Dreaming of Electric Femmes Fatales: Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner: Final Cut* (2007) and Images of Women in Film Noir

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Abstract:
Blade Runner is cited amongst many as a classic neo-noir, a science fiction film which applies 1940s films noirs' visual style in order to create a dark and dystopian vision of humanity's future. However, this borrowing from film noir is not only limited to visual style: *Blade Runner*'s representation of women, that is to say female replicants, can be read as a reworking of female roles in film noir. When discussing women in film noir, it seems essential to pose some questions, i.e. where are they situated within the discourse of film noir and in relation to which characteristics are they defined? In answering those questions, different feminist perspectives on two female archetypal roles in film noir, namely the roles of the *femme fatale* and the *redeemer*, will be considered. Femmes fatales signify sexualized, active danger to men, whilst redeemers signify moralized, passive security and domestication. Generally, both roles are defined in terms of their sexuality, regardless of whether they are sexualized or desexualized, as well as their either threatening or non-threatening relation to the men surrounding them. An interpretation of the female roles in *Blade Runner* will clarify how the place assigned to women in film noir accords with the place of women/replicants in *Blade Runner*, that is a place located outside what Lacan terms Symbolic Order. Above that, *Blade Runner*'s orchestration of women is based on defining them through their sexuality and in relation to men: they are subjugated to marginalizing processes of sexual othering. Through a close reading of Rachael, it can be theorized that she transmutes from femme fatale to redeemer throughout the narrative. Similarly, both Zhora and Pris can be read as textbook examples of classic fatal women.

1 Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, first released in 1981, then re-released as a final cut version in 2007, constructs a dystopian future in which private detective Deckard is hired to hunt down fugitive replicants, i.e. a neologism for bioengineered humans. As Katherine Farrimond remarks, contemporary American science fiction films tend to stage female cyborgs "as [both] threatening and sexualised" and thereby revive the femme fatale of film noir: these cyborgs are not only hard, half-technological "deadly seductresses", but their initial female agency is also put under male control throughout the narratives (182). Regarding *Blade Runner: Final Cut*[1], with the exception of Deborah Jermyn's "The Rachel Papers," there is (at least to my knowledge) no in-depth work examining the correlation between female roles in film noir and Scott's film. This absence is surprising given that *Blade Runner* is often cited as a quintessential neo-noir (see, for example, Kellner, Leibowitz, and Ryan). Bearing the aforementioned in mind, I intend to point out how far *Blade Runner*'s

[1] Although I will be talking about the final cut version, I will simply refer to the film as *Blade Runner*.

representation of women can be interpreted as a reference to the representation of women in film noir.

2 When discussing *Blade Runner*'s reference to roles or images of women in film noir, it is necessary to outline the film's general use of visuals and themes prevalent in film noir, regardless of "[w]hether it is a genre, a cycle of films, a tendency, or a movement" (Cowie 121). As the paper's main focus is on gender representations, I will only give a short outline of the typical film noir features that can be identified in *Blade Runner*. In their essay "Blade Runner and Genre", Susan Doll and Greg Faller categorize "*Blade Runner* as a multi-generic film, as a combination of film noir and science fiction" (89). The scholars' approach is rather formalistic, as they valorize visual style, i.e. the specific use of certain cinematic signifiers, against plot (91). Thus, they posit eight stylistic devices or characteristics that constitute film noir: "low-key lightning, claustrophobic framing, shadows and/or reflections, unbalanced compositions, and great depth of field", as well as "urban landscapes, costuming, particularly trench coats, garments with padded shoulders, and spiked heels; and most often rain-soaked environments" (91). However, Doll and Faller also make thematic statements, i.e. that films noirs most often deal with some kind of investigation, involving an investigator, who sometimes is a detective, "a corrupt authority figure," as well as an image of women usually tied to the role of "femme fatales or redeemers" (91). The world or society in film noir is often characterized by hopelessness, desolation, amorality and the instability of old orders.

3 Interestingly, *Blade Runner* accords with most of the features listed above. The overall lighting of the film is expressively dark; according to Doll and Faller the scenes in Bryant's and Tyrell's offices and Deckard's condo serve as good examples of low-key lighting. Furthermore, the use of close-ups and extreme close-ups (of eyes), as in the scene where Leon takes the VK test, exemplifies a style of claustrophobic framing. Yet, overly shiny and blinding "television monitors" have a similarly claustrophobic effect (91). In terms of costuming, "Rachael's tight-fitting dresses with padded shoulders and her 1940s influenced hairdo, Deckard's and Bryant's (and to some extent Gaff's) trenchcoats" seem to be an allusion to the fashion of 40s films noirs (92). Finally, the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* is a rainy and dark megalopolis, as are most of the cities presented in films noirs (ibid.).

4 Stylistically, *Blade Runner* is often cited as the quintessential filmic text of postmodernism, especially due to its genre-mixing as a form of intertextuality (see Bruno). It is this paper's aim to point out in how far *Blade Runner*'s intertextual reference to film noir is not only confined to visual style, but also manifests itself in the (conscious or unconscious) orchestration of remarkably noir-styled women characters.

5 In her introduction to the new edition of *Women in Film Noir*, E. Ann Kaplan notes that "classical Hollywood 'realism'" tends to accord "with the patriarchal status quo that positions women as subordinate in a (Lacanian) male Symbolic Order" (3). Concurrently, in "The Place of Women in Fritz Lang's *The Blue Gardenia*", Kaplan extends the scope of this statement to film noir. Kaplan draws on Laura Mulvey's standpoint that the mythological figure of the Sphinx symbolizes women, for it is situated outside the realm of male culture: it is postulated that the women of film noir "are placed in the position of the Sphinx, mysterious, sinister and challenging to men but assigned a place outside the order of the film" (87). With reference to the above, two essential suggestions can be made: firstly, that the women of film noir are often defined by mystery as well as their challenging/threatening nature and activity, secondly, that most films noirs, however, eventually assign women a subordinate place, meaning that the discourse of these films remains male as opposed to female and does not destabilize, but reaffirm patriarchy. This is in accordance with Mulvey's discussion of women in mainstream film. In her analysis, men are active, controlling the gaze, taking pleasure in looking at and fetishizing women (fetishistic scopophilia), whilst women remain passive, objectified as sexual images and "tied to [their] place as bearer[s] of meaning, not maker[s] of meaning" (Mulvey 7). Initially, film noir unsettles this "active/passive heterosexual division of labour" only to further reinforce it in the end (12). Nevertheless, it will be delineated in how far women in film noir are not simply misogynist constructions, but can also be read as female agents or at least as false projections, as a discussion of a study by Julie Grossmann will show. In this chapter, my main focus addresses the portrayal of specific roles ascribed to women in film noir.

6 Relying on the assumption that film noir can be considered a "male fantasy", Janey Place claims that in film noir femininity is constructed in relation to sexuality: consequently, it offers women two dualistic roles to perform, either that of the dark lady, spider woman or femme fatale for whom sexuality is accessible or that of the good and innocent woman, the redeemer for whom self-determined sexuality remains beyond reach (47). Although film noir can be termed "phallocentric," because it defines women in terms of their sexuality and otherness to men, for Place it also has a subversive potential: "it does give us one of the few periods of film in which women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality" (47). Hereafter, the two pre-dominant female roles in film noir, that of the femme fatale/spider woman and that of the redeemer, will be investigated, as these are also, in my reading, the pre-dominant female

roles in *Blade Runner*. This investigation will especially approach the figure of the femme fatale from differing theoretical feminist perspectives.

7 Angela Martin writes about the origin and meaning of the French term *femme fatale*: she simply translates the term into English ("'fatal woman'") and points to the three different meanings of the adjective: "(1) causing or capable of causing death, (2) ruinous, disastrous, (3) decisively important, (4) destined, inevitable" (206). Hence, deadliness and destruction can be labeled two determining traits of the femme fatale. In male discourses on film, the fatal woman's deadliness was then ascribed to her ability to avail herself of her "sexuality as weapon" in order to put forth the destruction of a men for her own benefit (206) However, it seems noteworthy that (oftentimes) the femme fatale's deadliness is not based on violent actions or actual enforcements of murder, but rather lies in "her very presence", that is to say her power to fascinate men sensually and sexually (Martin 208). This point is quite insightful with regard to *Blade Runner*. In my reading, the female replicants are not naturally violent or deadly, but it is the Symbolic Order that expects and creates their fatal nature and thereby makes them react in a lethal (or defensive) manner.

8 What is more, according to Place the femme fatale's sexual way of posing a threat to masculinity is recognizable in film noir's "iconography" and "visual style" (54). This specific form of iconography is either sexual or violent. Sexual, for the femme fatale is visualized through blond or dark long hair, make-up, jewelry, cigarettes symbolizing "dark and immoral sensuality", as well as long legs, often shot in a sexualizing, fragmentizing manner (54) Her violent side is linked to her ability to handle a gun and take possession of a metaphorical phallus (54). With respect to composition and camera movement, the femme fatale adopts a dominant and active role. She is usually orchestrated as the center of single shots and even if she is placed in the background, she draws the male protagonist's as well as the audience's attention to herself. In Place's words, the fatal women "direct the camera (and the hero's gaze, with our own) irresistibly with them as they move", meaning that they possess control over camera movement as well as the male protagonist gazing at them, which implies a temporarily static man and a dynamic woman (56). It is, however, noted that, in the end, the femme fatale is detached from her status as a dynamic woman who controls both camera movement and the men around her: usually, she loses her ability to move freely, to control camera movement and gaze relations, restrictive frames and other compositional devices keep her immobile and "imprisoned" and sometimes she is even murdered (56). After all, as Mulvey suggests, cinema could be viewed as an ideological apparatus, working to satisfy male desire. First, the male spectator can identify with the male protagonist. Second, both

extradiegetic spectator and intradiegetic male hero come to be "in direct scopohilic contact with" a female protagonist who serves nearly no diegetic function apart from being an object of the male gaze (13). In film noir, the above described gender and gaze relations are not as black and white, since the femme fatale challenges them. Yet, the femme fatale's transgressions remain ephemeral, as when death is her reward, and the gendered active-male passive-female dichotomy is restored. To summarize, the femme fatale is at first presented as a powerful, free and also dangerous woman, but eventually her power and freedom (the two characteristics that make her dangerous for men) are limited or even eliminated by the narrative of the film (56). Conclusively, it can be summarized that film noir visualizes the femme fatale as both independent and sexual, but eventually punishes her sexuality and independence: those are the 'poor' characteristics that make her transgress the borders of the traditionally passive and dependent place assigned to women in a patriarchal system. Thus, this transgression is rendered inoperative by putting the femme fatale back in her subordinate, femininely connoted place.

9 Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyk) from Billy Wilder's *Doubly Indemnity* (1944) serves as a good example of a classic femme fatale. In terms of iconography, Dietrichson matches most of the features listed above: she has long blond hair, is made up and dressed elegantly, and her long bare legs are often located in the male hero's and the audience's field of vision. In one scene, for example, Walter Neff, the male hero and an insurance salesman, gazes at Dietrichson's ankle chain as if hypnotized. Besides, she controls camera movement, as she is often in the center of single shots and also often filmed from a low angle, which expresses her high position as a dominant position. In terms of general characterization, Dietrichson matches the image of the fatal and destructive woman. She seduces Neff, begins an affair with him and they team up to kill Mr. Dietrichson. When Neff starts questioning their crime, Mrs. Dietrichson expresses her phallic power by shooting Neff with a gun, a move that, however, does not kill him. On the contrary, Neff gets hold of the gun and is able to shoot down and kill Mrs. Dietrichson. Afterwards, the injured Neff drives to the insurance company where he works and makes a confession; it is implied that the police will take care of him. The message conveyed here, can be formulated as follows: although Phyllis Dietrichson independently attempts to leave behind her assigned status as a passive wife in an unsatisfying marriage, she is simultaneously portrayed as an evil seductress and murderer and is punished for these malefactions through an execution by Neff. Mrs. Dietrichson is a classic femme fatale, as she uses her sexuality to get what she wants and ultimately destroys the man who fell in love with her as well as herself. She does not escape the status of a male

fantasy/construction, for in the end all of her sources of sexuality and activity are put under male control.

10 This notion of the femme fatale as a male construction can be developed further. In her essay "Film Noir's 'Femme Fatales' Hard-Boiled Women," Julie Grossmann claims that most readings of the femme fatale in film noir tend to be misinterpretations of real female experience (23). It is stated that male discourses make an attempt at defining nearly all independent women of film noir as femme fatales, whilst some of the independent women of film cannot be put in this category. They tend to be women onto which the image or idea of the fatal woman is projected (25-28). In *Gilda* (1946) "Johnny Farrell can't abide Gilda's verbal, psychological, and sexual power over him; he reacts so violently and cruelly to her … that the movie enacts in the story the annihilating process of 'putting the blame on Mame'" (23). Hence, it is not necessarily the noir woman's behavior that renders her fatal, but rather the male hero's way of interpreting this behavior as fatal. Therefore, Grossmann views her as a "projection of male fears and desires" (29).

11 Similarly, the redeemer can be considered a projection of male desires, yet of desires of safety, stability and female quietism. The role of the redeemer in film noir seems to be far less complex than that of the femme fatale: rather, she seems to be an Anti-femme-fatale, her counter-part in a rigid binarism of virgin-whore. As Place remarks, the redeemer takes over an integrative part in film noir, for she "offers the possibility of integration for the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values, roles and identities": as her name suggests she redeems him (61). In contrast to the femme fatale, the redeemer remains "visually static and passive," not at all in control of the gaze, and resides in "the pastoral environment of open spaces" as opposed to the femme fatale's dark and shadowy urban homes (61f.). In conclusion, the redeemer can be defined as a safe haven for the male protagonist, for she is "rooted in the pastoral environment, static, undemanding and rather dull," meaning that she does not threaten the male protagonist with sexualized destruction. As the male hero usually settles for and marries the redeemer, she becomes his bride-price for having resisted the destructive lures of the femme fatale (62).

12 When regarding *Blade Runner*'s representation of women, Kaplan's comment about noir woman as mysterious sphinx remaining "subordinate in a (Lacanian) male Symbolic Order" seems fairly suitable (3). Terry Eagleton describes the Lacanian Symbolic Order as "the pre-given structure of social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society" (145). This means that the Symbolic Order is a system in which certain pre-given symbols (language) as well as laws constitute all societal institutions, for example the police,

as well as communication systems. Following Catherine Belsey's argumentation, it can also be said that the language of the laws and prohibitions existent in this order is that of "the forbidding Father"[2] (58-59). When regarding the Symbolic Order as the realm of the language and the laws of the Father, it seems plausible to characterize it as patriarchal. As already clarified, the women of film noir are defined in terms of their sexuality, meaning their otherness to men. It is their sexuality, signifying activity and power, which is seen to transgress the borders of a Symbolic Order, which assigns them a passive and subordinate position. The transgressive behavior is, however, soon punished by either relegating them to a subordinate position once more or by murdering them. At the same time, their perceived dangerous sexuality renders them mysterious and positions them outside male culture.

13 In *Blade Runner*, all of the major female characters, Racheal, Pris and Zhora, are non-human androids, so-called replicants. This denotes that all of the members of the police as well as the blade runners, i.e. representatives of the Symbolic Order, are men, whereas the (strong) main female characters, Pris and Zhora, are represented as criminal cyborgs, i.e. as the ones who pose a threat to the welfare of the Symbolic Order. That is why both of them undergo punishment: they are intended to be executed by Deckard who as a law-keeper defends the interests of the Symbolic Order and also executes brutally. Thus, in *Blade Runner*, the women are constructed as a non-human, anti-social Other, as the sphinx so to say. Deborah Jermyn's statement "that the female replicant is the ultimate manifestation of the commonplace cultural positioning of woman as duplicitous," precisely sums up my interpretation (159). Furthermore, like most of the women of film noir Zhora and Pris are characterized in relation to their sexuality: Zhora is a night club dancer, whilst Deckard's boss Bryant refers to Pris as a "basic pleasure model," i.e. a prostitute (*Blade Runner*, 0:14:16-0:14:26). Subsequently, I will analyze the three female replicants Rachael, Zhora and Pris in terms of their shared features with film noir women.

14 When examining Rachael, it is important to draw a line between the two roles she embodies in *Blade Runner*: in the following analysis, I will lay bare in how far Rachael can be viewed as an ambiguous figure, as she embodies both the role of the femme fatale and the role of the redeemer. To begin with, it could be said that Rachael, like most of the femme fatales' of film noir, is denied a central position within the narrative of *Blade Runner*. Tellingly, in most critical accounts, *Blade Runner* is read as Deckard's adventure not Rachael's (even though she "might embody a more sensitive vision of humanity than its humans") and Rachael is mostly analyzed in terms of "what she represents for *Deckard*" (Jermyn 162). As

[2] The capitalization connotes a representative of male values, therefore not a natural father.

in film noir where definitions of the femme fatale are oftentimes based on the way in which men perceive her (sexual) danger, male-authored essays and reviews tended to analyze Rachael in relation to Deckard, but not in relation to her striking femme fatale *identity* (162). However, as Jermyn notes,

> Rachael carries all the superficial erotic trappings of the femme fatale and, at least initially, the same spirit of confidence, an ice-maiden-black-widow who first encounters Deckard with admirable poise, meeting and returning his gaze even while object of the gaze herself (164f.).

In the first meeting between Rachael and Deckard, Rachael accords with most of the determinant visual qualities of the femme fatale. When she first enters Tyrell's office, the viewer sees a shoulder close-up of her made-up face, her red-painted lips as well as her elaborately styled dark hair and when she starts moving towards Deckard it is revealed that she wears a black dress exposing her long, bare legs (*Blade Runner*, 0:16:23-0:16:32).

15 Rachael's dress and also her hair style visualized in this scene are reminiscent of Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity*. It is also noteworthy that while Deckard is rather static (residing at Tyrell's desk) in this scene, Rachael moves through the office dynamically and directs Deckard's gaze. Although she becomes the object of Deckard's (male) gaze, by moving around she nevertheless controls it, meaning that being gazed at does not render her passive. Her very mobility and dry eloquence contradict Mulvey's idea that filmic women "freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation"[3] (11). Besides, as Lacan notes, "the gaze that is outside", i.e. the returning gaze of the looked-at object, is what constitutes the look of the subject (106). Thus, Rachael directs and thereby determines Deckard's subjective looking position. Visually, Rachael and not Deckard is the center of most of the single shots in this scene. When asking Deckard if he has "ever retired a human being by mistake," Rachael is filmed from a low angle, meaning that the power relation expressed here is that of a woman looking down at a man (Deckard) from a markedly higher position (*Blade Runner*, 0:16:40-0:17:17). In addition, Rachael's question is intended to discompose Deckard. Once again, Rachael could be compared to Phyllis Dietrichson with respect to appearance: When Dietrichson and Neff meet at the Dietrichson mansion for the first time, Dietrichson also takes up a higher position, residing on the stairs, whilst Neff is standing in the hallway. She also confronts him with provoking questions like Rachael does with Deckard (*Double Indemnity*, 0:07:54-0:08:41). In the subsequent VK test, however, Rachael transmutes from "a demanding subject" who confidently smokes her cigarette and returns Deckard's questions to

[3] Performances and dances within the narrative or close-ups of fragmented body parts break the coherence of an action-based plot. However, as the male spectator and protagonist share the gaze, such breaks become irrelevant.

a woman defined "by vulnerability and uncertainty," as his questions become more intrusive (Jermyn 165). Accordingly, the first scene where Rachael is staged, firstly provides the image of a strong and independent femme fatale-like woman (in terms of appearance as well as behavior), but then banishes "her from the room where moments ago she had held court, leaving the men free to scrutinize her further still" (165). The scene analyzed above, sums up film noir's treatment of the femme fatale: at first, Rachael independently maintains her ground and seems to exert control over Deckard, but eventually the men, Tyrell and Deckard, assign her a subordinate place, as they banish her from their conversation, that is to say *their* male discourse.

16 The second scene that seems crucial for reading Rachael as a femme fatale is the rape scene in Deckard's apartment. This scene reveals in how far Rachael becomes Grossmann's projection of male desires and also fears. Jermyn argues that Deckard's violent behavior towards Rachael is "a desperate effort … to reinscribe his masculinity": after all, it was Rachael who saved Deckard from Leon by killing him with a pistol shot through his head (166). Deckard's rape attempt can therefore be read as a recovery of his phallic power, for in the preceding scene it was Rachael, as opposed to Deckard, who possessed the phallus. She shot Leon with a gun, which can be read as a symbolic act of exerting penetrative power. Although Rachael might have saved Deckard, it could also be argued that she has unmanned him by reversing the traditional roles of *savior* (Rachael) and *damsel in distress* (Deckard). Thus, in my reading, Rachael puts into question Deckard's masculinity and thereby becomes fatal and terrifying in his eyes. This reading of her prompts him to man himself again which results in a rape-like scene. Rachael is devalued by Deckard's sadistic exertion of sexual control over her (Mulvey 14). Similarly, Deckard over-values Rachael when he objectifies her and turns her into something "reassuring rather than dangerous" (ibid.). When Rachael starts playing the piano and composes her hair, she figures as Mulvey's visual spectacle causes a break in the coherent diegesis (11f.) The scene's sole function is to arouse (physical) desire in Deckard: as he moves towards her, he leans in and starts kissing her neck. After his attempt to kiss her on the mouth, Rachael heads for the door to leave, but is harshly stopped by Deckard who pushes her against the wall only a few seconds later. Deckard then literally projects his desires on Rachael, for he dictates phrases like "Kiss me" and "I want you" to her and she repeats them to him (*Blade Runner*, 1:05:48-1:09:40). Hence, he scripts Rachael as his male fantasy of a femme fatale having access to her sexuality and playing it out actively, even though in actuality she remains passive and simply follows his orders. I would argue that rape is not too strong a term here, for Deckard's direct physical needs overpower Rachael's clear,

performative no, reflected in her attempt to leave. Deckard violently prevents her from leaving his flat, whilst her overt uneasiness and sobbing do not stop him from putting dirty/sweet talk in her mouth. If Rachael, in *Blade Runner*, "embod[ies] a more sensitive vision of humanity than its humans", then she can be assumed to have desires of her own which Deckard ignores and violates (Jermyn 162). The main problem with this scene is that Deckard replaces his desires with Rachael's and when she does not comply with his femme fatale fantasies, he literally constructs her relative to what she represents for him. He devalues Rachael by ignoring her clear no and simultaneously over-values her by fetishizing her as his femme fatale.

17 Contrariwise, the scene above suggests that Rachael is sexually inexperienced or as Jermyn puts it even "asexual or sexually naïve", bordering on "frigid" (167-68). This analysis is limited, since Jermyn seems to equate the right to say no with sexual naivety. However, the notion that apparently she has "to learn 'desire' in the film", can be used as an argument to also put her in the category of the redeemer (167). Above that, Douglas Kellner, Flo Leibowitz, and Michael Ryan describe her as a typical *good woman* in their diagnostic critique of *Blade Runner*: "Rach[a]el, fulfills the common male fantasy of the completely pliant woman who serves all a man's needs," and even rescues him from death (par. 18). The original version of *Blade Runner*, released in 1982, contains an obvious happy ending: as a romantic couple, Deckard and Rachael are able to escape into nature (par. 20). With Rachael, Deckard is capable of leaving behind the dark and polluted city of L.A. and can find his peace in the safe haven of a natural, pastoral space, as described by Place (62) Like in film noir, it is the non-violent, non-sexual woman, namely Rachael, who eventually becomes romantically involved with the male protagonist and survives (in this special case as the sole replicant). In conclusion, Rachael starts out as a determined femme fatale, but then accepts her role as submissive redeemer or 'good woman'. Her survival is her reward: Rachael submits to Deckard, whereas Zhora and Pris have to pay with their lives for not doing so.

18 Unlike Rachael, Zhora exclusively performs the role of a fatal woman. The viewer's first encounter with Zhora is Bryant's description of her as a "Beauty and the Beast" type belonging to an "Off-World kick murder squat" (*Blade Runner*, 0:14:05-0:14:12). This first description of Zhora already provides the viewer with a sufficient characterization of her: as a combat model she is highly dangerous and deadly, she is also classified as beautiful and as is shown later, she works as a night club dancer. The scene in Bryant's office already anticipates Zhora's later representation as a destructive femme fatale.

19 In the first scene where she is really shown, Deckard follows her to her dressing room pretending to be a member of an artist federation. Zhora is presented as eroticized, carrying a snake (symbol of sin) around her neck, only wearing heels, a bikini-like top, panties and being sprayed all over with glitter. Her transparent coat implies her to-be-looked-at-ness. As she seems to be a public object of the male gaze, it could be argued that she has access to her sexuality and knows how to seduce and please men as well as herself. As the scene goes on, she takes a shower, bids Deckard to dry her, only to subsequently knock him down and strangle him. However, she does not succeed at strangling Deckard, for she is interrupted by some fellow dancers and therefore has to flee (*Blade Runner*, 0:50:17-0:53:02). In this scene, Zhora first seduces and distracts Deckard by undressing and letting him dry her, meaning that she uses her sexuality as a part of her fighting strategy, and then changes to actual fighting by hitting and strangling Deckard. Zhora's sexual side is paired with her destructive side and she nearly succeeds at literally *destroying* the man. This combination of sexual seduction with an actual exercise of violence renders Zhora as a dually threatening femme fatale. Valerie Su-Lin Lee concludes quite insightfully: "Having Zhora attack ferociously within this sexualised context effectively associates female sexuality with savage violence, marking it as perverse and terrifying" (par. 3).

20 Nonetheless, Zhora's unmanning and near-destruction of Deckard through sexuality and traditionally unfeminine violence is treated as a transgression in *Blade Runner* and thus punished. When Deckard is able to shoot down Zhora, she crashes through multiple windows "in slow-motion" and finally drops down dead, being "reduced to … an inanimate object" (Wee, par. 3). Like Phyllis Dietrichson, Zhora is ultimately punished, i.e. murdered, by the patriarchal discourse of the film, for she threatens a man, even a member of the Symbolic Order, both sexually and violently.

21 The first staging of Pris seems to refer implicitly to a comment by Place that "[t]he dark woman is comfortable in the word of cheap dives, shadowy doorways and mysterious settings" (53). She emerges from a dark environment, making her way through a street belonging to a rather bad or shady neighborhood and eventually hides between garbage bags. Seemingly, Pris seems to be familiar with the dark and mysterious sides of L.A. The subsequent encounter with J.F. Sebastian, a genetic engineer who works at the Tyrell Corporation, can be termed a planned seduction: Pris plays the role of the innocent, scared and in her own words "lost" little girl in order to get access to Sebastian, as Roy and Leon have previously figured out that he is an acquaintance of Tyrell and knows how to contact him. Her determined face at the end of the scene reveals her real femme fatale-like nature,

that is to say to intentionally behave in a manner that enchants Sebastian (*Blade Runner*, 0:34:51-0.37:47). It is also telling that Sebastian's encounter with Pris eventually becomes fatal to him and brings forth his destruction: if Pris had not *seduced* him, he would not have brought Roy to Tyrell and Roy would not have killed both of them. This means that for Sebastian Pris acts as the deadly fatal woman who first charms him and then thereby enables his death.

22 As in Zhora's case, Pris's transgressions (her destruction of Sebastian and her attempted destruction of Deckard) are also punished in the end. When Deckard enters the Bradbury building, he becomes involved in a fight with Pris (*Blade Runner*, 1:27:14-1:29:51). In this scene, Pris hides from Deckard pretending to be one of Sebastian's dolls and firstly adopts a static position. As Deckard starts inspecting her, she suddenly attacks him and is "shown clamping Deckard's head between her thighs, presenting a sexually suggestive image" (Wee, par. 5). This image is sexually suggestive, for it more or less visually links deadliness and female sexuality: whilst Deckard is nearly killed, he is in the immediate vicinity of Pris's lap and thus her vagina. The scene continues with sexual undertones, as Pris *penetrates* Deckard's nostrils with her fingers and thus undermines the heteronormative role allocation of man as *penetrator* and woman as *penetrated*. These two transgressions that call male supremacy into question are, however, rendered inoperative: eventually, Deckard is able to shoot Pris and two bullets strike her in the region of her genitalia, meaning that he symbolically puts an end to the assumed perils of her sexuality. Like a classic femme fatale, Pris first exerts power over a man and even unmans him, just to be killed in the end so that the power she expressed before is undermined. Conclusively, as Wee argues about Zhora and Pris, "these female characters are violently punished with the death sentence for transgressing social laws and boundaries" by inhabiting the roles of typical femmes fatales (par. 10).

23 In this paper, I attempted to shed light on the fact that *Blade Runner*'s portrayal of women refers to the general portrayal of women in film noir. In order to prove this, I have first outlined how women are represented in film noir and then I have applied my findings to *Blade Runner*. In film noir, women are usually assigned a subordinate place in the Symbolic Order or they are placed outside of it, for they remain mysterious and threatening from a male viewpoint. What defines them the most is their sexuality often interpreted as dangerous and destructive to maleness, but however it is their access to their own sexuality which helps them to actively exert control over men. The dangerous and destructive woman described above, was termed *femme fatale* in discourses on film noir: she can be viewed as an independent and strong woman who uses her *sexuality as weapon* to bring about the downfall or actual

destruction of a man. She is a mobile woman, controlling camera movement and transgressing the boundaries of traditionally female, i.e. passive, places by becoming initiative and threatening male supremacy, symbolically through seducing men and literally by firing at them with a gun, as in *Double Indemnity*. However, her transgressive behavior is punished in the end in order to re-stabilize patriarchal power, either marking men as passive again in some way or by murdering them. What is more, the femme fatale can be seen as a male fantasy, for the male hero projects his desires and fears on her. Conversely, the redeemer re-integrates the male hero into a stable world and becomes his safe and submissive haven.

24 In *Blade Runner*, all of the women are replicants, meaning embodiments of the non-human Other. Thus, they are assigned a place outside the Symbolic Order and are therefore persecuted by the law-keeper Deckard, a so-called blade runner. Rachael first behaves like a strong femme fatale, boldly facing and challenging Deckard, but later submits to him and accepts her place as his passive lover. She is also a projection of male fears and desires, for Deckard dominates her to reaffirm himself of his masculinity and creates her as his own sexually expressive femme fatale. Zhora and Pris can be read as seductive/sexual and also literally dangerous, for they exercise violence, femme fatales. Like the femmes fatales of film noir, they nearly initiate the destruction of a man and are punished for their supposedly unfeminine, active actions in brutal death scenes. In conclusion, like most film noirs, *Blade Runner* presents women as enigmatic, but renders their sexuality destructive.

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