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Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*

GIULIANA BRUNO

“History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it we must be excluded from it. . . . That is what the time when my mother was alive *before me* is—History. No anamnesis could ever make me glimpse this time starting from myself—whereas, contemplating a photograph in which she is hugging me, a child, against her, I can waken in myself the rumpled softness of her crepe de chine and the perfume of her rice powder.”¹ That is history for Roland Barthes and history for the replicants of *Blade Runner*. The replicants are perfect “skin jobs,” they look like humans, they talk like them, they even have feelings and emotions (in science fiction the ultimate sign of the human). What they lack is a history. For that they have to be killed. Seeking a history, fighting for it, they search for their origins, for that time before themselves. Rachel succeeds. She has a document—as we know, the foundation of history. Her document is a photograph, a photograph of her mother, hugging her, a child, against her, wakening in her the rumpled softness of, most probably, a hamburger. History is hysterical; it is constituted only if we *look* at it, excluded from it. That is, my mother before me—history. History/Mother/My mother. “My mother? I’ll tell you about my mother. . . .”²

*

The debate on postmodernism has by now produced a vast literature. Roughly, we might distinguish three positions: one elaborated with reference to the human sciences and literature, by Jean-François Lyotard and Umberto Eco, among others; one concerning the visual arts, recently developed in particular in the U.S.; and one related to the discourse of and on architecture.³ It is the latter

1. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981, p. 65.

2. Thus answers the replicant Leon when asked about his mother; he then kills his questioner.

3. The literature is by now extensive, if not particularly distinguished. See, for example, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge, Massachusetts,

which, for the most part, constitutes the theoretical groundwork for this paper, in which *Blade Runner* will be discussed as a metaphor of the postmodern condition. I wish to analyze, in particular, the representation of narrative space and temporality in *Blade Runner*. For this I will use two terms, pastiche and schizophrenia, in order to define and explore the two areas of investigation. The terms are borrowed and developed from Fredric Jameson's discussion of postmodernism. In his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"⁴ and in the later, expanded version, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,"⁵ Jameson suggests that the postmodern condition is characterized by a schizophrenic temporality and a spatial pastiche. The notion of schizophrenia which Jameson employs is that elaborated by Jacques Lacan. According to Jameson's reading of Lacan, schizophrenia is basically a breakdown of the relationship between signifiers, linked to the failure of access to the Symbolic. With pastiche there is an effacement of key boundaries and separations, a process of erosion of distinctions. Pastiche is intended as an aesthetic of quotations pushed to the limit; it is an incorporation of forms, an imitation of dead styles deprived of any satirical impulse. Jameson's suggestion has proved a viable working reference and a guideline in analyzing the deployment of space and time in the film. Pastiche and schizophrenia will thus act, in the economy of my argument, as what Umberto Eco calls umbrella terms, operational linguistic covers of vast and even diverse areas of concern. My discussion of postmodernism and *Blade Runner* will involve a consideration of questions of identity and history, of the role of simulacra and simulation, and of the relationship between postmodernism, architecture, and postindustrialism.

Pastiche

It is useful to note that Jameson has derived his view of postmodernism from the field of architecture: "It is in the realm of architecture . . . that modifications in aesthetic productions are most dramatically visible, and that their theoretical problems have been most centrally raised and articulated; it was indeed from architectural debates that my own conception of postmodernism began to emerge."⁶ It is in the architectural layout of *Blade Runner* that pastiche is most dramatically visible and where the connection of postmodernism to postindustrialism is evident.

MIT Press, 1977; Charles Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, New York, Rizzoli, 1977; Paolo Portoghesi, *Postmodern: l'Architettura nella società postindustriale*, Milan, Electa, 1982.

4. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Port Townsend, Bay Press, 1983, pp. 111–125.

5. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August 1984), pp. 53–92.

6. Jameson, "Cultural Logic," p. 54.



Blade Runner. 1982. Deckard on a rooftop.

The film does not take place in a spaceship or space station, but in a city, Los Angeles, in the year 2019, a step away from the development of contemporary society. The link between postmodernism and late capitalism is highlighted in the film's representation of postindustrial decay. The future does not realize an idealized, aseptic technological order, but is seen simply as the development of the present state of the city and of the social order of late capitalism. The city of *Blade Runner* is not the ultramodern, but the postmodern city. It is not an orderly layout of skyscrapers and ultracomfortable, hypermechanized interiors. Rather, it creates an aesthetic of decay, exposing the dark side of technology, the process of disintegration.

Next to the high-tech, its waste. It is into garbage that the characters constantly step, by garbage that Pris awaits J. F. Sebastian. A deserted neighborhood in decay is where Deckard goes to find the peace he needs in order to work. There he finds the usual gang of metropolitan punks exploring the ruins for unexpected marvels. In an abandoned, deteriorating building, J. F. Sebastian lives surrounded by nothing but his mechanical toys. It is a building of once great majesty, now an empty shell left to disintegrate. The rain completes the am-



Blade Runner. 1982. Deckard in pursuit of a replicant.

bience. It falls persistently, veiling the landscape of the city, further obscuring the neobaroque lighting. It is a corrosive rain which wears things away.

The postindustrial decay is an effect of the acceleration of the internal time of process proper to postindustrialism. The system works only if waste is produced. The continuous expulsion of waste is an indexical sign of the well-functioning apparatus: waste represents its production, movement, and development at increasing speed. Postindustrialism recycles; therefore it needs its waste.⁷ A postmodern position exposes such logic, producing an aesthetic of recycling. The artistic form exhibits the return of the waste. Consumerism, waste, and recycling meet in fashion, the “wearable art” of late capitalism, a sign of postmodernism. Costumes in *Blade Runner* are designed according to this logic. The “look” of the replicants Pris and Zhora and of some of the women in the background in the bar and in the street scenes reinforces this aesthetic. Pris, the “basic pleasure model,” is the model of the postindustrial fashion, the height of exhibition and recycling.

7. On the history of waste, see Dominique Laporte, *Histoire de la merde*, Paris, Christian Bourgeois, 1978. Laporte traces the history of waste as a cyclic process of repression and return.



The postmodern aesthetic of *Blade Runner* is thus the result of recycling, fusion of levels, discontinuous signifiers, explosion of boundaries, and erosion. The disconnected temporality of the replicants and the pastiche city are all an effect of a postmodern, postindustrial condition: wearing out, waste. There is even a character in the film who is nothing but a literalization of this condition. J. F. Sebastian is twenty-five years old, but his skin is wrinkled and decrepit. His internal process and time are accelerated, and he is wearing out. “Accelerated decrepitude” is how the replicant Pris describes his condition, noting that he and the replicants have something in common. What Pris does not say is that the city suffers from it as well. The psychopathology of J. F. Sebastian, the replicants, and the city is the psychopathology of the everyday postindustrial condition. The increased speed of development and process produces the diminishing of distances, of the space in between, of distinction. Time and tempo are reduced to climax, after which there is retirement. Things cease to function and life is over even if it has not ended. The postindustrial city is a city in ruins.

In *Blade Runner*, the visions of postindustrial decay are set in an inclusive, hybrid architectural design. The city is called Los Angeles, but it is an L.A. that

looks very much like New York, Hong Kong, or Tokyo. We are not presented with a real geography, but an imaginary one: a synthesis of mental architectures, of *topoi*. Quoting from different real cities, postcards, advertising, movies, the text makes a point about the city of postindustrialism. It is a polyvalent, interchangeable structure, the product of geographical displacements and condensations. *Blade Runner's* space of narration bears, superimposed, different and previous orders of time and space. It incorporates them, exhibiting their transformations and deterioration. It is a place of vast immigration, from countries of overpopulation and poverty. While immigrants crowd the city, the indigenous petite bourgeoisie moves to the suburbs or to the "off-world" as the case may be. Abandoned buildings and neighborhoods in decay adjoin highly populated, crowded old areas, themselves set next to new, high-tech business districts. The film is populated by eclectic crowds of faceless people, Oriental merchants, punks, Hari Krishnas. Even the language is pastiche: "city speech" is a "mish-mash of Japanese, Spanish, German, what have you." The city is a large market; an intrigue of underground networks pervades all relations. The explosive Orient dominates, the Orient of yesterday incorporating the Orient of today. Overlooking the city is the "Japanese simulacrum," the huge advertisement which alternates a seductive Japanese face and a Coca Cola sign. In the postindustrial city the explosion of urbanization, melting the futuristic high-tech look into an intercultural scenario, recreates the third world inside the first. One travels almost without moving, for the Orient occupies the next block. The Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* is China(in)town.

The pertinence and uniqueness of architecture to specific places, cultures, and times has been lost in postmodernism. The metropolis of *Blade Runner* quotes not only from different spatial structures but from temporal ones as well. The syntactic rules are broken down in postmodernism and replaced by a parataxis, a regulated aesthetic of lists. The connections are not made at random, but ruled by a different logic. It is the logic of pastiche, which allows and promotes quotations of a synchronic and diachronic order. "The resultant hybrid balances and reconciles opposed meanings. . . . This inclusive architecture absorbs conflicting codes in an attempt to create (what Robert Venturi calls) 'the difficult whole'. . . . It can include ugliness, decay, banality, austerity. . . . In general terms it can be described as radical eclecticism or adhocism. Various parts, styles or sub-systems are used to create a new synthesis."⁸ In *Blade Runner* recollections and quotations from the past are subcodes of a new synthesis.⁹ Roman and Greek columns provide a retro mise-en-scène for the city. Signs of classical Oriental

8. Jencks, p. 90.

9. Among other elements, the city of *Blade Runner* includes a set called "New York street," built in 1929 and used in a number of Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney movies; and the Ennis-Brown house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

mythology recur. Chinese dragons are revisited in neon lighting. A strong Egyptian element pervades the decor. The Tyrell corporation overlooks what resemble the Egyptian pyramids in a full sunset. The interior of the office is not high-tech, but rather a pop Egyptian extravaganza, to which the choreography of movement and makeup of Zhora adds exoticism. Elevators might have video screens, but they are made of stone. The walls of Deckard's apartment are reminiscent of an ancient Mayan palace. Pastiche, as an aesthetic of quotation, incorporates dead styles; it attempts a recollection of the past, of memory, and of history.

The result of this architectural pastiche is an excess of scenography. Every relation in the narrative space produces an exhibitionism rather than an aesthetics of the visual. The excess of violence is such an exhibitionism. The iconography of death as well is scenographic. The "scene" of death becomes a sort of "obscenity," the site of total, transparent visibility. The fight and death of Pris are rendered as a performance. Zhora dies breaking through a window in slow motion. The decor, the choreography of movement and editing, the neobaroque cinematography emphasize visual virtuosity. It has been said that scenography is the domain of postmodern architecture. Paolo Portoghesi claims that "Postmodern in architecture can be generally read as the re-emerging of the archetypes and the reintegrations of the architectural conventions and thus as the premise for the creation of an architecture of communication, an architecture of the visual, for a culture of the visual."¹⁰

Schizophrenia

Pastiche and the exhibitionism of the visual celebrate the dominance of representation and the effacement of the referent in the era of postindustrialism. The postindustrial society is the "society of the spectacle," living in the "ecstasy of communication." Addressing this aspect of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard speaks of a twist in the relationship between the real and its reproduction. The process of reproducibility is pushed to the limit. As a result, "the real is not what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced . . . the hyperreal . . . which is entirely in simulation."¹¹ The narrative space of *Blade Runner* participates in this logic: "All of Los Angeles . . . is of the order of hyperreal and simulation."¹² There, the machinery of imitations, reproductions, and seriality, in other words, "replicants," affirms the fiction of the real.

The narrative "invention" of the replicants is almost a literalization of Baudrillard's theory of postmodernism as the age of simulacra and simulation.

10. Portoghesi, p. 11.

11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman, New York, Semiotext(e), 1983, p. 146.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Replicants are the perfect simulacra—a convergence of genetics and linguistics, the genetic miniaturization enacting the dimension of simulation. Baudrillard describes the simulacrum as “an operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.”¹³ It would be difficult to find a better definition of the nature and functions of the replicants and their capacity of simulation in the narrative motivation of *Blade Runner*. In L.A., year 2019, simulation is completely dominant as the effect of the existence and operations of the replicant/simulacrum. “The unreal is no longer that of dream or of fantasy or a beyond or a within, it is that of *hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself*.”¹⁴ The replicant performs such hallucinatory resemblance. “It” looks and acts like a he or a she. Perfect simulation is thus its goal, and Rachel manages to reach it. To simulate, in fact, is a more complex act than to imitate or to feign. To simulate implies actually producing in oneself some of the characteristics of what one wants to simulate. It is a matter of internalizing the signs or the symptoms to the point where there is no difference between “false” and “true,” “real” and “imaginary.” With Rachel the system has reached perfection. She is the most perfect replicant because she does not know whether she is one or not. To say that she simulates her symptoms, her sexuality, her memory, is to say that she realizes, experiences them.

The fascination with the simulacrum has, of course, generated narratives before *Blade Runner*. We find in *Der Sandmann*, for example, one of the most influential fictional descriptions of simulacra. It is this tale, in fact, which inspired Freud’s reflections on the uncanny. *Der Sandmann* concerns the android Olympia, who is such a perfect “skin job” that she is mistaken for a real girl, the daughter of her inventor. The protagonist of the tale, Nathaniel, falls in love with her, but reality triumphs: the android is unmasked and destroyed. In Hoffmann’s time, replication is still a question of imitation, for the real still bears a meaning. The replicants of *Blade Runner* are, on the contrary, as the name itself indicates, serial terms. No original is thus invoked as point of comparison, and no distinction between real and copy remains.

It is, indeed, in simulation that the power of the replicants resides. Since the simulacrum is the negation of both original and copy, it is ultimately the celebration of the false as power and the power of the false.¹⁵ The replicants turn this power against their makers to assert the autonomy of the simulacrum.

But these replicants, “simulacra” of humans, in some ways superior to them, have a problem: a fragmented temporality. “Schizophrenic vertigo of

13. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 142. See also Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, Black and Red Press, 1983.

15. For this aspect of the theoretical discussion of the simulacrum, see Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October*, no. 27 (Winter 1983), pp. 45–56.



Blade Runner. 1982. Deckard fights with a replicant amidst J. F. Sebastian's mechanical toys.

these serial signs . . . immanent in their repetition—who could say what the reality is that these signs simulate?”¹⁶ The replicant affirms a new form of temporality, that of schizophrenic vertigo. This is the temporality of postmodernism's new age of the machine. The industrial machine was one of production, the postindustrial machine, one of reproduction. A major shift occurs: the alienation of the subject is replaced by the fragmentation of the subject, its dispersal in representation. The “integrity” of the subject is more deeply put into question. Baudrillard describes the postindustrial age thus: “We are now in a new form of schizophrenia. No more hysteria, no more projective paranoia, but this state of terror proper to the schizophrenic. . . . The schizophrenic can no longer produce the limits of its own being. . . . He is only a pure screen.”¹⁷ A replicant.

Blade Runner presents a manifestation of the schizophrenic condition—in

16. Baudrillard, p. 152.

17. Jean Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” trans. John Johnston, in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, p. 132.

the sense that Lacan gives this term. For Lacan, temporality, past, present, future, memory are of a linguistic order: that is to say, the experience of temporality and its representation are an effect of language. It is the very structure of language that allows us to know temporality as we do and to represent it as a linear development from past to present and future. The experience of historical continuity is therefore dependent upon language acquisition, upon access to the realm of speech. It is dependent upon the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father, paternal authority conceived as a linguistic function.

Schizophrenia, on the other hand, results from a failure to enter the Symbolic order; it is thus essentially a breakdown of language, which contributes to a breakdown of the temporal order. The schizophrenic condition is characterized by the inability to experience the persistence of the "I" over time. There is neither past nor future at the two poles of that which thus becomes a perpetual present. Jameson writes, "The schizophrenic does not have our experience of temporal continuity but is condemned to live a perpetual present with which the various moments of his or her past have little connection and for which there is no conceivable future on the horizon."¹⁸ Replicants are condemned to a life composed only of a present tense; they have neither past nor memory. There is for them no conceivable future. They are denied a personal identity, since they cannot name their "I" as an existence over time. Yet this life, lived only in the present, is for the replicants an extremely intense experience, since it is not perceived as part of a larger set of experiences. Replicants represent themselves as a candle that burns faster but brighter and claim to have seen more things with their eyes in that limited time than anybody else would even be able to imagine. This kind of relationship to the present is typical of schizophrenia. Jameson notes, in fact, that "as temporal continuity breaks down, the experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid and 'material.' The world comes before the schizophrenic with heightened intensity."¹⁹

The schizophrenic temporality of the replicants is a resistance to enter the social order, to function according to its modes.²⁰ As outsiders to the order of language, replicants have to be eliminated. Theirs is a dangerous malfunction, calling for a normalization, an affirmation of the order of language and law. Their killing constitutes a state murder. It is called "retirement," a word which connotes exclusion from the productive and active social order.

If the replicants are to survive, the signifiers of their existence have to be put in order. Some semblance of a symbolic dimension has to be put together to release them from the trap of the present. Their assurance of a future relies on the possibility of acquiring a past. In their attempt at establishing a temporally

18. Jameson, "Consumer Society," p. 119.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

20. Jameson states that "schizophrenia emerges from the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language" (*ibid.*, p. 118).

persistent identity, the replicants search for their origins. They want to know who “conceived” them, and they investigate their identity and the link to their makers. The itinerary is that of an Oedipal journey. To survive for a time, the android has to accept the fact of sexual difference, the sexual identity which the entry into language requires.

Of all the replicants, only one, Rachel, succeeds in making the journey. She assumes a sexual identity, becomes a woman, and loves a man: Deckard, the blade runner. Rachel accepts the paternal figure and follows the path to a “normal,” adult, female, sexuality: she identifies her sex by first acknowledging the power of the other, the father, a man. But the leader of the replicants, Roy Batty, refuses the symbolic castration which is necessary to enter the symbolic order; he refuses, that is, to be smaller, less powerful than the father. Roy commits the Oedipal crime. He kills his father; and the Oedipal topos of blindness recurs, reversed. Roy thus seals his (lack of) destiny, denying himself resolution and salvation.

In this tension between pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, Imaginary and Symbolic, the figure of the mother becomes a breaking point in the text. Replicants can be unmasked by a psychological test which reveals their emotional responses as dissimilar to those of humans.²¹ *Blade Runner* begins with such a test as it is being administered to Leon, a replicant who is trying to hide his identity. Leon succeeds up to a certain point, but there arises a question which he cannot handle. Asked to name all the good things that come to his mind thinking about his mother, Leon explodes, “My mother, I’ll tell you about my mother,” and kills the inquirer. The mother is necessary to the claiming of a history, to the affirmation of an identity over time. Unmasked by the same test, Rachel goes to her inquirer, Deckard, to convince him, or herself rather, that she is not a replicant. Her argument is a photograph, a photograph of a mother and daughter. “Look, this is me, with my mother.” That photograph represents the trace of an origin and thus a personal identity, the proof of having existed and therefore of having the right to exist.

A theoretical link is established in *Blade Runner* between photography, mother, and history. It is a connection that we also find in Barthes’s writings on photography. In *Camera Lucida*, reflections on photography are centered on the figure of the mother as she relates to the question of history. Photography and the mother are the missing link between past, present, and future. The terms of the configuration photography/mother/history are knotted together in dialectics of totality and division, presence and absence, continuity and discontinuity.

21. A further observation on schizophrenia is made in regard to the test. In the novel from which *Blade Runner* was adapted (Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Eclectic Sheep?*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1982), a moral question arises from the possibility that humans might be “retired” by mistake. It is proved, in fact, that a certain “type” of humans respond to the test the same as do replicants. This type is the schizophrenic. Thus replicants and schizophrenics are “scientifically” proved to be the same.

“The name of Photography’s noeme will therefore be ‘that-has-been,’ or again the Intractable. In Latin, this would doubtless be said: *interfuit*: what I see has been there, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred.”²² As a document of “that-has-been,” photography constitutes a document of history, of its deferred existence. A history conceived as hysterical is established only in an act of exclusion, in a look that separates subject and object. History is that time when my mother was alive before me. It is the trace of the dream of unity, of its impossibility. The all-nourishing mother is there, yet as that which has been given up. The Imaginary exists as a loss.

Photographs are documents of existence in a history to be transformed into memories, monuments of the past. Such is the very challenge of history, as Michel Foucault has pointed out. “History is that which transforms documents into monuments.”²³ The document is for Foucault a central question of history; for *Blade Runner* it is the essential element for the establishment of a temporality, of perceiving past and future. Foucault defines history as “one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked.”²⁴ Photographs can be such documentation for the replicants. Not only does Rachel exhibit her document-photograph of that past moment with her mother, but she is fascinated by photographs generally. In a second visit to Deckard, she produces her memories in response to his photographs. She attempts to look like the woman in his old photograph, and plays the piano to recapture a memory, an atmosphere. Leon’s precious kept pictures serve no apparent purpose other than the documentation of the replicant’s existence in history. Deckard understands this motivation when he finds the photos. “I don’t know why replicants would collect photos. Maybe they were like Rachel, they needed memories.”

The desire of photography in *Blade Runner* is essentially a phenomenological seduction: “In photography I can never deny that ‘the thing has been there.’ There is a superimposition here of reality and of the past.”²⁵ Photography is perceived as the medium in which the signifier and the referent are collapsed onto each other. Photographs assert the referent, its reality, in that they assert its existence at that (past) moment when the person, the thing, was there in front of the camera. If a replicant is in a photograph, he or she is thus real.

The function of photography in film’s temporal construction is further grasped in Barthes’s observation that “the photograph’s immobility is the result of perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live. By attesting

22. Barthes, p. 77.

23. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York, Pantheon, 1982, p. 7.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Barthes, p. 76.

that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive. . . . Photography, moreover, began historically as an art of the Person: of civil status, of what we might call, in all senses of the term, the body's formality."²⁶ Replicants rely on photography for its perverse confusion, as it induces the surreptitious belief and hope of being alive.

Investigating the other side of the body's formality and the civil status of the replicants, blade runners also make use of photography. Once Deckard finds the photographs/documents in Leon's apartment, he proceeds by questioning them. History as a process of investigation is involved in a questioning of the document. "History now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations."²⁷ Foucault's description of the historical process exactly describes the way in which Deckard interrogates the documents/photographs producing history. Deckard puts a photograph in a video machine to analyze it. The photograph is decomposed and restructured visually through the creation of new relations, shifting the direction of the gaze, zooming in and out, selecting and rearranging elements, creating close-ups of what is relevant. The dissected and reorganized signifiers of photography result in a narrative. At work is the same process of investigation and detection that we find in *Blow-up*: the serialization of the still image, the photograph, produces a new meaning, a story, a filmic text. The revelation of the secret is an effect of the sequentialization, and thus narrativization, of the still image. This is how and why the murder is discovered in *Blow-up* and the replicant Zhora is discovered in *Blade Runner*. Searching the document/photograph, Deckard unveils the investigative and narrative process of history. *Blow-up* stops at the level of the signifier of photography; *Blade Runner* wants to believe in its referent: Zhora has-been-there; therefore she is (to be captured) real and alive. Not far off is Barthes's comment, "I went to the photographer's show as to a police investigation."²⁸

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Blade Runner posits questions of identity, identification, and history in postmodernism. The text's insistence on photography, on the eye, is suggestive of the problematics of the "I" over time. Photography, "the impossible science of the unique being," is the suppressed trace of history, the lost dream of continuity. Photography is memory. The status of memory has changed. In a postmodern age, memories are no longer Proustian madeleines, but photographs. The past has become a collection of photographic, filmic, or televisual images. We,

26. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

27. Foucault, p. 6.

28. Barthes, p. 85.

like the replicants, are put in the position of reclaiming a history by means of its reproduction. Photography is thus assigned the grand task of reasserting the referent, of reappropriating the Real and historical continuity. The historical referent is displaced by a photographic referent. In a world of fragmented temporality the research of history finds its image, its photographic simulacrum, while history itself remains out of reach. Schizophrenia and the logic of the simulacrum have had an effect on historical time. The meaning of history is changed, and changed too is the representation in which history, forever unattainable, merely exists.²⁹

The loss of history enacts a desire for historicity, an (impossible) return to it. Postmodernism, particularly in art and architecture, proclaims such a return to history as one of its goals. It is, however, the instantiation of a new form of historicity. It is an eclectic one, a historical pastiche. Pastiche is ultimately a redemption of history, which implies the transformation and reinterpretation in tension between loss and desire. It retraces history, deconstructing its order, uniqueness, specificity, and diachrony. Again, as with the photographic reconstitution, with the logic of pastiche, a simulacrum of history is established.

A tension is expressed in *Blade Runner* between the radical loss of *durée* and the attempt of reappropriation. This very tension, which seeks in the photographic signifier the fiction of history and which rewrites history by means of architectural pastiched recycling, underlies as well the psychoanalytic itinerary. An itinerary suspended between schizophrenia, a fragmented temporality, and the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father, standing for temporal continuity and access to the order of signifiers.

29. The debate on questions of memory and history in postmodernism is well represented in the special issue on "Modernity and Post-Modernity" of *New German Critique*, no. 33 (Fall 1984).

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Giuliana Bruno

October, Vol. 41. (Summer, 1987), pp. 61-74.

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[Footnotes]

¹⁵ **Plato and the Simulacrum**

Gilles Deleuze; Rosalind Krauss

October, Vol. 27. (Winter, 1983), pp. 45-56.

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