice employed to keep ontological categories intact, carefully separating the human from the replicant.

"LOVE OR MATHEMATICAL PRECISION": CONSTITUTING BINARY DIVISIONS OF INTIMACY

As the search for the lost child continues, Niander Wallace, head of the Wallace Corporation, which produces the replicants, also has an interest in finding the child, since it is the only replicant that is the result of replicant reproduction. K tracks down Deckard, who is the father of the child, as well as the protagonist of the original *Blade Runner* film. Wallace captures Deckard and interrogates him concerning the child's whereabouts, playing a recording of how Deckard met Rachael, the replicant mother of the child. The recording moves Deckard,

as Wallace narrates it, offering Deckard two options: Either he was designed to meet Rachael in order to procreate (and therefore a replicant), or he was not designed (and therefore human), and their meeting was serendipitous. Wallace then says, "Love, or mathematical precision? Yes? No?" to which Deckard responds, "I know what's real." Wallace's words set up a binary division: Love not only gets designated as belonging to the ontologically human, but is then also the result of happenstance. In contrast, the replicant becomes associated with what is determined through programming, envisioning the meeting between Rachael and Deckard as being premeditated.

Deckard's response, however, bypasses the binary nature of the question posed by Wallace. By replying that he knows "what's real," he suggests that regardless of whether he is a human or replicant, what is "real" transcends those categories. Deckard is inevitably *either* a replicant *or* a human, but since love is what is attributed to what is considered human, and as I argued earlier, to serendipitous chance, this implicitly connects the authentic with "love" rather than "mathematical precision." But Deckard's response separates those two. The ability to experience what is real, or authentic, becomes divorced from the necessity of being the sole domain of the ontologically human through Deckard's claim.

In his reading of the original *Blade Runner*, David Harvey (1992) argues that "The depressing side of the film is precisely that, in the end, the difference between the replicant and the human becomes so unrecognizable that they can indeed fall in love (once both get on the same time scale)" (313). Brian Carr (1998) responds in a later essay that "I wish to invert the chronology of his claim. It is precisely the 'act' of 'falling in love' and the (hetero)narrative trajectory it marshals which exacts Rachael's ability to signify 'human,' thus rendering the dissolution of the human/replicant distinction that Harvey flags. It is not that Rachael first signifies 'human' and then she can enter into sexual normativity. Rather, what the film makes clear is that sexual normativity constitutes the hegemonic field of the human's intelligibility as such" (134). For Carr, Harvey's assertion that the identity of the human and replicant coincide through their simultaneously falling in love is incomplete. Rather, what is considered "human" (even when it concerns a replicant) becomes constituted through the act of falling in love, as part of heteronormative sexuality. Still, I would like to take this argument one step further, in light of Deckard's response to Wallace.

Unlike Carr, I want to distinguish between how a replicant can signify as human and how it can signify traits that we may associate with the *humane*, which is transitive. One way of thinking through the identity of the replicant contra the human in the film is by distinguishing attributes. A replicant falling in love could be considered as passing as human, since falling in love is considered

a human trait. But Deckard's response to Wallace signifies a different way of relating to this binary division, since the capacity to know what is real *surpasses* the claim that they fell in love: Whether or not they did, Deckard claims, his experience with Rachael was "real," thus implicitly suggesting that whatever his ontological nature may be, he is capable of experiencing what is "real," or authentic. Earlier I elucidated how for Shouse feelings are autobiographical because we have a set of previous sensations to draw from and compare against. The question that arises is, if memories are implanted, this would connote their being inauthentic, insofar as they do not appear to be the subject's "own" memories. But ownership over memories reinstates the replicant as the liberal humanist subject delineated by Hayles, since such ownership over memories is what would then constitute the biographical identity of that individual. Therefore, not being the original "owner" of the memories would thus render them inauthentic. But Shouse's definition of feelings instead refers to a process through which meaning attributed to feeling arises via the act of comparison with previous feelings. The capacity to distinguish what is "real" concerns the embodied ability to discern new feelings against previous ones that have become memories, where the status of the memory itself as implanted is then arbitrary when it comes to the ability to constitute the labeling of the new sensation. Shouse's emphasis on the (auto)biographical and personal nature of feelings should consequently be supplemented with the notion that in lived embodied experience the processes that constitute the formation of a(n) (auto)biography itself continuously take shape as embodied practice.

Valuable here is the distinction made by Paul Connerton (1989) concerning what he refers to as incorporating practices and inscribing practices. Incorporating practices are those practices, such as giving a handshake or speaking in sentences, that transfer a message "by means of their own bodily activity" (72). Inscribing practices, as the name suggests, involves storing and retrieving information through a medium, for which Connerton gives an index or a photograph as examples (73). This division between incorporating and inscribing practices becomes complicated in *Blade Runner 2049*. On one hand, the movie presents formed memories as a practice of inscription, as comprehensive units of information that can be implanted in a replicant body, thereby conceptualizing the body as a medium for memory. On the other, the shaping of new memories in that same body is necessarily an incorporated practice, as checking new sensations that occur in the body against old memories in order to label them (which is itself a method of inscription) involves the bodily capacity to be *affected* in the first place.

Ruth Leys (2011), in an influential overview as well as critique of affect theory, delineates different "schools of thought" concerning affect. One conceptualization

of affect she describes as being understood as "nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning. For the theorists in question, affects are 'inhuman,' 'pre-subjective,' 'visceral' forces and intensities that influence our thinking and judgments but are separate from these" (437). If affect is indeed to be separated from thought and "pre-subjective," this raises the question of how and why affect becomes relevant and what its relation to judgement and significations of embodied experiences may be. Following a similar conceptualization Melissa Greg and Gregory J. Seigworth have elucidated affect as follows, emphasizing its relational nature:

> Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (2010, 1)

As this quotation shows, the capacity of a body to be affected is not inherently distinguished by that body being human or nonhuman. While affect is distinct from feeling in that affect does not necessarily rely on being checked against previously held biographical sensations the way feeling would, it also becomes clear that feeling in turn is determined by affect as that which creates the relationship between the body that is affected and whatever object/event acts upon it. Since replicants share with humans their capacity for feeling as well as to affect and be affected, it becomes increasingly clear that the distinction between the two ontological categories may primarily rest on the desire of characters in the film for such a continuous division. Kaja Silverman (1991) notes in her essay on the original *Blade Runner* that it "does not ultimately permit us to rationalize the android characters as 'copies' or 'reflections' of the human characters. Instead, it encourages us to see the replicants as 'more human than human'—as living out more fully and more consciously than their makers the basic conditions of subjectivity" (114).

This encouragement to "ultimately" see the replicants as "more human than human," or rather, as I have been arguing, as exhibiting behavior we might call *humane*, becomes tied to what Silverman dubs "living out more fully and more consciously than their makers the basic conditions of subjectivity." If *Blade Runner 2049* is still invested in exploring the logic of the copy contra the authentic through actively questioning who is replicant or human, or

who has artificial memories, what is concurrently investigated is Silverman's insight concerning what "more human than human" might mean. To live out more "fully" the conditions of subjectivity, the film concurrently displaces a notion of authenticity (understood here as the "authentic" capacity for feeling as the prerogative of humans) as central to the formation of relationships of intimacy, parallel to its being an issue in the copy–original logic. Lynn Worsham (2002) notes how emotions may be understood as "a tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meaning" (105). Worsham's evocation of the texture of a braid in delineating the relationship between affect and judgment signals how neither of those terms trumps the other, but rather they become intertwined in lived bodily experience. This delineation connects it to Silverman's superlative phrase that replicants may be "more human than human." Even when K learns that he is not the child he thought he was, he is determined to help Deckard, and ultimately to reunite him with Stelline, who is the actual replicant child herself. The replicant is refashioned as more "human than human" precisely through the embodied capacity to be affected by and act on emotional states that signify compassion and magnanimity toward others. Simultaneously, when Wallace offers Deckard a replica of Rachael (and thus a replica of a replicant, or a double copy), Deckard notes how the original Rachael's eyes were green instead of brown before walking away, prompting Wallace to kill her on the spot. This thus once more reifies the copy–original logic through which replicants can remain distinguishable from humans.

CONCLUSIONS

In their definition of affect, Greg and Seigworth noted how affect influences the bodily capacity to act and be acted upon, but also noted how the "resonances" produced through affect stick to bodies and worlds—human or otherwise. The copy–original (or replicant–human) logic exists side by side with the capacity of the film's characters to form or build relationships of intimacy through their (im)material actions and bodily capacity to be affected. I noted earlier that these two exist parallel to one another, rather than that they should be conceived of in hierarchical fashion. We can locate the authenticity of newly formed, or the forming of, intimate relationships through both affect and feeling. K's journey from believing he is the replicant child to reuniting Deckard with Stelline shows that, while his memories *were* designed by Stelline (modeling them on her own), his being affected by the new relationships he forms with these memories (and

with this, forming new memories) thus involves both feeling as a practice of inscription and affect as an incorporated force that drives him to help others. The fact that his memories were implanted (and therefore *are* copies) coexists with his ability to create new relationships of intimacy with people.

In her seminal essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," Donna Haraway (1987) writes that "The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, Utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household" (84). This "revolution of social relations" in the household Haraway alludes to, or rather, the constitutive process that underlies the formation of intimate relationships, is necessarily determined by possibility of the replicant body to be affected, while also being capable of feeling, meaning the ability to attribute new meaning to sensations based on past sensations.

After K has learned that he is not the replicant child, he encounters a gigantic holographic Joi advertisement as he wanders through Los Angeles. Echoing their earlier conversation, this Joi tells him "what a day" and "who's a good Joe?" Seemingly disillusioned by these phrases, which were previously also uttered by his "own" Joi, K appears to realize that Joi is a commodity, as Figure 3 shows us the of an advertisement text that K sees. Jennifer Cooke (2013) notes that "Intimacies are contextual so they fall under the mark of generic nomenclature—one is a lover, a mother, an abuser or a son—yet simultaneously they are textured by the singular experience that one person has of another. They

Figure 3 K looks at the text advertised with Joi. *Source: Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve 2017).

do not happen in blank space" (7). K, when confronted with the knowledge that Joi is in fact a commodity, thus experiences the decontextualization of his own intimacy with Joi, while his realization simultaneously shows how their own shaping of a shared context (as lovers) was constitutive for their intimacy earlier in the film.

The scene then moves into a voice-over from Freysa, the leader of the replicant resistance, who told K that "dying for the right cause is the most human thing we can do," prompting K to help Deckard. Freysa's defining this act as the most "human" thing the replicants can do may in the terminology I have been using better be understood as the most *humane* thing they could do. A reading of the humane here is in line with Hayles' posthumanist notion of the inability to determine an a priori will: The replicants refashion their will based on the network of power relations they perceive themselves to be in.

Rather than grounding replicant subjectification in the copy–original logic, I want to extend my reading of Deckard's "I know what is real" phrase and apply it to K's and Joi's relationship: The combination of incorporated and inscriptive practices that constituted their relationship became "real" to K in a fashion similar to that in which Deckard was offered the binary choice between love and programming by Wallace. As such, the replicant's capacity for humane behavior is posthumanist, in that in the vast network of different sources of information and signals through which replicant subjectification takes place (through continuously questioning artificial memories, building relationships with programmed AI's and other replicants and humans, and so on), the desire to be in control of one's own will is subjugated to the realization that instead, even when one is unable to determine by what will the replicant is driven, what remains continuous is the embodied capacity to exhibit humane behavior.

The revolution that takes place in the household referred to by Haraway is indeed one of intimacy, but not of intimacy alone. Rather, as I have argued with my reading, the formation of intimate relationships is dependent on the bodily capacity for feeling and to be affected, conjoining inscribing and incorporating practices. Exhibiting behavior we deem humane, such as forming intimate relationships or showing compassion, is not the prerogative of the human, but rather extends to posthuman subjects such as replicants. In this light, the continuation of the copy–original logic to distinguish the human from the replicant based on attributes is not enough for that distinction to fully hold. The anxiety concerning replicant reproduction signaled by Žižek earlier in this essay is thus not the only anxiety the neoliberal human subject has to worry about in order to keep the two ontological categories separate. The separation of the humane from the human through the embodied subjectification processes I have delineated undermines the ontological constitution on which the strict

separation of the human and posthuman can be understood, and ultimately subverts the presumed stability of these categories.

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