

REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY & CORPORATE CAPITALISM

People as commodities

In *Blade Runner*, reproductive technology is represented as having reached such an advanced stage that a corporation specialising in genetic engineering can produce designer copies of human beings and sell them. The replicants are considered by humans to be commodities. The design details of the Nexus 6 replicants are recorded on a set of files known as incept dates³ and are kept in the Blue Room.

A replicant is a replica or a simulation made out of synthesised organic material. This material is manufactured in laboratories that specialise in certain body parts. For example, Chew manufactured the replicants' eyes and Tyrell constructed their brains.

In *Blade Runner*, Earth has become the production space for corporations. The corporation boasts that their skill in producing the replicants is so advanced that it is difficult to tell them from humans, because they are 'more human than human'.

Replicants are the ultimate designer product. They are used to explore the off-shore colonies. Their owners exploit them and use them to do the dangerous and unpleasant jobs that humans don't want to do. Replicants are also used in the wars that continue to rage, even after the tragic wars that have destroyed Earth.

Dr Eldon Tyrell, the head of the Tyrell Corporation, has manipulated the genetic coding used to create the replicants' brains to ensure that they only have four-year life-spans. Even so, scientists have noticed that replicants were developing 'strange obsessions'. Although replicants were not designed to remember, they have begun to develop a capacity for emotional responses – love, hate, fear, anger and envy – from their experiences.

Retirement

At the opening of the film, viewers are positioned to fear a group of rogue replicants that have rebelled against their slave status and illegally re-entered Earth. Their mission is to meet their maker and have their life spans extended.

Identity

The film explores the subject of what it means to be human, raising issues of identity and memory. Photographs, and the need for a past, a family and friends, are an important motif in the film. The replicants are represented as complex beings who are more than mere machines. Scott humanises them and attempts to give them a human voice to speak against the dehumanised state of humanity. The replicants can be seen as products of amoral humans.

³ See Sammon p.121 for a copy of the incept dates.