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A comparative study of *BR* and *BR 2049* from Zizekian subjectivity

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Abstract: This article analyses and compares the classical science fiction film *Blade Runner* and its recent sequel *Blade Runner 2049* from the perspective of Zizek's subjectivity theory. Through Zizek's tracing and weaving the concept of subjectivity from Descartes' radical doubt to metaphysical subject and then death drive in Lacanian psychoanalysis, it will argue that the principle concern of this film is the issue of subjectivity, and while carefully scrutinizing replicants in the films with the multi-faceted conception of Zizekian subject, a detailed comparison between these two films could be accomplished. Subsequently, by analyzing from the genre, namely noir and cyberpunk, it will point out the world delineated in both film is a claustrophobic and paranoid one, as well as a postmodern multicultural world. The denizens of this world lead a machine-like and unreflecting life due to the decline of the Big Other. Finally, by associating subjectivity with death drive, the ultimate significance of subjectivity is revealed as a weapon to antagonize the repressing symbolic order and redeem our world from an apocalyptic future presaged in the films.

“Anything real should be a mess”.

-- Dr. Ana Stelline

“Always jumping that one. Never a thought what to do if it made land”.

-- Niander Wallace

“All those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain. Time to die”.

-- Roy

1. Tracing Subjectivity in *BR* and *BR 2049*

1.1 Subjectivity in *BR* and *BR 2049*

Before applying Zizek's theory to the interpretation of the two films, the relevance of the issue of subjectivity has to be ensured.

1.1.1 Subjectivity as Cartesian Doubt or Doubt about Self-identity

There are many obvious allusions with Descartes' Cogito in *BR*. The protagonist's name, "Rick Deckard" is an obvious wordplay on "René Descartes". There is also a teasing line in the "breakfast for three" scene: when Roy indignantly declines Sebastian's requests to see some of their extraordinary abilities, Pris stands up and unexpectedly blurts out Descartes' maxim: "I think, Sebastian, therefore I am". So the association of *BR* to self-consciousness could be fairly ensured.

In fact, in the original Dick's novel *DADES*, the state of radical doubt is central to the work since the protagonist is more and more trapped in his ontological crisis. Consistent with the novel, the essential Cartesian doubt could also be seen in many scenes in *BR*. For example, in "Rachael and Tyrell" scene, after Deckard has finished the V-K test on Rachael, Dr. Tyrell confirms Rachael's replicant-status: "She's beginning to suspect, I think". Deckard immediately addresses Dr. Tyrell an intriguing question: "Suspect! How can it not know what it is?" Deckard's question comes out so fast that he seems overreacts. The only convincing explanation is that either Deckard has already brewed this question for too long or he is preempting a defense against his own inflicting skepticism. So it is probable that both Deckard and Rachael have been bothered by the gnawing doubt whether I am a truly human being or just a replicant. It is this very unresolved ubiquitous suspicion

that makes both of them perfect Cartesian subjects embodying "I doubt, therefore I am".

Other evidence indicating the doubt about self-consciousness or self-identity in *BR* could be found in the romantic "Rachael lets down her hair" scene. After Rachael rescues Deckard by shooting Leon dead, Rachael follows Deckard back to his apartment. While Deckard finishes tending his wounds and falls asleep on the sofa, she glances through Deckard's antique photos and begins to play the piano. Then Deckard wakes up and joins her closely by the piano.

Deckard: I dreamt music.

Rachael: I don't know if I could play. I remember lessons. I don't know if it's me or Tyrell's niece.

Deckard: You play beautifully. (BR)

After the V-K test, Rachael's human identity has already been subverted. Even a trivial thing like piano playing makes her suspect who is actually doing it. That is why she dodges Deckard's kiss while she seems clearly enjoying his intimate cuddle. The fraught with uncertainty about her own agency renders her *mise-en-abyme*. She must be perplexed by the thought whether it is Tyrell's niece or herself who wants to return Deckard's kiss.

Entangled in her mire of bafflement, Rachael decides to leave. Then a very idiosyncratically romantic scene happens in *BR*. Before she could rush out of the apartment door, Deckard in a machismo blocks the doorway and slams the door determinedly. He then grabs her by the shoulders and violently thrusts her against the walls. Proceeding to approach slowly his prey, he finally kisses the vulnerable Rachael.

Deckard: Say, "Kiss me".

Rachael: Kiss me.

Deckard: I want you.

Rachael: I want you.

Deckard: again.

Rachael: I want you.

Rachael: Put your hands on me. (BR)

The conversation between them seems entirely masochistic. Some scholar even thinks this scene has "a disturbing rape-like quality" (Coplan 40). However, in light of subjectivity, this disquieting scene can obtain a reasonable explanation. It is only by Deckard's violent gesture that Rachael's soul could be jolted into realization. The instruction Deckard gives to Rachael is nothing but

to help evocate and retrieve Rachael's genuine self. After this process, Rachael at last is able to speak for herself "Put your hands on me". No longer a ventriloquist for Tyrell's niece, she then consummates her romantic love with Deckard.

In *BR 2049*, most of the overt Cartesian allusions and covert associations with the doubt of self-identity are unfortunately deprived. The eternal doubt over whether I am truly human or just an android is to a large extent irrelevant because most of the ensemble are replicants knowing directly they are machines: from the protein farmer Sapper Morton who is "retired" in the opening sequence, Mr. Wallace's lethal and sadistic enforcer Luv, to the protagonist K as a more sophisticated model. The discrimination against K for being a "Skin-job" appears several times in the film and he seems accept it composedly. Moreover, when K's superior Joshi tries to provoke him by asking K to share his memory: "Do you remember anything? Before you were under me, you have any memories from before?" K replies: "I have memories. But they are not real. They are just implants ... I feel a little strange sharing a childhood stories, considering I was never a child". K's suspicion about his own identity only lasts a short interval, from his discovery the mysterious serial number "61021" inscribed on the sapless tree to his meeting with the best memory-maker Dr. Ana Stelline. Without many suspensions for viewers to dwell on, the mystic and intriguing aura in the previous film is fatally lost in *BR 2049*. No wonder many people feel it rather languid and tedious in this almost three-hour ponderous sequel.

1.1.2 Subjectivity as Doubt about the Truth of Reality

Since the doubt of self-identity is closely related to the subject's doubt about the truth of reality, it could be argued that both films still deal heavily with the topos of subjectivity. In his innovative argument of *BR* as a "modernist experience of the city", Bukatman points out that cinema as modern art as well as some type of science fiction has the capabilities to accustom the viewer's mind from "established absolute to unstable conditions" (10). A salient fact of *BR* is the constant appearances of eye symbol emphasizing the theme of vision: from the mise-en-scene at Eye Works, the wide-open disembodied eye staring and reflecting the infernal city in the opening scene, the flashing red eyes of the artificial owl in Tyrell Corp., to the ridiculously thick trifocal glasses Dr. Tyrell wears, etc.. According to Bukatman's: "[v]ision somehow both makes

and unmakes the self in the film, creating a dynamic between a centred and autonomous subjectivity (eye/I) and the self as a manufactured, commodified object (eye works)" (16). This commodified object obviously means the artificial eyes designed by the old and wizened Asian technician Chew. If even the eyes of the replicants are designed and manufactured by the human others, how can they know the world around them and further their selves are real? Like Roy Batty ironically and bitterly answers Chew's question:

Chew: "You Nexus, hah? I designed your eyes."

Roy: "Well, if only you could see what I've seen with your eyes." (*BR*)

In terms of cinematography in *BR*, the slippery or unreliable status of visual perception also makes subjectivity a central issue. When the personages in the film enter a strange environment, the camera often takes a subjective, first-person point of view. For example, when Deckard enters into the Sebastian's apartment, camera movement renders the decaying building seemingly haunted by some unseen threats. The more this visually complex film shows to meet the scopical pleasure, the more uncertain it grows. When Deckard scrutinizes Rachael's photo which in fact belongs to Tyrell's niece and her mother, the photo seems to flicker to life for one second, giving an unreal or imaginary sense. Also *BR*'s cyberpunk urbanism punctuates the presence of mass media, evoking a sense of unreality. Its world is a Baudrillardian one which abounds with simulations: animals artificially made, replicant designed after man, false memory, ubiquitous media spectacle. This shattering distinction between real and false also enhances the feeling of delirium and confusion. Thus visual perception could not guarantee truth.

BR 2049 also has many indications of sensory confusion between real and fantasy. But the two most notable examples deal with the doubt about the truth of reality, thus making the movie more thematically focused and consistent. Still retaining the eye symbols such as the unfolding green eye in the opening scene and the dissected eye from the farmer with a serial number NX8 237.8, *BR 2049* elevates its concern from visual uncertainty toward ontological and cognitive suspicion of the realness of the world. Instead of exhibiting the artificiality of bodily parts like eyes, the film directly presents the fabrication of memory this time. When K meets Dr. Stelline in her laboratory, she conjures a vivid birthday party scene attending by several kids from a handheld dreamweaver. By rotating, pausing and back-playing, she tinges the color of the cake and adjusts other minor details. And she also reveals the motive of memory construction: "Wallace needs my talent to maintain a stable

product. ... I can't help your future but I can give you good memories to think back on and smile". Because memory is the retention of past information for the purpose of influencing future actions, it is a vital part of human experience or personal identity. If my memories can be engineered and implanted from outside, how can I be sure my personal memories belongs to me? To step further, how can I ensure the realness of the world if I do not even assure my own identity? That is also why K comes to Dr. Stelline in the first place. Convinced by her words "Someone lived this, yes. This happened", K murmurs the line twice "I know it's real".

Another pivotal example concerning the issue of the realness of reality in *BR 2049* happens when Deckard is led to Niander Wallace as a prisoner later in the film. Wallace queries whether Deckard's consummation with Rachael is designed by Tyrell Corp. as a breeding program, or their union is genuine love:

"Did it ever occur to you that's why you were summoned in the first place? Designed to do nothing short of fall for her right then and there. All to make that single perfect specimen. That is, if you were designed, love or mathematical precision? Yes? No?" (*BR 2049*)

Emotionally disturbed, he still manages an answer: "I know what's real". Wallace then offers a "very, very good thing", an identical Rachael made again, as the exchange for the divulging of the location of Deckard's allies. After struggling for a while, Deckard resolutely rejects the temptation with a scorn toward Wallace: "Her eyes were green". So Sims' opinion has a point that the central philosophical question is "not whether K is a replicant, but whether any of us is 'real', whatever labels we may be assigned" (The Atlantic Oct 12).

1.2 A Zizekian definition of Subjectivity

Having established the leitmotif of both movies, it is time to give out the Zizekian conception of subjectivity. The normal definition of subjectivity usually refers to the Cartesian subject qua pure, substanceless "I think". Through the absolute certainty of "I think" in Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, the doubt about one's certainty of "reality" can be dispelled by his incontestable knowledge of existence as a thinking being. But this *cogito* is still just one among many representations in an intricate totality, part of reality and not yet correlative to the whole of reality, i.e., as the point external to reality, exempted from it. Descartes is the first to introduce a crack in the ontologically consistent

universe, but he quickly patches up the wound he cut into the texture of reality (TN 12).

Then, contrary to Descartes' *cogito*, Žižek introduces Kant's "I" of transcendental apperception which renders manifest the "out of joint" state of the subject. According to Kant, Descartes makes a mistake by jumping directly from the empty "I think" accompanying every representation of an object, to the positive phenomenal entity *res cogitans* which thinks and is transparent to itself in its capacity to think. In other words, self-consciousness renders self-present and self-transparent the "thing" in me which think (TN 13). In fact, there is a topological discord between the form "I think" and the substance which thinks, or a gap between the empirical I's self-experience and the I of transcendental apperception. The latter is a necessary and simultaneously impossible logical construction (Lacan's Real). The act of "I think" is trans-phenomenal and not an object of inner experience or intuition. So it is not a noumenal Thing but rather the void of its lack. Besides the thoughts which are its predicates, no conception can be given to the I of pure apperception. The lack of intuited content is constitutive of the I; the inaccessibility to the I of its own "kernel of being" makes it an I (TN 14). This is Kant's inherent paradoxes of self-consciousness.

So in Kant's paradox of synthetic unity of apperception: the empty form of thought coincides with being, which is devoid of all determinations-of-thought. But this coincidence in self-consciousness does not guarantee access to myself qua thinking substance: "Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = X" (TN 15). The fundamental feature of the I of pure apperception is that its representation is empty, devoid of any intuitional content. I am conscious of myself only insofar as I cannot access myself qua the real kernel of my being. This inaccessibility of the "Thing which thinks" renders the impossibility of locating subject in the "great chain of being" or the Whole of universe. Subject is in the most radical sense "out of joint" and it constitutively lacks its own place. That is why Lacan designates it by the mathem \$, the "barred" S.

Then Žižek advances towards Hegel's radicalization of the Kantian split between the discursive intellect (the level of the Notion) and intuition. Instead of the platitude that Hegel's "absolute idealism" overcomes Kant's formalism, Žižek asserts that Hegel is the most consequential of Kantians. And he also

gives out the definition of Hegelian subject: "... as absolute, self-relating negativity". This definition could be interpreted from Hegel's assertion that the Absolute has to be conceived also as subject, not only as substance¹ (TN 21). When subject is mediating the object (substance becomes subject), the subjectivization of the object is never complete and there is always a remainder of the substance eluding the grasp of the subject's mediation. This remainder (Lacan's *objet a*) is *stricto sensu* correlative to the very being of the subject. Meanwhile, in the process of the "subjectivization" of substance, its compact In-itself is dissolved into the multitude of its particular predicates-determinations, of its "beings-for-other". And "subject" is that very X, the empty form of a "container" which remains after all its content has been "subjectivized". Thus the subject is that very "nothing", the purely formal void which is left over. In this sense, "subject" and "object" are two left-over of the same process, or a parallax shift of perspective between modality of form (subject) and modality of content (object).

Therefore, Žižek's subjectivity is embodied in the Hegelian subject as absolute, self-relating negativity. Since the Hegelian subject is that very X, the empty form of "container", subject is in this sense nostalgic or subject of loss. Žižek gives an even more accurate definition of subject in the preface of the new edition of his popular work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: the subject is "the abrogated / cleansed substance, a substance reduced to the void of the empty form of self-relating negativity, emptied of all the wealth of 'personality'" (xiii). Or, it is "a totally 'desubstantialized' substance whose entire consistency lies in the refusal of its predicates" (FTKWTD 37). Therefore, the dimension of subjectivity lies in the fact that there is an irreducible lack forever preventing Substance achieving its full identity. Subject emerges as \$ qua empty point of self-relating by identifying himself to the void of absolute negativity.

1.3 The Paradox of Self-Consciousness

In the "Rachael and Tyrell" scene of *BR*, Deckard's astonishing line "How can it not know what it is?" constitutes him and Rachael pure subjects. The unawareness of Deckard as well as Rachael's status as a replicant exemplifies perfectly Kant's ingenious insight about the paradox of the self-consciousness.

¹ This definition of Hegelian subject could also be interpreted from Hegel's two levels of the notion of reflection. See *SOI* 258.

It is this ignorance of one's own status that enables one to live like a normal person. That is why when Dr. Tyrell suggests Deckard to V-K test on Rachael, there is a fast flash of confident smirk in her face. There are many places in the film indicating that Deckard does not know himself as a replicant. When Rachael confronts Deckard in the "Rachael lets down her hair" scene: "You know, that Voight-Kampff test of yours, did you ever take that test yourself ?" The camera's brief survey of his personal memories (old childhood pictures on the piano), the famous unicorn reverie scene which is a 12-second shot of a unicorn galloping through woods and Gaff's tell-tale origami are arguably all allusions to the spectators that Deckard's memories might also be fabricated implants.

This paradox illustrates the "nonsubstantial status of the subject": "with regard to every substantial, positive content of my being, I'm nothing but a replicant, i.e., the difference which makes me 'human' and not a replicant is to be discerned nowhere in 'reality'" (TN 40). The place of my self-consciousness could only be the void that remains. It is an empty distance towards every positive content since everything I actually am is an artifact whether it is my body, my eyes, or my most intimate memories and fantasies. Therefore, Deckard's unawareness his android identity could be an inverse mirror image reflecting our own "replicant" status in real life. People in contemporary society do not realize that their selves are constructions or misconceptions. Their selves are radically decentred and programmed by the Others. The experience as free human agents is an illusion based on the ignorance of the causal links which regulate people's lives. It is only when they acknowledge their manufactured robot-status that they become truly subjects and reach their "thing that thinks". The statement "I am a replicant" is the purest one made by the subject. This reading, although superficial, does add an uncanny flavor to the film.

In *BR 2049*, the losing of the dimension of the eternal doubt over whether I am truly human or just an android no doubt impairs the attraction of the film. But it does acquire some narrative compensation by adding some dramatic twist to the protagonist's road toward agency when uncovering his own identity. During his visit to Dr. Stelline's laboratory, she verifies the genuineness of K's memory in tears: "Someone lived this, yes. This happened". He then starts to shake involuntarily. After murmuring "I know it's real" twice to himself, he fiercely burst into curse "God damn it" for he knows that he will probably be hunted for the rest of his life by other Blade Runners. It is only here that he

engenders the illusion that he could be the special child of the Deckard and Rachael, thus not a replicant but a born "human". However, his misrecognition of his own status lasts only a brief period until his artificiality will be soon informed by the female replicant leader Freysa. Correspondingly, the whole aforementioned reflected signification of *BR* on the real world is lost. After watching the movie, it is probably natural for people to wonder what its revelation to the real world.

1.4 The Nostalgic Subject or Subject of Loss

In terms of subject as subject of loss or subject of nostalgia, it can be safely argued that replicants in *BR* are quintessential Hegelian subjects epitomizing the void left over or the "receptacle" emptied all of its content. Because replicants are manufactured artifacts, no substantial evidence in reality could distinguish a replicant from a human being whether it is the eyes, the body, the photos or even personal memories. It is only by "losing the humanity" that replicants directly embody an empty point of negativity or a void. This empty point of negativity is not "nothing" but the opposite of everything, or the negation of all determinacy. So subject emerges exactly when the individual loses its support in the symbolic tradition. With Vangelis' tonal non-diegetic music, a poignant nostalgia and melancholia pervades through the film. Both Leon and Rachael cherish their precious photos as the prosthetic memorabilia which could provide emotional attachment and comfort. Deckard's black-and-white childhood photos on the piano transmit an even more reminiscence of the past. When Deckard brutally reaches the verdict that Rachael is an android, she is so devastated by the great grief of losing her identity that she begins to snivel.

Therefore, the Zizek suggests that *BR* could be read as the replicants' process of subjectivization (*TN* 41). Even if the replicants' most intimate memories are fake implants, they still subjectivize themselves by organizing extraneous memories into a consistent and meaningful narration in order to embed themselves in the symbolic order. Back to our real world, the famous Lacanian dictum "Truth has the structure of a fiction" has already concluded that our "human" memories are also borrowed from the treasury of the big Other. Prior to our speaking, we are spoken by the discourse of the Other. People speak but only as the ventriloquist of the Other who speaks through them. Like the replicants, each of us subjectivizes the invented memories in a

unique way and integrates them into our symbolic universe. In this respect, the foregoing analogy between the replicants and contemporary people is even more obvious.

The protagonist K in *BR 2049* also subjectivizes his childhood memory into an individual narrative so that he could imagine, although very briefly, that he is the special child whom he is looking for. When the replicants leader Freysa and her army retrieve the seriously wounded K to their haven, she accidentally exposes that the child born to Deckard and Rachael is a “she” not a boy. K’s initial response is of course denial: “It was a boy that you hid”. Freysa then explains that the boy is “just a piece of puzzle”. Overwhelmed by the sudden information, he falls back sitting on his bed. Although it is too dark for the film viewer to observe his countenance, Freysa begins to console him: “You imagined it was you? Oh, you did. You did. We all wish it was us. That’s why we believe”. So *BR 2049* excels its progenitor in that it accentuates K’s subsequent agonizing experience of loss and hence his conversion. Later, when the gigantic nude hologram Joi accosts him in one of the film’s bravura moments: “Hello, Handsome! ... You look lonely! ... You look like a good Joe.” He must realize that he is indeed irrevocably severed all the symbolic support now. With the voiceover of Freysa’s words “Dying for the right cause is the most human thing we can do” reverberating in his mind, he is interpellated as a pure subject embodying the void whose mission is nothing but to Act.

Furthermore, *BR 2049* also has an advantage in its emphasis of the emergence of class consciousness. In addition to being engineered slaves in Off-world, even replicants’ intimate memories are fabrications. So they are a new kind of proletarian embodying literally the void of pure substanceless subjectivity. This is manifested in Freysa’s political propaganda: “I knew that baby meant we are more than just slaves. If a baby can come from one of us, we are our own masters ... And we are building an army. I want to free our people. If you want to be free, join us”. No wonder when K is briefing his human superior Joshi after Rachael’s bones are plundered, she seems really edgy and unsatisfied with his search results. Joshi knows that once the shocking news that replicants have the potential for procreation is leaked out, its result could be a disastrous uprising against humans: “... Am I the only one that can see the fucking sunrise here? This breaks the world, K.” It is extremely urgent to stop the bomb from going off.

2. The Significance Of Subjectivity

2.1 The Claustrophobic and Paranoid Post-Industrial World

Faithful to futuristic decadence in the original novel *DADES*, both films represent a world of claustrophobia, technophobia and paranoia in a post-industrial wasteland where the pervading capital reins.

In the opening scene of *BR*, the aerial view of the camera exhibits a panoramic shot of the future L.A. in 2019, also nicknamed as the "Hades landscape" or "Ridley's Inferno" by the film crew (Sammon 231). In the film diegesis, a horrendous landscape appears devoured by an extremely dark night. On the building tops, chimneys like petrochemical cracking towers belch volcanic fireballs high into air. Yet the evanescent bursting flame could not disperse the pervasive claustrophobic darkness and illuminate the hopeless world below. The glimpsed lower strata world of shadow, dilapidation and woe contrasts sharply with the magnificently thrusting Mayan building (headquarters of Tyrell Corp.), which could be an ominous symbol of mass human sacrifice and affliction. This opening scene presages a bleak, dystopian world which is governed by high-tech mega corporations. Cruz even connects the world in *BR* with Dante's *Inferno*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and William Blake's poetry (48-75). Compared to the black-skied Hades cityscape, the spectacular opening vista in *BR 2049* presents, in mist-pale daylight, a colossal solar panel infrastructure deployed endlessly on California's desolate territory, foreshadowing a similar futuristic dystopia where natural energy has been completely depleted.

As a consistent extension of the previous novel, the city in *BR 2049* is also presented as a desolated and polluted one similar in *BR*. Ecosystem has completely collapsed and resident "has never seen a tree before". The rain-drenched scenes indicate that the contaminated world caused by nuclear radiation is exacerbating. However, there is some difference this time as Taylor points out that "Villeneuve has successfully enlarged the Blade Runner canvas" (The Globe And Mail 2017). Instead of confined in a dark and polluted city, *BR 2049* goes to new places. When K and Joi are going to leaving the Greater Los Angeles to investigate the orphanage, it depicts a spectacular view of an immense dam wall protecting the brilliantly lit megapolis from rising seas. When they enter the San Diego District which is Los Angeles municipal waster processing area, two immense flying garbage airships are dumping trash into mountains. The eerie Central Valley is an even more monochromatic and de-vegetated peril, lying abandoned as a radioactive

wasteland.

Inheriting the features of genre noir, *BR*'s dark atmospheric background is depressingly claustrophobic. *BR* is not only dark in a literal sense but also dark in a metaphorical way. The film adopts many traditional cinematographic methods to delineate this ominous world as Coplan summarizes concisely the visual style of *BR* (122). To elaborate: the chiaroscuro use of high-contrast lighting, causing figures being cast in semi-darkness or silhouette; the addition of smoke in the background causing a harsh and hazy effect; the shafts or ribbons of light produced by fractured lighting creating a sense of entrapment and paranoia as in Deckard's apartment; there are also many scenes not only occur but are shot at night; the frequently used wide-angle lenses to produce deep-focus shots; the practice of location shooting instead of studio shooting; viewer's sight of certain character in one shot is often masked by other objects in the frame or dark shadows; the mise-en-scene is often chaotic and visually highlighted; the solely relying on neon light in street scenes; and also the lots of extreme low or extreme high angle shots, achieving an effect of powerful organization or dwarfed people by monolithic building, etc. It is hard to breathe in this doomed world awash in grays and black. Most of those formal styles help portraying an ominous urban world still remain in *BR 2049* although there are critics considering its striking compositions "forgo the noir-ish elements" of its predecessor (Grierson 2017). Rottenburg also mentions that director Denis Villeneuve "tried to find an equilibrium with explosions of color that would express some emotions and some themes". Still the gloomy world in *BR 2049* is a legitimate extension of the original one.

BR is also a typical cyberpunk film as a postmodern subgenre which unites high-tech with the low-life street culture to express a distrust of the technological development (Crutz 30). Epitomizing a post-industrial high-tech world, there is in *BR* the futuristic hovercar called "spinner" as an advanced transportation and supervising tool. There is also the Esper which Deckard uses to analyze Leon's photographs which is actually a centralized talking supercomputer whose terminals could be found everywhere, from the inside of a car, out on the sidewalk, to the Blue Room screen where Captain Bryant briefs Deckard on the information of the fugitive replicants. Another rather salient technical novelty is the omnipresent and invasive searchlight emitted from giant Blimp ship cruising slowly above the building and advertising Off-World colonies. The light beams are very powerful and capable of strafing even the innermost recesses of bedrooms and corners. Those intrusive shafts

of light resemble the supervising searchlights monitoring prisoners in a jail. In echoing the giant eye reflecting the Hades cityscape, people's life is constantly supervised and tends to become paranoid. All those future technology gadgets are reserved and updated in *BR 2049*, supplemented by the lifelike holograms and the hovering surveillance drones.

The diegetic worlds in both films are also media saturated, full of advertisements maintaining the smooth operation of a late capitalist world. Jameson's once points out that cyberpunk is "henceforth ... the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (419). In addition to the media screen on the omnipresent Blimp playing the hype of Off-World colonies, the city in *BR* is equipped with gigantic animated billboards: the huge video screen repeatedly displaying a geisha taking a red pill in a smile which could be a commercial of some pharmaceutical elixir; there is also a giant screen displaying a Coca-Cola advertisement in an extreme long shot (It is worth mentioning the slogan: "Enjoy Coca-Cola"); and other gleaming brands like RCA, TDK and Pan-Am on building tops. In *BR 2049*, this neo-cityscape is still there and more contemporary corporate logos are added. People are bombarded with corporation commercials to buy and enjoy all kinds of products. However, the more they consume or enjoy, the more they are enslaved and suffocated because desire could never be satisfied. Both worlds are claustrophobically commodified where everything is impersonal and manufactured corporately.

In a highly commercialized society, even human can objectify as a commodity because of the capital's persistent and inexorable pursuing of profits. As Dr. Tyrell boasts to Deckard after Rachael's V-K test: "Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell. More human than human is our motto." Replicants are designed and manufactured solely for the commercial interests. Since the replicants are in every way similar to a human being, they should be treated equally as human's peers, not as inferior and expendable slaves. The callousness of Dr. Tyrell can be seen in his refusing to see Rachael because in his opinions: "Rachael is an experiment. Nothing more." The implanting of memories into replicants is just for the purpose to "... create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions" and so the company could control them better. Therefore, Roy's ruthless gouging out his bio-mechanic father Dr. Tyrell's eyes is probably a punishment for his father's lack of knowledge or conscience of the replicants' extreme suffering. In *BR 2049*, the avaricious industrialist Niander Wallace's brooding on how to create replicant-workers on a scale sufficient for his

imperial plans is even more grotesque: "Every leap of civilization was built off the back of a disposable workforce ... But I can only make so many ... We need more replicants than can ever be assembled. Millions, so we can be trillions more".

2.2 Dr. Tyrell as the Obscene Father

Descartes only envisages the possibility of a malicious demon manipulating people's mind. It is until Kant's paradox of self-consciousness that the Evil could indeed appear from the unavoidable gap between the I of apperception and the noumenal thinking substance. The evil genius could create the "Thing which thinks" and hence I am only an artifact unable to reach the noumenal thinking Thing. In other words, "man" is entirely under the domination of his maker, utterly unaware of his automaton-status. In *BR*, the evil incarnated is clearly the technical genius Dr. Eldon Tyrell who is the archetypical pre-symbolic obscene father in a post-industrial and late capitalist world. Zizek's describes him as "a long figure of uncanny, ethereal, frail materiality, devoid a sexual partner" (*TN* 40). Instead of a symbolic authority bearing the Name-of-the-Father guaranteeing son's symbolic identity, Dr. Tyrell is an obscene and non-castrated Father-*jouisseur*.

When Dr. Tyrell is first seen in the "Rachael and Tyrell" scene, his appearance is described as "... wearing a severely fitted, two piece, blue sharkskin suit, a pair of trifocal glasses and a white bow tie" (Sammon 126). Although looking like an elegant intellectual, there is always a ridiculous sense about his over-suaved outfit and comportment. Moreover, the writer Hampton Fancher once expresses the dissatisfaction toward the actor playing the role of Tyrell: "Actually, Tyrell was a disappointment to me... I'd originally conceived Tyrell as someone huge, someone who couldn't be resisted or beaten" (Sammon 127). Dr. Tyrell's first entering the scene in *BR* engenders a sinister sense. Out of complete darkness, he suddenly appears as if he were lurking there all the time, interrupting the conversation between Deckard and Rachael. When he appears the second time in the "I want more life" scene, the solitary Tyrell is in his "boudoir", "sitting in his luxurious bed, swathed in a quilted brocade robe and surrounded by tall candles" (Sammon 171). This fragile and feminine father is no longer S1, Master-signifier which guarantees son's symbolic identity and quilts his symbolic place, but the S2, knowledge which

creates the son as an automaton or machine². This also explains the coincidence that an artificial owl always shows up accompanying the twice appearances of the smug-faced Dr. Tyrell because owl has always been a standard symbol for wisdom or knowledge.

The change of father status from S1 to S2 can have disastrous consequence. In Zizek's opinion, "the moment father changes his status from S1 to S2, from empty Master-Signifier to Knowledge, I, the son, becomes a monster" (*TN* 40). The typical example would be Dr. Frankenstein's monster creature who approaches his maker, posing several hysterical questions³: "Why did you screw me up? Why did you create me the way you did, incomplete, crippled?" Similarly, Roy also tosses a series of hysterical questions toward Dr. Tyrell in the bloody "I want more life" scene: "Can the maker repair what he makes? ... I want more life, father. ... Why not? ... What about EMS recombination? ... Then a repressive protein, that blocks the operating cells ...". Rather than resolutely declining all of son's requests like a symbolic father (God as Master-Signifier S1 quilts the society not by showing beatitude or his amiable side but by his dreadful rage), the obscene father Dr. Tyrell suggests: "You're the prodigal son ... Revel in your time" which equals asking Roy to "Enjoy your life". Instead of the authoritative symbolic father forbidding jouissance, the obscene father Dr. Tyrell on the contrary asks Roy to enjoy. In fact, the superego's injunction to enjoy renders people much more impotent and it is even more unbearable because part of enjoyment is lost from the very beginning and hence immanently impossible. When the subject faces this obscene father, or lack in the Other, it is a much more traumatic encounter with the Real. Out of desperation, Roy ruthlessly crushes his perverse father's skull.

However, the feminine father Dr. Tyrell in *BR* is replaced by the megalomaniac and messianic industrialist Niander Wallace as the evil genius incarnated in *BR 2049*. As if being a follow-up of the plot in the prequel, he is directly blind echoing Roy's ruthless gouging out Dr. Tyrell's eyes. But with the aid of the intricate levitating-camera system, he is all-seeing. As a man playing God, his twice appearances in the film gives a much creepy and chilling feeling. Through Wallace's God complex, the film adds a lot of Biblical references.

² The difference between S1 (the unary Master-Signifier) and S2 (the chain of knowledge) can be seen in *FTKWTD*, p235-236.

³ Hysteria is the subject's way of resisting interpellation or symbolic identification, see *FTKWTD*, p101.

Prone to dubious utterances, he mentions “coming to the kingdom of heaven, a child being born, bad and good angel, storm Eden and the patriarch Jacob’s wife’s womb”. If the replicant Roy in *BR* could be interpreted as the Miltonian conception of Lucifer, *BR 2049* without a doubt universalizes these subtle biblical metaphors which make the story about “a child is born, not made” more consistent. Unfortunately Wallace does not possess the feminine and obscene side like Dr. Tyrell, but his father status is still S2 instead of S1. Out of his millions “children”, he only names his malevolent female functionary Luv. So a Zizekian psychoanalytic interpretation, although impaired, still can be applied to the film *BR 2049*.

2.3 Non-existent Big Other

When the machine-like symbolic order is stained with spectral enjoyment, the big Other no longer exists. The symbolic father turns into an obscene one with the consequence of the decline of paternal authority. The nonexistence of the big Other could have much more serious consequences. The big Other always functions as a reliable arbitrator whom we trust unquestionably to decide the life path of our world. Due to the fast technological development which has a profound influence on our life, we are facing increasingly difficult ethical dilemmas in diverse fields, such as cyberspace, medicine and biogenetics, nuclear power and even mundane sexual life. The big Other could provide a universal law to regulate and decide the meaning of our activity. Any usurpation of the authority of the big Other by transposing the responsibility to some specialists is sooner or later discovered to be null and useless. This big Other is Hegel's social Substance: "the 'objective Spirit' as the true Substance of my being which is always-already there as the ground on which individuals thrive, although it is kept alive only through the incessant activity of those individuals" (*TS 334*).

When the big Other no longer exists, modern subjects are no longer quilted into a rational social totality and they no longer identify with direct social status e.g., sex, religion, wealth. The result is a postmodern society where people's identities are not fixed but can drift freely among a multitude of choices. Individual can choose a favorite way of life arbitrarily, without a big Other guaranteeing his consistent Self. Postmodern society dehumanizes people into insensitive beings less human than machines. People float through life without reflection and are incapable of reaching out to others, just like the

“living dead” condemned to vegetate in the Symbolic. The whole society made up of those widely different personalities seems like a pandemonium or pastiche. This conundrum-like postmodern society is repeatedly depicted in both films.

In *BR*, after the intense fight in "The Snake Pit", the stripper replicant Zhora bursts out of the club door and Deckard begins to hunt her. Suddenly Deckard finds him swallowed by the "insane crush of bodies representing street life of the future - soldiers, Asians, hard-core punks, slumming society folk, even a group of Hare Krishnas" (Sammon 156). This gregarious underclass of people from all walks of life scurrying on the crowded street resembles Nietzsche's nihilistic "little people" which Bryant also uses in a dehumanizing way to refer to Deckard's social status. In addition to the whole mise-en-scene of props, steam, neon and sound effects, the whole 300 people are all individually dressed. Each one seems lost in this hodgepodge of cacophonous signs. Although the street is much overcrowded, it is not a collective experience and no one is interacting with another. At the gruesome scene when Deckard shoots down Zhora, they just look on and walk by without lending a hand to other people's suffering. *BR* stages such a disorienting and miserable postmodern world full of bewilderment, fragmentation and emptiness.

Almost all of the characters in *BR* are loners or alienated beings who live marginally in a dark and highly commercialized world. The most obvious example is the misfit J.F. Sebastian who has to remain on the earth due to his Methuselah syndrome. He lives in a totally deserted and decayed building (aka the Bradbury Building) whose front entrance of the building is almost a dumpster full of junk. Inside the building, water leaking and deterioration can be noticed everywhere. Living solely by himself in this much spacious apartment, Sebastian is an emblematic character of postmodern life. His lonely and alienated quotidian existence consists only of routines like going to work and returning home. When he returns his apartment from work, he is greeted by his toys which he makes. The drab and monotonous life Sebastian lives can be seen in his toys' greetings: "Home again, home again, jiggy jig. Good evening J.F.". He pathetically overcomes his loneliness by constructing mechanical toys, like his wordplay: "I make friends". He seems fully engrossed in his world of work and hobby as if he had an unlimited time ahead of him.

Due to the accelerated aging, Sebastian also has a curtailed life span like

other replicants. So *BR*'s great power lies in that it invites reflection on people's own mortality since Sebastian's problem is just a more extreme version of contemporary people. As Gaff's final resonating line suggests: "It's too bad she won't live. But then again who does?" In stark contrast to the replicant Roy's stubborn refusal to accept the inevitable, Sebastian seems intentionally to evade thinking about his own mortality. By calmly accepting that death is going to happen but not right away, he continues to immerse in his psychotic and anxiety-free life like a robot programmed by the big Other. Through Sebastian, *BR* is satirizing the post-industrial society in which the inhabitants ignore the ephemeral nature of life and human experience. Without much leeway in their "being-towards death", they lack an initiative to open up new horizons of an authentic and valuable life. Instead of fulfilling life's potential and salvaging a meaning out of it, they continue to submerge in their fantasy-construction, namely ideology, to evade the unbearable desire of the Other, or lack in the Other.

In *BR 2049*, it is still could be seen as a satire on the pathetic living status of postmodern world. Although there is no longer a Sebastian-like character this time, its indications to the pleasure-seeking status of the citizens are even more obvious. For example, the incorporeal beautiful women pirouetting on the crowded street, the enormous body-objectifying advertising mirage outside the skyscraper as well as the inscrutable erotic colossus in the wreckage of Las Vegas. The citizens are distracted in the pursuit of their pleasures. And there is also a highlight in the film which is the baseline test, aka "post-traumatic baseline test". It replaces the old V-K test, which is an empathy test to distinguish robot from human by measuring involuntary iris dilation or fluctuation of the pupil evoked by emotional reactions. At the beginning of the baseline test, K is asked to recite the baseline: "And blood-black nothingness began to spin. A system of cells interlinked within cells interlinked within cells interlinked within one stem ...". Then he is interrogated fiercely:

"Have you ever been in an institution? Cells; Do they keep you in a cell? Cells; What's it like to hold the hand of someone you love? Interlinked; Do you long for having your heart interlinked? Interlinked; What is like to hold your child in your arms? Interlinked ..."

(*BR 2049*)

At the interval of these personal questions, K is required to repeat the last word, either "Cells" or "Interlinked", attached to the end of each question. He must

respond as quickly as possible with minimal reflection. Any emotional deviance will endanger his android allegiance in following orders. This baseline test compellingly raises the metaphor of the contemporary life experience in an alienated universe.

If there is still some human contact in *BR* when Deckard buy noodles from a vendor, people acquire their food from an automatic vending machine in the sequel. In the ultra-technical world of *BR 2049*, humans are further detached and alienated from each other when people's job is rendered obsolete. The human character Dr. Stelline lives alone behind the glass in a "compromised immune system" which resembles an isolated and insulated cell. When she is visited by K, she seems ecstatic about the contact: "A visitor ... It's just unusual. Nice to meet you ..." At the end of the film, as Deckard finally gets to meet Dr. Stelline, he reaches out his hand toward her symbolizing the much longed-for connection (interlink). Moreover, there is also a sequence better illustrate the ideal solidarity. Just before K goes into the abandoned casino where Deckard hides himself, he detects signs of life around the arm of the huge statue by heat analysis, impossible in a literal orange bathed desert of radioactive ruins. When he goes toward it to investigate, he comes across inexplicably some beehives around which the living bees are buzzing. K reaches out his hand into one of the beehives, which could be interpreted as symbolizing some kind of connection, until his hand is covered entirely by the bees, famous for their collective communal life.

So both films are an explicit and incisive satire on the lives of people in late capitalist world which is characterized by a vicious superego cycle of incessant capital expansion. The collapse of the big Other could lead to the "Oedipus crisis" of the late capitalist society. Oedipus Complex used to function as the elementary form of socialization, integrating subject into the symbolic order. But symbolic order is increasingly smeared by the obscene enjoyment and thus undermined from within. When symbolic efficiency is in retreat, the real is less and less distinguishable from its imaginary simulations. Individual is fully immersed in this world of simulations and strives for egotistical pleasure and profit. Any contingent accident disturbing the individual's mode of pursuing pleasure will make him paranoid. The only gesture to extricate oneself from this miserable mode of ordinary lives in vicious circle is to act, toward establishing a new symbolic order.

2.4 The Significance of Subjectivity

Similar to Hegel's mad "night of the world", subjectivity in psychoanalytic field designates actually a radical form of drive, aka death drive. As the pre-synthetic imagination qua "night of the world" possesses the capability to dismember any organic whole, human subjectivity could also be regarded as a kind of Evil or Crime for disturbing the balance of the harmonious world (TS 25-34). There is a widely accepted aphorism that man is "the wound of nature". Subjects disturb the balanced order not by rational reason but total capricious choosing of something trivial and then pathologically attaching himself to it. To persist in something is precisely to disregard other things. As Žižek points out: "Excess and lack of attachment thus *stricto sensu* coincide, since excessive attachment to a particular contingent object is the very operator of lethal dis-attachment ..." (TS 107). So death drive is not a nihilistic attitude denying any meaning but a concrete form of wanting Nothingness. The thing in which the subject persists is utterly contingent and is a metonymy of void or Nothingness. The goal may be anything, e.g., love, art, religion or politics. When a positive object occupies the void of Nothingness, it is elevated to sublimation and hence subject begins to obsessively pursue it⁴ ⁵. This is the fundamental principle of drive as opposed to natural instincts, which is disclosed by Freud as well as Lacan. By stubbornly attaching to something accidental, the subject could paradoxically disengage himself from the immediate immersion in his reality. So this "stubborn attachment" has the form of Evil but constitutes Act ontologically. This is the quintessence of Žižek's theory of subjectivity.

Therefore, death-drive points precisely towards a dimension of human subjectivity which resists its full immersion into its life-world: it designates a blind persistence which follows its path with utter disregard for the requirements of our concrete life-world. This is the ultimate significance of Žižekian subjectivity. It is the one and only weapon to antagonize the

⁴ In psychoanalysis: the true object-cause of desire is a metonymy of lack, a stand-in for Nothingness. That explains objet petit a, as the object-cause of desire, is the originally or primordially lost and is nothing but a loss positivized.

⁵ When we are after the sublime object, we do not want to obtain it directly. Instead, we keep circulating around the object and keep repeatedly missing the object as the stand-in for the void. It is the process of pursuing *per se* or the way how they reach their goal that brings them satisfaction. Žižek emphasizes this fact that "... this reflexive reversal-into-itself constitutive drive relies on a fundamental, constitutive failure" (TS 304). So the circular drive relies on their repeated failure to realize their wish, or the mysterious X forever eluding their access. This principle of circular and repetitive drive surprisingly coincides with Kant's enigmatic paradox of self-consciousness. The capability of human being to reflect and recognize himself is only possible on the condition that he can never encounter the noumenal Thing which is he himself.

claustrophobic symbolic world. It enables the subject to break out of the constraints of Being, tear apart what belongs together in nature and wipe clean the slate for creative sublimation. This is the true ethical act because it has to shoulder the risk of suspending the big Other who guarantees the subject's identity. The act proper has to erase any reference to the Good ("pleasure principle"), and perform the act just for the sake of it. It is not guided by material, selfish motive and hence resembles the ethical act. This act is different from the internal guerrilla war turning the hegemonic field against itself. It is a much radical and creative reconfiguration of the entire symbolic universe. When the subject goes through the "zero-point" of death drive, he obtains symbolical rebirth, or re-creation *ex nihilo*. This is exactly the famous Lacanian psychoanalytic term "traversing the fantasy". When the subject on one side of Moebius string⁶ persists in his drive until infinity, suddenly he realizes that he is already on the other side of the ring. It is in this way that the domain of a new synchronic symbolic order or symbolic rebirth could emerge which erases the past one.

In *BR*, Roy and his cohorts exhibit their subjectivity qua death drive in their persistent and rebellious attempt to meet Dr. Tyrell, in the same way as Sophocles' Antigone who shows the self-destructive dimension by going to the limit and "doesn't give away on her desire" (Lacan' dictum). Since it is illegal and almost suicidal for them to escape back to the earth, they are supposed to hide and cherish their remaining time. Needless to mention they will be severely punished for committing a horrible crime of slaughtering 23 people during their fleeing. On the contrary they keep trying to sneak into Tyrell Corp. and still would not give up after two of them "got fried running through an electrical field". Even the experienced hunter Deckard is puzzled by their motive: "I don't get it. What do they risk coming back to Earth for? That's unusual. Why...?" The replicants are not fighting for selfish reasons but for their species, like Roy's request: "If we don't find help soon, Pris hasn't got long to live". And the replicants' stubbornly insisting for more life is not even the ultimate goal since their demeaning life in the Off-World colony is miserable and meaningless. Wanting more life is thus a mask of death under whose veil is the primordial ontological void. The replicant's rebellion is nothing but death drive elevated into sublime level, exempted for the normal considerations, feelings, passions and fears.

⁶ Lacan uses this topological concept to explain his "traverse the fantasy". The moebius strip seems have two sides at any one point. But when the whole strip is traversed, it clearly shows that the two sides are in fact continuous. It is only because the two sides are continuous that it is possible to cross over from inside to outside.

In today's late capitalist world, the power of capital is increasingly gathered in the hands of a few individuals or monopolistic companies. The emerging of omnipotent oligarchy or tycoons with disproportionate power, like the Evil Genius Dr. Tyrell or Wallace who will effectually control our life, is no longer a paranoid illusion. The omnipresent system of surveillance with video and image control is already commonplace in the age of social media and smart phones. And impelled by capital's profit-driven operation, new technologies which could fundamentally change people's life pattern keep emerging. Sooner or later all of them will converge into domination and governance of several inexorable mega corporations. Tragically, Dr. Tyrell is incapable of fatherly love and consoling his son. When Roy finally manages to meet him, he is trading stocks on the phone in his bed. The future seems doomed if commerce is the entire concern.

Accordingly, Zizek's theory offers us a tantalizing solution to those gigantic global monopolizing companies. The wound can be healed by the spear which smote it. Zizek believes that since "... ownership becomes, in a way, irrelevant to its functioning, so that it becomes possible simply to cut off this head and to socialize the entire network without greatly disturbing its function" (*TS* 350). The enormous monopolies will not be disturbed and can still maintain their operation even if they lose their top leader. So Roy's patricide is in essence a formal conversion or change of symbolic rule without the huge price of the demolition. But the murder scene in which Roy brutally crushes Dr. Tyrell's head is too repulsive to watch. The collateral damage of Roy's killing spree seems entirely unjustified and unacceptable. *BR 2049* even discards the final confrontation between the protagonist and the arch-villain Wallace. K's heroic Act ceases abruptly when he brutally terminates his nemesis Luv's life in a rather conventional escape sequence in a submerging car. In this sense this paper concludes that both films could also be a fantasy of contemporary people secretly wanting a symbolic change without paying dear for it in their real life.

3. Conclusion

As a brief compendium, this paper first investigates in detail the relevance between the two films and the leitmotif of subjectivity. From all the epistemological and ontological uncertainties in the films, the correlation can be firmly verified. But the ubiquitous besetting doubt about ones' own identity is to a larger extent slashed in *BR 2049* since the replicants directly know their

android status. And this dramatically weakens the enticement and fascination of the film. Then a Zizekian definition of subjectivity is combed through and summarized, from Descartes' Cogito, Kant's paradox of self-consciousness to Hegel's subject of loss. By scrutinizing the characters in both films from the perspective of Zizek's theory, it is revealed that the conception of subjectivity embodied by almost all the replicants in *BR* is solely focused on the protagonist K in *BR 2049*. So a possible allegory of the "replicant" status of people in real world is lost since all the replicants in the sequel know they are manufactured machines. But it does surpass its prequel in emphasizing the conversing moment of K's road toward his agency when he is severed all the symbolic links epitomizing the subject of loss. In addition, the *BR 2049* also makes the issue of the emergence of class consciousness explicit which is concealed in *BR*.

In the second part of this paper, it argues that the world represented in *BR 2049* inherits and expanded the claustrophobic and paranoid post industrial wasteland in *BR*. Although the director of *BR 2049* adds some color to express some emotions, it is mostly still a low lever lightning world typical of genre noir. Consistent with *BR*'s cyberpunk genre, the distrust of ultra-technology and hence a sense of insecurity and alienation is inherited. And both films depict a media saturated and highly commodified late-capitalist world where capital even succeeds in penetrating our private memories and fantasy. While the evil incarnated in *BR* is an obscene father Dr. Eldon Tyrell, the arch-villain in the sequel is the megalomaniac and messianic tycoon Niander Wallace. Although Wallace misses the feminine side of its predecessor, he is still a capitalist father S2 who cannot placate his son. So an impaired Lacanian psychoanalytic interpretation could still be applied to *BR 2049*. The emergence of the obscene father reflects the decline of paternal authority which could lead to a disorienting and miserable postmodern world where people lead a machine-like and unreflecting life. In terms of representing the pathetic postmodern life, both films are on a par with each other. But the sequel misses one critical minutia, concerning the curtailed life span embodied in the quintessential character Sebastian as well as the build-in obsolescence of the replicants. This could cause great detriment to the signification of the film.

Finally, by resorting the Lacanian's death drive, the significance of subjectivity is disclosed. The ultimate significance of subjectivity lies in the establishing a new symbolic order synchronically. In addition of being an incisive satire on the lives of people in contemporary late-capitalist world, both

films also disclose a new dimension to solve the urgent problems by hystericizing the narcissistic subjects fully immersed in their enjoyment-ridden world into action. Considering the final monstrously violent patricide allusive of revolution, it is even more like an impossible fantasy of symbolic change without paying its due, and even that dimension is missing in *BR 2049*. Therefore, it is relegated to a stereotyped mindless Hollywood pop culture spectacle. Although it is widely agreed that the sequel is a dazzling visual extravaganza and its themes are more straightforward, it is still much inferior in finesse and nuance compared to the more kaleidoscopic and subtle prequel. Despite the director Denis Villeneuve “didn't want to create a mere replica — or replicant”, it is still a hardly a match with the groundbreaking original ... (Rottenburg 2017)

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