

From Fake Cop to Real Blade Runner: A Tripartite Comparison of the Role of Androids and Replicants as Laboring Beings

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While far from real, the worlds created by science fiction often show us our inner conceptual frameworks. This is masterfully shown by the Androids and Replicants found in the worlds of Philip K. Dick, beginning with their creation as replacement workers on the off-world colonies of Mars in the 1968 novella *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The framework continues in its more recent instantiations in the movies — Ridley Scott’s 1982 *Blade Runner* and Denis Villeneuve’s 2017 *Blade Runner 2049*. Throughout their time on the page and screen, Androids and Replicants have been conceptualized as laboring beings. Yet a change occurs between their first outing and their last: designed to be purely a slave race in the novella and the first movie, the most recent concept gives them salaries, love lives, time off for their own pursuits, and in a limited scope, power and respect. In this article I examine what changes were wrought and why — how the need for labor is conceptualized in the *Blade Runner* mythos, and how that shifted through various Android/Replicant incarnations.

I will begin by looking at the characters of Rick Deckard, Rachael Rosen, Pris Stratton, and Roy Baty, from the novella, then move to Deckard (Harrison Ford), Rachael (Sean Young), Pris (Daryl Hannah), and Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), from the first film, and complete the article with an examination of Sapper Morton (Dave Bautista) and KD6-3.7 (Ryan Gosling), from the second movie, as well as taking another look at Deckard and Rachael’s relationship. The three-part analysis allows the reader of this article to differentiate different characters with similar names; Roy Baty from Roy Batty, Pris Stratton from Pris, and so on. The primary mode of analysis will be via Michel Foucault’s notion of societal self-policing, the concept

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of the panopticon. Additionally, a second meaning of the term labor occurs for the Replicant Rachael, who bears a child by the Blade Runner Rick Deckard. Her labor — which carries multiple meanings — is made nearly invisible as she is beatified by the narrative.

Cops and Andys: Two Types of Laborers in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

The novella *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is set in an unspecified dystopian future earth, where a nuclear or chemical disaster has impacted the ecosystem, devastating all animal life. Most humans live in the space colonies if they are wealthy enough, off world, where they have Androids (Andys) to do the day-to-day manual labor. These Andys, biomechanical creations of the Rosen Association, are built to fulfill various purposes, from mining to seduction, and Eldon Rosen's goal is the eventual creation of an Andy so realistic that it can integrate into human society. He has gotten very close. The most recent model, the Nexus-6 series, is so bioidentical that there are only three ways to tell the difference: bone marrow analysis, the Voigt-Kampff Test, and the presence of intense physical strength and lack of emotions in the Andys. The story focuses on a group of escaped Nexus-6 type Andys who include Pris Stratton and Roy Baty, and their confrontation with a police officer who is specifically tasked with hunting down and killing ("retiring") rogue Andys: Rick Deckard.

Deckard's superior alerts him about the escapees, letting him know they are extremely violent, and that they will try to blend in, to trick him, and to outsmart him in order to survive. Deckard travels to the Rosen Association for more information about the Nexus-6 model and is then meant to liaise with his counterpart from the Soviets for details about the escaped Andys. At the Rosen Association, he meets Rachael Rosen. Rachael is a prototype Android — it is heavily implied both in the novella and the first movie that she is the only Nexus-7. Deckard's Soviet counterpart is one of the escaped Androids, and tries, unsuccessfully, to kill him. Deckard's next target is an Andy disguised as an opera singer, who turns the tables on Deckard by calling the "cops" on him. These cops are also escaped Androids, and they take Deckard to a fake police station, and threaten to "retire," him, saying that he, in actuality, is an Android in disguise. He escapes, and continues on to kill the remaining Andys, including Pris Stratton (a body double of Rachael Rosen), and Roy Baty, the leader and brains of the group.

If the above summarized plot has you confused about who is human and who is a biomechanical mimic, that is normal. The reader is meant to be confused; the reader is meant to doubt Deckard, as Deckard doubts himself. While the term “Blade Runner” is not introduced until Ridley Scott’s 1982 movie adaptation, the novella’s Rick Deckard is the template for the idea of a specialized cop whose purpose is to kill Androids. He is a bounty hunter, a person who does specific labor for hire, a man who has two purposes in his world — to be a breadwinner for his family (his wife Iran, and their titular electric sheep), and to discover and kill Androids. Throughout the novella, Deckard struggles with ideas of his own humanity. He wonders if his ability to feel emotions rather than having them dictated to him (via an empathy box,¹ as is used by the rest of the humans in the story) sets him apart from what is “right” and “good” and “human.” The end to those struggles is the haunting and shattering realization that he may be the only person in his life whose emotions are authentic — both Iran and Deckard’s boss at the police department are dependent on the empathy box, Rachael and the rest of the Androids are acting out of self-preservation — and thus the only “true” human being left.

Two modes of labor are set up to contrast each other. Deckard, a mostly normal human being, labors because it is what mostly normal human beings do. He is American, presumably white, middle-class, and has a wife, a car, and an (electric) pet. From the perspective of readers in the late 1960s, he can be seen to be a stand-in for the sci-fi reader: white, middle-class, Atomic Age men who believed in America. We see this when the titular sheep is introduced, and Deckard explains to a neighbor how the weight of responsibility was almost equal to the prestige of owning an animal, real or not (Dick 10-14). Rick Deckard is ostensibly free and sells his labor to the San Francisco Police Department. The Androids are enslaved.

Forced to do backbreaking work until they die — whether by accident, or by reaching the end of their pre-programmed lifespans — the Androids are created to only labor, never to profit, never to enjoy life or to do non-laborious, non-profitable things. They are not paid. They are not created with the capability to feel. They have, at best, the ability to mimic, and that ability is very limited. Any time they are shown to try to mimic emotions, they give themselves away, because while they

¹ The Empathy Box is a device that can be set to whatever emotion the user wants to feel, and the box’s interface then imposes that emotion on the user. It is like listening to music to heighten or lower or match your mood, only much more direct and impactful. Iran has dialed for depression, and Deckard wants her to snap out of it, using the box to dial for something more lighthearted.

can say the words, they cannot put real meaning behind them. Without meaning, the words ring hollow. And for what purpose would they have been given emotions anyway? A purely laboring being does not need them.

The idea of the Panopticon is useful here. In *Discipline and Punish*, his 1975 book on imprisonment, Michel Foucault discusses and expands upon Jeremy Bentham's structural prison, the Panopticon. This structure, consisting of a central guard tower and a ring of cells around that inner tower, allows for the constant unseen surveillance of the inmates. The idea is that while the inmates cannot see into the guard tower, the guards can see everything the inmates do, and wrong actions are punished. After a while, however, direct punishment is no longer necessary, as the inmates internalize the rules, and begin to self-regulate, begin, in effect, to discipline their minds and bodies and punish themselves.

Foucault expands this to apply to the concept of most societal structures. The way in which our habits molds our behavior is a form of self-discipline, or internal coercion toward actions that society has deemed right and proper, and away from things that would require punishment. By the time a person has reached adulthood, they have so internalized their societal notions of right and wrong, they simply *do* without thinking. Deckard decidedly exists with his own internalized Panopticon. His labor is coerced only by the expectations of the white American middle-class. He strives for more in his life — the ability to travel, the ability to purchase an actual living animal instead of an electric one. He has leisure time that he can use as he pleases when he is not on the clock.

Not so for the Androids. Firstly, they are built, not born, and the internalization of the Panopticon requires being raised into society, not thrust into it without preparation. It requires, in effect, childhood — that time period where humans learn what it means to be human in society, where we go from unknowing, uncritical, accidental creatures to thoughtful, deliberate, habitual creatures by way of continual instruction and correction by our parents. Our habits, be they good or bad, and our own versions of right and wrong are instantiated in and solidified by the years-long process of growing up. Androids, with their foreshortened lifespans, cannot acquire internalized social structures. Additionally, Androids have no leisure time. Without emotions, and without a structured social order, they have no art, music, hobbies, pets, or aspirations to gain or maintain property. They do have internal structures, as shown by their specs:

The Nexus-6 did have two trillion constituents plus a choice within a range of ten million possible combinations of cerebral activity. In .45 of a second,

an Android equipped with such a brain structure could assume any one of fourteen basic reaction postures. (Dick 28)

Yet, without the internal structure of the Panopticon, their discipline and subsequent punishment comes from outside of themselves, from the humans who have created them to be slaves.

Three of these Androids bear examination: Roy Baty, Pris Stratton, and Rachael Rosen. Foucault seats the power of labor in the body, and states “if economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labor, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and increased domination” (Foucault 82). The Androids, being bioengineered, were given unlimited bodily power, and no means with which to control their own destinies — they were indeed constricted more tightly as their aptitudes for labor increased. Advances in Android technology, namely the potential for the Androids to blend in with humans vis à vis Rachael Rosen have humans and Andys in a double bind: in order for Andys to continue to be enslaved to humans, humans need to have physical control over them; however, in order to perform at the top of their aptitude for labor, the Andys need to be more advanced, which makes them less controllable.

Yet, just because the Andys were built for labor, does not mean they are willing. Roy Baty is both the brains and the brawn of the escape operation, hijacking a ship from the Mars colony, and bringing his fellow slaves to earth. Physically imposing, with raw cunning and intense viciousness, Baty directs the other Androids to avoid, manipulate, and execute the humans they interact with. Yet none of his actions require an internal disciplinary structure. Baty’s behavior is almost animalistic. He avoids when he can, camouflaging the Androids after their escape, creating fake personas for each one. When this primary avoidance doesn’t work, he moves to secondary avoidance, directing Pris Stratton to set up a safe house. He then turns to manipulation, wheedling, coercing, and tricking a human, J.R. Isidore, into hiding the Androids in his own home. Anyone who cannot be avoided, evaded, or manipulated, he kills.

While killing is his last resort, it should be noted that he does so dispassionately, a means to an end, or out of curiosity for the results, for the pain he can put a person through. While we never know his adopted persona, apart from that of a “married couple” (Roy has a “wife,” Irmgard, though her character is not retained when the novella is made into the movie), it is one that disintegrates under scrutiny. There is

no substance there, no depth to his desires, other than the desire to be free and to live. Baty is possessed of a singular purpose other than laboring: survival.

All the Androids have this survival instinct, and use their various cover stories, in the same manner: to avoid, evade, or manipulate. While these actions may appear to imply that they have an internal Panopticon — after all, if one is avoiding something, or trying to manipulate circumstance from one outcome to another, that does imply that they find things “right” or “wrong” — it is more accurate to see this as though one **is** talking about animals. A cornered animal will try to escape, and if that does not work they will do whatever else remains to them that would result in their uninjured survival, up to and including killing, and they do not need a theory of “other” or philosophy of the “mind” in order to do so. The difference of course is that the animals of the novella have more than just survival instinct, they have and instill empathy, whereas the Androids have none.

Baty sends Pris Stratton to create a safe house for them in the outskirts of San Francisco. Unfortunately for the Andys, someone is already living there when she shows up: J.R. Isidore, a so-called “chickenhead,” or person of low intelligence. Delighted to have another person to talk to, he tries to befriend Pris. She cannot avoid him; therefore, she begins to manipulate him. Not that it takes much effort: Isidore is so starved for human company, that he brings her food, finds her an apartment with furnishings, welcomes the other Andys, and only leaves again after Deckard finds the apartment and begins to try to ‘retire’ the Android contingent. While Pris may not have emotions, she is doing emotional labor for Baty. She manipulates Isidore, and then Deckard, because she has the body of an attractive woman. She is the homemaker, being sent to create the safe-house for the other Androids. She is not the brains or the brawn of the operation, she is the beauty.

Rachael, on the other hand, is all three. The newest model, possibly a Nexus-7, she is physically strong, very attractive, truly intelligent, and she has emotions. This allows her to do two notable things: she gets revenge on Deckard, and she mourns her inability to have children. Both require the presence of a concept of right and wrong. Not necessarily the societally created Panopticon, but internal states that understand the consequences of current actions upon a future beyond her immediate survival. Every time Baty and Pris interact with a human, their focus remains only on what happens directly after that interaction, and whether they will survive the encounter. When Rachael and Deckard interact, she demonstrates a clear and distinct knowledge that she can act now to cause him social and emotional difficulties later, and also that their futures will diverge and while she is present

with him now, he will abandon her and move back toward his wife and pet. Not only that, this is a future which displeases her. She is sad and angry at his inevitable defection and betrayal which has nothing to do with her continued survival. She is not a rogue Andy; he is not hunting her and will not go on to retire her, so other than damaged feelings and bruised ego, she has no stake in Deckard's future. However, as the story moves from the page to the screen, these issues become both clearer and more complex.

Tech-noir: Blade Runners and Replicants on the Screen

With the change to a new medium, we see changes in several of the characters as well. Androids are now called Replicants. Deckard is divorced, Rachael no longer already knows that she is a Replicant and is said to be the niece of the replicant's creator (Eldon Tyrell in this instantiation), Roy Baty has become Roy Batty, and Pris Stratton is merely Pris. The scene is now Los Angeles, and the setting is November 2019. The incomparable soundtrack is by Vangelis. And LAPD headquarters is a Panopticon. *Blade Runner* is widely recognized as the first tech-noir film — a genre that combines the mechanical-futuristic feel of techno and the dark, gritty, voiceover, private-eye characterizations of noir.

In this instantiation, the sheer raw physicality of the replicants comes to the forefront, with the maniacal psychotic power of Rutger Hauer (Batty), the acrobatic slinkiness of Daryl Hannah (Pris), and the sad, soft, feminine sweetness of Sean Young (Rachael). As shown by the fact that different actresses played them, Pris and Rachael are no longer bioidentical in *Blade Runner*; changes happened in the story's take on the topic of labor as well.

One of the biggest changes is in the character of Rick Deckard, played by Harrison Ford. No longer the middle-class Atomic Age hero, he is retired from work in the police department, from his life as a Blade Runner. When the movie opens, we see him very deliberately not laboring. He is reading a newspaper, ordering dinner, and getting drunk, but he is not working until he is coerced back to work by his chain smoking, foul-mouthed former boss. Deckard is assigned a partner to work with, Gaff, played by Edward James Olmos. Gaff does not do much in terms of tracking down the escaped Replicants, and for the first few viewings of this movie I honestly did not understand why he was even there — his job seems to be to show up whenever Deckard is slacking off. Gaff brings Deckard in from retirement. Gaff asks questions about Deckard's relationship with Rachael. Gaff

shows up when Deckard is buying more alcohol instead of looking for the Replicants. Gaff, it turns out, is Deckard's social conscience — that part of Deckard which would have been his internalized Panopticon. We, the viewer, get not only the visual of the LAPD building as Panopticon, but also Gaff, reminding Deckard by his immutable presence in times of lapse, that Deckard lives in a society with right and wrong, and that doing his job and retiring the Replicants is “right” and going easy on them because one happens to be sympathetic is “wrong.”

This signifies the shifting of that Atomic Age mentality (Dick wrote his novella in the 1960s), to the tech-noir genre of the late 1970s and early 1980s, two decades marked by technological advances, as well as successful counter-culture revolutions that championed non-conformity and “sticking it to the man.” Deckard, who is retired, has done his time under authority, and now wishes to ignore all other people during his retirement.

But what of Batty, Pris, and Rachael? Joined by Leon (Brion James) and Zhora (Joanna Cassidy), they are as single minded as their earlier versions; however, their desire for survival extends beyond the immediate. They want Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel), founder of the Tyrell Corporation, to extend their lifespan, to ensure that they survive beyond the four years that were programmed into them upon creation. Of the Replicants, only Zhora has a fake persona for the movie — she takes on work as an exotic dancer at Taffey Lewis's bar, and her character is noted to be a mix between a pleasure model and a warrior. Zhora seems to exist in the script to fulfill three purposes: to round out the number of escapees; to allow Deckard to proposition Rachael, thus showing his hand in terms of his attraction to her; and to inject glittery gritty sexiness into the movie. Pris is a pleasure model, Batty is a warrior, and Rachael is the new prototype of the Nexus-7.

Let us return for a moment to the architecture: while the LAPD sits in a Panopticon, Tyrell runs his Replicant empire from a Ziggurat. These two structures represent different ideas within the collective consciousness. Although the Panopticon is both shown as a building and brought to life in Gaff, it stands for the internalization of social structure and the idea that to labor is one's duty to the state. A Ziggurat, on the other hand, represents top-down external power structures, specifically ones which are religious in nature. When Batty confronts Tyrell, they both talk about Tyrell as the “creator” and “father” of the Replicants — religiously

charged language. Tyrell asks what he can do for his creation, and Batty responds “I want more life...” (Scott 01:23:34-01:23-36).²

As shown, Tyrell’s power and his vision of the Replicants’ labor is that of a father to his children. A creator to his creations. Victor Frankenstein to the creature, where the good and right action of the Replicants creates pride, but even the bad and wrong action cannot erase his possessiveness, nor his control over his creations. In this way, the Ziggurat contrasts with the Panopticon — the Ziggurat is owed labor because it created the laborer; the Panopticon is owed labor because to labor is the person’s societal duty.

Sebastian’s creations, the automatons, are mostly only mechanical, though there are two — Bear (Kevin Thompson) and Kaiser (John Edward Allen), played by actors with dwarfism — who have rudimentary intelligence. In this way, the movie illustrates Foucault’s point. Tyrell, at the top, is in control of the lives and labors of the Replicants. His employee, J. F. Sebastian (William Sanderson), is in control of his own set of creations, his automata. No longer a chickenhead, as in Dick’s novel, Sebastian creates the nervous systems of the Nexus-6 replicants. His power is on a smaller scale to Tyrell’s, and he creates literal puppets since he cannot create life like Tyrell. Ironic, too, that both Tyrell and Sebastian are killed by Roy Batty, and that Sebastian is manipulated by Pris.

That manipulation again comes in the form of romantic appeal, which is in and of itself a kind of labor. Pris appeals to Sebastian’s caretaking nature, and poses as a shy, gamine girl, in need of a home. While we cannot put aside the idea of emotional labor taking place here — women’s roles often do the heavy lifting in terms of making the relationships flow properly — we also cannot discount the fact that Sebastian is desperately lonely. Isolated by his genetic condition, never allowed to leave the planet like other normal humans, lest he contaminate the off-world colonies, Sebastian barely needs manipulating at all. And in taking her in, he opens the door to her eventual betrayal. Sebastian calls his automata his “friends,” and this gives Pris the opportunity to introduce him to one of her own friends, Roy Batty, and to introduce that friend into Sebastian’s apartment. Although she is meant to be more of a “pleasure” model than Zhora, Pris’s appeal is more the

² As seen by the ellipsis, that is not the entirety of the dialogue. The reason for the ellipsis is that the audio track was recorded in such a way that depending on the way the speakers are set up, and with what type of mindset you are watching/listening, the last word in that line can be one of two things: father, or fucker. One is an entreaty; one is a malediction. The closed captioning in my version of the movie has “fucker” (Scott 01:23:36). Hauer has confirmed that it is meant to be heard both ways (Morehead).

appearance of vulnerability — appearance only, though, because when Deckard shows up to investigate her whereabouts and retire her, she very handily bests him physically, and is about to deliver the coup de grâce when he shoots her.

It is in the showdown between Deckard and Pris that we arrive at a conundrum of authorial intent. As I have shown above, in the novella Deckard doubts his own humanity *and* his own humanness. He is meant to wrestle with the idea that he might be an Android, before understanding that his compassion for Rachael and his ability to feel emotion set him apart from other humans but do not make him inhuman. However, in *Blade Runner*, doubt is introduced not by the actions of the characters, nor by the script, but by the director, who has implied in various interviews and through the constant reissuings of various versions of the movie that Deckard is not human, that he is, in fact, a Replicant, presumably of the same generation as Rachael (Di Placido; Jagermath; Lovett). I contend that two things happened: the characters and script decidedly show that Deckard is human and not a Replicant, and that this is confirmed by *Blade Runner 2049*, which will be discussed in the next section; and Ridley Scott misinterpreted his source material.

So, in what way is the showdown between Deckard and Pris exemplary of this conundrum? To put it very bluntly: Deckard gets his ass handed to him. In fact, every time Deckard comes up against a Replicant, he is distinctly physically outmatched. Recalling back to the discussion of labor, Replicants, like their Android instantiations before them, are bioengineered for strength, toughness, and the ability to labor almost continuously without effort. If Deckard were a Replicant, even if he did not know about his own origins and nature, he would not be so very thoroughly trounced in every encounter.³

But what of Rachael and her ambiguous status? For her, we need to explore a different definition of the word “labor.” In this characterization of Rachael, she has been duped by Tyrell into thinking herself human by means of implanted memories and abilities. She “remembers” learning to play piano, but it is a memory implant. Originally introduced into the movie as a representative of the Tyrell Corporation, the betrayal she feels at the revelation of her Replicant status overwhelms her, and although she does eventually rally enough to shoot Leon as he tries to kill Deckard,

³ There is also the fact that the Replicants are marked visually by a reflective flash of the eyes. It happens with every character that we know or find out is a Replicant; it does not happen with Deckard. Furthermore, while Deckard does triumph in the book, and fights K to a standstill in the second movie, this is due to decent, though human, reflexes and superior firepower (book) and a home ground advantage and the fact that K is not there to kill him and they start a conversation before things can turn lethal (second movie).

she spends a good part of the run time coming to terms with the fact that her body, mind, emotions, responses, desires, memories, are all a product to be marketed and sold. She is a prototype — the first, and, we later learn, the only, Nexus-7. Because she is so intimately linked to Tyrell, she knows all about the limitations placed on Replicants. Built for various types of labor, given a very short lifespan, and created sterile (as the novella's Rachael lamented), the main difference in her construction that we see in this movie is that she can have authentic emotions. She weeps, she kisses, she feels betrayal, she can act autonomously because she has those emotions that allow her to decide things for herself beyond her need to prioritize survival.

Rachael's final action of the movie is to run away with Deckard. As they are leaving, Deckard and Gaff have one final confrontation — a man and his conscience. Gaff remarks that he is sorry that Rachael will not live very long. After all, Replicants have that shortened life span. Deckard and Rachael have a few years, maybe less but certainly not more, before her end date happens and she dies. Throughout the movie, Rachael has been doing "emotional labor" for Deckard. She thaws him out, and warms him up, and makes him feel again. Her tears move him to compassion. Her plight induces him to move outside of his extremely passive rebellion against society and to take action to save her. She is the emotional linchpin of his existence. Between Gaff and Rachael, Deckard becomes a whole person, removed from the ennui of the tech-noir genre. Yet, despite the movie ending on a rather non-ambiguous note (we are told Rachael will die, we expect that Rachael will die, and Deckard becomes uninteresting without companion or conflict), their story is not over. It continues in the 2017 movie by Denis Villeneuve, *Blade Runner 2049*.

Replicants as Blade Runners: Salaries for Slaves

As the title suggests, the sequel is set in 2049, 30 years after *Blade Runner*. The movie comes with three featurettes, set respectively in 2022, 2036, and 2048. We retain the location, remaining in Los Angeles, but the LAPD building has transformed from a Panopticon to a building in the shape of a nail or a spike — wide at the top, tapering down to a thin base, buried in the miasma of the city below. What was once the Tyrell Corporation is now the Wallace Corporation, owned by Niander Wallace, who still maintains his control over his manufactured labor force from a Ziggurat.

We meet new characters as well: KD6-3.7 (verbalized as kay dee six dash three dot seven, and occasionally shortened to K), a Blade Runner for the LAPD and a Replicant; his companion, a hologram, named Joi; Lt. Joshi, K's (human) boss at the police department; Sapper Morton, a Replicant escapee whom K is sent to retire; Luv, a Replicant second in command to Niander Wallace; and Mariette, a prostitute Replicant.

In the first act, K (Ryan Gosling) is sent to retire Sapper Morton (Dave Bautista). Sapper owns a protein farm, where he farms grubs to create protein powder,⁴ leading us to our first ideas on labor in this movie. When we are introduced to Sapper, we only know three things: he is a Replicant, he has evaded the law, and he owns his own farm. This brings us back to the definition of labor, and the difference between true labor and slavery. He escaped, he self-freed, and therefore he labors, collecting the profits from his own work, selling the product to someone else and increasing his own monetary capital. The farm has a house on it, which is small and spare, but as we end up seeing later, it is larger than K's apartment, and more peaceful as well. Sapper is one of a group of Nexus-8 Replicants who went rogue between their creation after 2019, and the renaissance of Replicant technology, headed by Niander Wallace (Jared Leto), in 2036. This freedom, this economic self-sufficiency, is seen as theft of labor. The Replicants were made to labor, for free, for the state, and the newly reformed LAPD is going to bring that large spiky nail right down on them and stamp out that theft. The change in architecture signified a change in who the police are focusing on: no longer are they pitched toward humans, who have their internalized Panopticon, but on Replicants, who need to be nailed by the force of the law for their lack of duty to society.

K is of a newer generation of Replicant: he is built to be obedient (something that apparently did not occur to Tyrell...) and to do his job. He has been designed with an internalized Panopticon. The movie shows us that the owners of the newer Replicants can use an optical scan combined with verbal recitation to check for the Replicant's baseline. The baseline is a function of the internalized Panopticon and of how much the Replicant's recent experiences have caused them to stray from

⁴ This is not outside the realm of possibilities — insect protein is an up-and-coming trend and is being put forward among food scholars as an efficient, cost effective, less harmful to the environment replacement for a lot of commercial meat farming. It is your author's contention that this is viscerally gross, and it was played as such in the movie, but that contention is not shared by everyone.

their knowledge that laboring for the state is their duty. K's specific baseline is a fragment of a poem, the internal poem from Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. The imagery of the poem also mimics a Panopticon:

...And blood-black nothingness began to spin
A system of cells interlinked within
Cells interlinked within cells interlinked
Within one stem. And dreadfully distinct
Against the dark, a tall white fountain played. (Nabokov 59)

One can visualize a tall white central structure around which are arranged dark blood-black prison cells, a controlling threat that keeps "officer" KD6-3.7 in his place and reminds him that he is a creation and what can be created can also be destroyed.

And the Replicants *are* still slaves — Joshi (Robin Wright) controls K's destiny, can retire him, can order him to do things that he cannot then refuse; however, those who work within the system gain the trappings of respectability and of laboring for their own gain, if their baseline checks out okay. If they submit to society's versions of right and wrong, good and bad.

So, what are those trappings of respectability? In recognition for K's prestige as a Blade Runner, K has a salary, free time, and a bonus structure. In the novella and the first movie, we learn that Blade Runner is a skilled, respected position, that the people who retire Androids or Replicants are doing hard, dangerous work, but work that contains a measure of trust. Deckard, after all, was trusted, and needed by his bosses, but he was not nearly as strong as a replicant: he was fragile, and human, and in both book and movie, he was rebellious, he often said no or went against orders though he eventually followed through and got the job done. This raises a conundrum: hard work was generally given to Replicants, so there is no need to do dangerous labor if your manufactured slave race can do it for you, but Replicants are not trustworthy. They will take that physical power with which they were imbued and rebel, and kill humans, in the pursuit of their own survival. K's generation of Replicants obeys, they do not rebel, so they are trusted with more metaphysically ambiguous work, like retiring other Replicants. Regrettably, the viewer never gets an answer to why they have apartments and salaries and bonuses. If they obey, presumably they would obey just as well if they were kept in a broom closet while off duty and not paid at all — if they were treated as what they indeed were, a manufactured slave race.

Perhaps their treatment by their employers has something to do with their newly minted emotional capacity. We first saw emotive Replicants with Rachael's ability to care for Deckard in *Blade Runner* (Scott), and while she demonstrated a complete emotional range — sadness, anger, affection, indignation, ennui — she was just one being, and the first one at that. After all, she had desires, and the new versions of Replicants have desires as well. K wants attention and affection from Joi, Sapper wants to be kind but also to hold on to his memories of beauty, Luv wants to please her employer, and all these desires are shown not to be single-minded, but part of a rich and complex inner state of the Replicant person. With the inclusion of advanced emotional capacities, romantic entanglements take on even more labor-work, as the replicants are now completely capable of doing such labor, even wanting to do it, but still having no agency to truly make that choice, as their enslaved status ensures that they must obey. Yet they still do have desires: K's desires evolve and change over the course of the movie, as he discovers and internalizes the difference between simulacra and simulation regarding his changing romantic relationships. Perhaps beings with complex internal schema grow sad and fail to thrive if they are deprived of those trappings of respectability.

However, and this cannot be stressed enough, a paid slave is still a slave. In fact, the term “wage slave” denotes someone who has no choice but to continue to labor for their existence — a person who is housing and/or food insecure, and whose life and wellbeing are contingent on remaining in their current position. The economic systems embodied in the Replicant stories, epitomizes the extremes of our current capitalist system, where the super wealthy depend on the work of the impoverished masses, and the impoverished masses depend on the good will of their employers. Yet the transfer of money for the production of goods and services does not equal free labor if the parties involved in the transfer have a controlling or coercive or dominantly hierarchical relationship. As Joshi has literal control of life and death over K, and he physically cannot refuse her orders, he remains enslaved, even though he is accumulating capital. It seems, though Wallace did create the new model Replicants with internalized Panopticons, he did not trust them to hold, and thus that enslaved status remains.

But what of Rachael? When last we saw her, our emotional laborer, she and Deckard were fleeing LA, and she was soon to die. *Blade Runner 2049* reveals that she did not die; at least, not right away. After K retires Sapper, he spots an anomaly at the base of a dead tree near Sapper's home. Ground Penetrating Radar analysis of that anomaly turns up a box full of bones: Rachael's bones. During their analysis

at the LAPD headquarters, it is revealed that she was pregnant, and died during an attempt to save her and the baby during childbirth. Here we come to our last use of the word “labor.”

Women’s Labor: Childbirth, Mothering, and That Which Goes Unseen

While I have been quite flexible in this analysis with my use of the word labor, I have still stuck relatively close to the originally stated definition — to work for the creation of goods and/or services. Even when we speak of Rachael’s emotional labor, she is performing a service to Deckard by keeping him on an even keel and focused on what is right, and to herself, by exploring her newly realized Replicant status. In becoming a mother, Rachael now exemplifies not only herself qua herself, but also becomes the progenitor of a new type of being: half-human, half-Replicant, with whom she labors in childbirth. While it may seem that the beatification that occurs to her over the course of the film is in recognition of her progenitor status, particularly because the child is always referred to as “Rachael’s child” it is really an erasure of Rachael as a person, a reduction of her to the contents of her meant-to-be-barren womb.

Rachael’s labor, and the labor of mothers in general, does not create goods or services, but it creates other laborers, and her value as herself, as a labor producer, goes down due to her focus on the non-economic duties of childcare. A man’s value takes less of a hit for becoming a father — some, if he takes paternity leave, but little else — but accrues all of the prestige of being a family man, so long as he is monetarily responsible — see Deckard in the novella — and continues to labor within the Panopticon based right/wrong system.

Yet we are no longer dealing with Deckard of the novella (Dick), nor Deckard of the 2019 set *Blade Runner* (Scott). Deckard thirty years later, in 2049, is quite a different person. He is one of only two people in *Blade Runner 2049* who does not reduce Rachael to her fertility, the other one being KD6-3.7, who, for part of the run time, believes that he may be Rachael’s child. Deckard has moved from LA to Las Vegas and is holed up in the ruins of a casino. He has a dog, keeps bees, and continues to drink to excess on a regular basis. The character was in his late thirties in *Blade Runner*, so he is in his late sixties in *Blade Runner 2049*. Harrison Ford was 40 in 1982, and 75 in 2017, and though still rugged and good looking, does indeed look approximately his age. It is apparent from the way he confronts K, who comes to ask about Rachael’s child, that he has spent the intervening years

mourning Rachael and worrying about the child. Not as a curiosity or the “cure” to the Replicant condition, the way Niander Wallace and Luv (Sylvia Hoeks) worry about the child, nor as a potential world ending phenomenon who will steal away the control the state has over its Replicant slave labor force, the way Joshi worries about the child, but as a partner and father, who has lost everything he loved.

Rachael’s labor, and the cure it represents, is the only thing that interests Niander Wallace, however. While Joshi wants to find the child to kill it, Wallace, by way of Luv, wants to find the child and Deckard in order to discover how Tyrell made a fertile Replicant. They want to use the pair of them to unlock the secret of self-reproducing labor, and they believe that the secret lies in Rachael’s DNA. They look for *her* child, they threaten to torture Deckard to reveal how *she* became pregnant; they do not want to learn about his genetic contribution, they do not find him special or deify him, they want to know why *Rachael* could conceive when no other Replicant could. This is important to our earlier discussion of Deckard and his humanity.

The differentiation between man and machine, human and Replicant, remains important for the idea of voluntary labor or labor from duty, and slavery. Deckard, as shown in the first movie, labors only for himself until pressed back into service as a Blade Runner. His boss calls his masculinity into question with a few well-placed insults, and Gaff acts as a physical reminder of his mental Panopticon, but Deckard labors mostly voluntarily: he does what is correct in duty to the state, and he gets paid for it. Contrasted with K’s labor in *Blade Runner 2049*, which is coerced and forced by the system despite being monetarily compensated, we can see that Deckard’s labor is voluntary: if he told his boss to shove it, he could have walked out of the office, never met Rachael, never fallen in love with her, never had a child with her. His fate would have been different because of his choices, and his humanness is inherent because he has that power of choice.

Rachael’s fate, however, was always the same, that she was fated to die. Her labor before running off with Deckard was the product of lies about her status as a Replicant, and until she ran off, would have been only coerced, never voluntary, because she was created to be a slave. Afterward, it remained involuntary because she turned herself into one of the hunted by escaping. Indeed, even her bearing a child was fated: Wallace makes the connection to the biblical Rachel, who prayed for a child, and was blessed with one; but where is our Rachael’s voice in this? There is no indication in any of the source material that Rachael and Deckard were trying for a child. No mention of that desire. No mention of contraception or the

lack thereof. It was a “miracle” that a Replicant could conceive, but although the novella’s Rachael mourned her lost fertility, the movie’s Rachael did not, so that conception which she had not planned for nor desired was indeed fated. As she labored in childbirth, she was coming to terms with the fact that she would die.

That Rachael died is not in itself surprising. Not only were we meant to expect it due to her shut off date, but mothers being either bad or dead is a recognized trope in fiction, beginning in fairy tales (Doyle). This trope goes even further in science/science-fiction: we are all, at heart, Donna Haraway’s cyborgs and we all give birth to Robbie Davis-Floyd’s cyborg babies. While her form was briefly resurrected, as a (failed) bribe for Deckard’s cooperation, we return again to the difference between simulacra and simulation: while Replicants are copies of a prototype (simulation), humans are only copies of potentials, of their own DNA made flesh, combinations of copies of different parts of their parents, which combined to be simulacra, a copy of something entirely new. Humans can be full parents and do all the labor that entails over the life of the child, but Replicants can only do the labor they are built for. Rachael had to die, so that we would understand that she is a *good* mother. That she did her labor, in childbirth, and fulfilled her purpose. And so that in the final confrontation between Deckard and Luv, he could once again get his ass handed to him by a Replicant.

In Summation: A Few Final Words Regarding the Evolution of the Blade Runner

Part of what we see as this science-fiction story goes through three iterations is a change in the culture part of popular culture. Art both reflects and propels reality, and as Western culture moved from glorifying authority and conformity in the 1960s to the counterculture revolts of the 1970s and 1980s, to the gender-theory based ideas of the twenty-teens. This can be seen in the shift of the ways in which the characters labored, and the gendered spin on that labor, from the novella all the way through to the second movie.

In the novella, women are passive unless they are Androids. The majority of the characters are men. Deckard, his bosses at the police station, Rosen, and all the secondary characters (Isidore, his bosses, and the animal broker) are male. There is a female secretary at the police department, but she is just briefly mentioned on one page. The only consistently mentioned female character, Deckard’s wife, Iran, is passive and relatively pointless other than to serve as a human foil to Deckard, and

to provide him with the other person to round out his middle-class white American life. You could remove her entirely, and probably no one would notice. There is a slight improvement in *Blade Runner*, which does not quite pass the Bechdel Test, but still at least gives its female characters personalities and something to do (a movie passes if there are two or more named female characters who talk to each other about something other than men — *Blade Runner* fails because the female characters are not shown speaking to each other). Labor is expanded beyond merely producing goods and services to include emotional labor, which is a type that is normally, and was in this case, relegated to women. Rachael performed emotional labor, and so did Pris, though she did so most likely at the instigation of the screenwriter and as a holdover from her instantiation in the novella.

In *Blade Runner 2049*, we see the largest expansion of the idea of labor, and the changing notion of who could be a Blade Runner and what that position meant in society. This movie *does* pass the Bechdel test, several times over. Interactions between Luv and Joshi center around the search for Rachael's child, which remains un-gendered for much of the movie while K figures out what is going on; Mariette speaks with Freysa, a fellow Replicant that is both Mariette's pimp and the leader of the rebel group of escaped Replicants who are trying to find Rachael's child; and although the client is not named, Luv has a long conversation with a client about an order of Replicants that the client is making. While women were superfluous, distracting, or incidental in the novella and the first movie, they are active, powerful, and in charge in the second movie. The definition of labor has shifted to recognize equal contributions by women.

While the issue of feminism in science-fiction may seem secondary to the overall theme of labor, the reality is that when we discuss labor and laborers, we must distinguish between the effects of these fictional narratives on men and on women. We are all storytellers, says theorist Claude Levi-Strauss, and those stories influence how we speak about ourselves and others, how we define ourselves, our origins, our futures, the fabric of our beings. That those narratives are different, and have different effects, for different genders, is not unexpected, but it is important.

That this shift in narrative tone, with the inclusion of female power, comes so late in our history is tragic, though not surprising. We have not yet reached the point that having the police lieutenant and second in command of a corporation be female, even in a piece of fiction, nor having that piece of fiction pass the Bechdel Test, is expected. Our own actual corporations and police departments, as well as military commands, board rooms, manual labor jobs, and university departments

are still majority male. We place barriers of tradition and appropriateness around who gets to do what labor in our culture. Comparable to the title of *Blade Runner*, work is devalued and made lesser when it is shifted on to new bodies, when the internalized Panopticon changes and our perceptions of what is good and right are brought outside of our bodies and enforced by others instead of ourselves. The effect, however, demonstrates the complexity of the situation in that when we name coerced labor, or devalued labor, we also shine light on the Foucauldian structures which have mindlessly upheld it, and only when they are in the light can they be properly dismantled. Only then can humans and Replicants, male and female, move from fake cop to real *Blade Runner* in the narratives.

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