IMPLANTED MEMORIES, OR THE ILLUSION OF FREE ACTION
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INTRODUCTION: THE FRUSTRATIONS OF REPLICANT LIFE

> 'Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave.'
> – Roy
> 'You're weak my friend … He doesn't have a choice. He never did.'
> – Clovis[1]

The replicants' struggle for freedom is a very human one. As sentient beings who know they are alive, they want to control their own destinies. In the film, Roy and Pris explain this to Sebastian, whose accelerated decrepitude illness makes him sympathetic to the replicants' hunger for life: 'We're not computers, Sebastian. We're physical', he says; 'I think, therefore I am', she adds. But what does she think? According to classical philosophy, and for a rationalist like Descartes, free will is impossible without knowledge,[2] but replicants cannot be sure of what they know (their memories are fake implants and do not derive from experience), and have been programmed to follow one course of action only (as slaves in the Off-World colonies). In their Off-World jobs (for example Pris is a prostitute), freedom is obviously not an option, hence their rebellion. A player of computer adventure games could easily identify with the replicants, because the experience very often feels like travelling on a train; that is, on rails, without any real say in the direction of movement. That's what it is to be a slave. We start the game as a character with memories and an agenda that seem alien and take some time getting used to, and then have to perform a series of required tasks in order to progress to the next level. Do we ever have a choice?

This chapter will examine the *Blade Runner* PC game (Westwood, 1997) in order to find out how much freedom we can feel as players; free will being an important topic in both Ridley Scott's film and Philip K. Dick's source novel. The problematising of this matter is relevant to a narrative analysis of the computer game as it reveals some of the inherent difficulties of the adventure genre as sketched above.

The action of the *Blade Runner* PC game is parallel in time and space to that of the film. The player controls a character named Ray McCoy, a rookie blade runner who works in the same Police Department as Deckard (and seems to live in the same apartment block). The game is set at the same time as the film, so that McCoy will sometimes arrive to a place Deckard has just visited, for example the hotel where Leon lives, or the Tyrell Corporation; and other times he will be quicker than the characters in the film, like when he visits Chew, the eye designer, before Roy kills him. When the game starts we get our first case, an

animal murder presumably committed by replicants since no humans would be so cruel as to destroy real animals in a time of extinction. Following the initial clues from this crime scene, we soon get involved in a more complicated investigation of the whereabouts of a group of possible replicants, led by the charismatic Clovis. McCoy will search for clues in crime scenes and interrogate suspects, working towards a grand finale in which we must either have 'retired' all the rogue replicants, or joined them in their search for freedom and life if McCoy turns out to be one of them (an explanation of this twist follows below). The game introduction echoes the movie, with a panoramic view of a dystopian Los Angeles and the Vangelis soundtrack; the flawless reproduction of the movie's settings provides a constant source of wonder and pleasure for players.

PREVIOUS WORK ON THE GAME

As this volume eloquently demonstrates, *Blade Runner* is one of the most discussed films in history, an interest that to some degree also has extended to the novel upon which it is based, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. The 1997 Westwood game, however, has not received the same interest, probably because it is relatively recent, but also because it is only recently that the study of computer games has begun to gain acceptance as an academic discipline.

Blade Runner is usually mentioned as one of the key examples of adaptations from film to the game medium, and Steven Poole has identified its influence on computer game design. According to him, *Blade Runner* inaugurated a specific visual style that has been used repeatedly in subsequent games. Drawing on the movie's noir and decadent scenarios, the game takes advantage of the darkness, permanent rain and fog to achieve a believable atmosphere without spending excessive computer processing power (2000: 88–9).

The only monograph work I know about the game is my article 'Playing for the Plot: *Blade Runner* as Paradigm of the Electronic Adventure Game' (2000). The article argued that *Blade Runner* was the first game that had managed to offer a certain level of narrative complexity due to the efficacy of the decision branching and the significance of the different game endings. The game was also a starting point for discussion of the adventure genre in general, using Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot* (1983) as inspiration, and the nascent possibilities of applying narrative concepts to the study of certain computer game genres. Both my own work with computer games and the field itself have grown immensely in only four years, so that I feel a need to revisit my earlier conclusions: the game deserves a grounded discussion.

A QUESTION OF GENRE

As has been mentioned, *Blade Runner* is an adventure game,[3] a genre where player interaction takes the form of spatial exploration, management of an

object inventory (finding objects and using them), puzzles, quests and conversations with bots (usually by going down 'conversation trees'). Elsewhere I have characterised this genre as centred on telling a story, where the narrative component is the main motivation for the player as he or she searches for a plot (in Peter Brooks' terms (1983: 3–12)). This also connects such games with 'plot-oriented' literature, such as genre fiction:

> Most adventure games cast the player in a detective's role under various guises: the detective of *Deadline*, the mystery-writer 'Shattenjäger' of the *Gabriel Knight* series, the curious traveller of *Myst*, the journalist of *The 11th Hour* … Something has happened (usually a crime, assault, disappearance or any mysterious deed the programmers can think of), and the player must investigate in order to learn what. She must *look for a plot* behind the apparently meaningless terrible acts in order to reconstruct the story from clues that she finds at the crime scenes and the interviewing of the non-playing characters. The main character/player usually has a motivation: to find a lost girlfriend, to free somebody, to write a book, etc. (Tosca 2000: 3)

In the case of *Blade Runner*, the initial motivation is to advance up the career ladder, since the player's first mission is also the first 'real' case for McCoy, who will try to solve it in order to go from rookie to genuine blade runner. As the game advances, however, motivations can change, as I will examine below. Structurally, it is a progression game (Juul 2002), meaning that action is organised in chapters or 'acts' that need to be solved in order to continue on to the next one. Some of the aesthetic problems of the genre, according to Espen Aarseth, are the lack of believable characters (pre-scripted behaviour, repeating lines) and the conflict between the opposing goals of gameplay and storytelling, which causes the game experience to be undermined because of the priority given to the story (2004: 51). For Jonas Heide Smith, a serious problem is the lack of narrative coherence, since the story easily falls into inertia unless the player triggers the continuation of the story by some (often meaningless) action. He names this problem the 'interactor as a starting gun' (2000), by which, for example, action would only advance when the player found a key and a string hidden in the garden in order to open the door where the clues about the murder are waiting. For both authors, these problems might be partially solved with better artificial intelligence (Aarseth talks about simulation and Heide Smith about 'deistic narration', which means avoiding excessively linear design and instead allowing for objects to have properties governed by natural laws rather than an author's master plan). This would allow for worlds to appear more alive and stories more coherent. What these two authors are seeking is, in Juul's term, for progression games (such as typically linear adventure games) to also include emergence structures, by which a relatively small number of rules produces a great amount of combinations and possible states of a game, as happens for example in chess (see Juul 2002).

This is actually the trend that the market seems to be evolving towards with games such as *Grand Theft Auto III* which combine a very linear mission structure with an open world where objects and people seem 'alive' for the player to interact with. Another tendency is to mix the adventure with some action (mainly in the form of combat) as, for example, in *Deus Ex*. The pure adventure genre seems to have all but died out, with the exception of a couple of recent successful games such as *Syberia* or *The Longest Journey*,[4] although its basic structure is now part of other hybrid genres as mentioned above, or of thematically specialised genres such as the survival horror game.

In 1997, however, today's more advanced uses of artificial intelligence were barely dreamed of, and the developers of *Blade Runner* found other ways of dealing with the problems of the adventure game genre (namely the fact that you can only play once, and the issue that puzzles seem meaningless and disconnected to the main action). The product's marketing reveals that they were conscious of these potential flaws, and therefore created a game with several possible endings, eliminating the puzzles that had been the genre's trademark. They promised a 'constantly changing plot' in a game where 'character agendas are random … your adventure can be different every time you play'.[5] However, the absence of puzzles was met with a great deal of scepticism and hostility by the genre's fans,[6] who felt the game lacked interactivity and was too linear, as the *Gamespot* review harshly summarises: 'Somewhere along the production line, someone forgot to include a game.'[7] I will address the consequences of these innovations below.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF *BLADE RUNNER*

If adventure games are usually close to stories, the association becomes even more intimate when the game springs from one specific, very well known story. The designers cleverly chose not to try to reproduce the events in the film, but to create a similarly-themed narrative that could play out in the same diegesis. According to designer Louis Castle they were very concerned to avoid misinterpreting the film, which had 'a great base of demanding fans',[8] so that when the production team chose the main theme they tried to remain faithful to the fundamental question of distinguishing between human and non-human. The game makes this more explicit than the film: 'McCoy is even more questioning since he is accused of being a replicant. The ambiguity is one of the game's greatest strengths.'[9] In my analysis I will examine how the game creates this ambiguity and how it adjusts to or differs from the usual techniques in adventure games. My discussion is structured by a series of fundamental topics, according to my framing of the adventure genre.[10]

The plot level: a good old linear story
Let us start with the story, since it is what primarily defines the genre. I am separating the 'plot' level from the 'action' level for purposes of analysis, even though they would be experienced at the same time by a player.[11] The plot is

structured in five acts, as in theatre, which in themselves do not present any unity of space or time, but are introduced by different action triggers. The acts are punctuated by the cut-scenes that present important information about the plot (always just before an act starts). The act structure is straightforward, as McCoy advances trying to find more clues and talking to people. As an example, this is the development of act 1:

- McCoy examines Runciter's shop and find all clues, specifically the videodisk with Lucy's picture and the chopstick wrapper with the name of Howie Lee's restaurant in Chinatown.
- Go to the police station to see the pictures on the videodisk (use the Esper) and ask about the rest of the clues in the laboratory.
- Go to Chinatown and talk to the cook Zuben at Howie Lee's. Zuben will run away when he is asked about Lucy and McCoy can either talk to him, try to kill him, or even be unable to find him in the backalleys.
- McCoy goes back to his apartment and in most cases (that is, unless he found him in the alleys before) will be attacked by Zuben, having to kill him here. Sleeps.

The highlighted clues, actions and places are the 'action triggers' mentioned above with reference to Heide Smith. If we don't find the chopstick wrapper, we don't know where we have to go next. If we don't find the picture of Lucy, we cannot ask Zuben about her; this causes the action to stop and will probably force the player to consult a walkthrough in order to continue. In this way we can say that the plot advances as a chain reaction of small events, with clues we found in act 1 leading us into act 2 and so on. The action triggers are pre-scripted, and even though they can sometimes be activated in different orders, there is usually a linear progression through the acts.

If we were to ask ourselves what the player needs to know in order to advance at the plot level, that is, what is her literary repertoire (see Tosca 2003b: 4), we could mention:

- a basic knowledge of the adventure game genre (for example, we would know the rule: don't leave any scene without having tried to click in all the possible places, or keep talking to the characters until they declare that they have no more to say).
- a basic knowledge of the original movie, because otherwise we might not understand the ambiguity as to the nature of the replicants, and the game could be played like an extremely boring *shoot-em-up*, which was not intended by the designers.
- not necessary, but a bonus if players know Philip K. Dick's novel; they will enjoy the references to it, such as the 'kipple', the pollution, the value of animals and the surrealist episode where some fake policemen arrest McCoy and he finds another guy living in his apartment, the fragility of our identities being one of Dick's favourite themes.

Even though the voice acting is relatively good, characters remain stereo-typical, particularly the female ones. The character of McCoy is clearly inspired by that of Deckard, but his constant ironic commentary delivered with a certain degree of cheerfulness makes him very different in personality from his haunted and insecure counterpart. The replicant leader, Clovis, is a dark-haired Roy Batty, who walks around quoting William Blake and brooding philosophically about destiny, eliciting admiration and scorn in equal degrees in the players' fora.[12] Unlike Roy, who is a more ambivalent character, both brutal and compassionate, Clovis's violent side is expressed through the crazy Sadik, whom he has to restrain constantly. The rest of the male characters are typical cardboard figures, although it has to be said that the designers have made an effort at suggesting an inner life for them: Gordo's show-business obsession, Runciter's taste for young girls, the conflict of the Siamese twins Lance and Luther.

This comes across particularly in the cutscenes, as the game sequences do not really allow for persona development and sometimes even force us to act out of character.[13] The female characters in the game all fulfill recognisable roles in computer games: the fourteen-year-old Lolita (Lucy), the beautiful good-hearted erotic dancer (Dektora), the hard, masculine police woman (Crystal). There seems not to be the same degree of correspondence between the female characters in the game and those of the movie as there is with the main male characters; one can only speculate as to the reasons for this, but it seems that the designers deemed the masculine characters more interesting, probably making an informed guess as to possible player demographics.

The action level: frantic clicking

While most fans and reviewers acknowledge that the game scenarios are beautiful and the story compelling, the action level of the game has earned harsh criticism from the player community. The game's only interface is a mouse-controlled arrow that turns green when there is some clue to be examined or a character McCoy can talk to, and blue to indicate a possible exit from that screen into another scenario. The simplicity of this system becomes a disadvantage when McCoy is wielding his gun, because it is very difficult to shoot and steer him at the same time since the arrow turns into a gun sight.[14]

McCoy has a 'clue database' or inventory where clues are attached to the possible suspects and crime scenes, and can be filtered as a way of remembering where each of them comes from. Not that we need to use it, since there is never a need to combine different clues or to hand one clue to a suspect (just clicking on the suspect will get McCoy to automatically produce the document). The clues are classified according to the crime scenes where they were found, and attached to possible suspects, so that the database does your work for you in sorting out the clues and suspects.

The most frustrating aspect of the interaction is the menu that pops up when we talk with the non-player characters.[15] These menus display a list of items suggesting general themes one can interrogate the characters about,

but it is impossible to know what McCoy will actually say on each topic. Usually we have to try to cover all the topics or we will miss information and get stuck. As an example, the menu when interrogating Howie Lee in the first act:

> LUCY PHOTO
> RUNCITER CLUES
> EMPLOYEE
> SMALL TALK
> DONE

In this case they are mostly self-explanatory, except for 'Runciter Clues'. The player has just arrived from the Runciter shop, but what can this possibly mean? It turns out to be a question about the chopstick wrapper that was found there, so 'chopstick wrapper' would have been a much better title. Sometimes the lack of clarity of the menus has unwanted consequences. For example, in a later conversation with Dektora (the erotic dancer), there is an item named CRYSTAL. I wrongly assumed that McCoy would ask her if a female blade runner had visited her already, but instead he warns Dektora that Crystal might be looking for her and her friends, thus effectively making McCoy into a replicant sympathiser without the player's collaboration.

This being said, the advantage of such a simple system is that the learning curve is practically zero, and any player can become familiar with the game mechanics in less than ten minutes. The problem of a system that does not require the player's thinking is that gameplay turns into mindless clicking, both on objects and people. There is no need to register the various discoveries, as McCoy will use this knowledge without our intervention, which in a way ruins the plot as described above (in other games the player must remember information and know what objects to use when; here McCoy does it automatically). It is true that detective stories usually seem quite linear in that the investigator goes from one clue to the next, but if we do not even need to think where to go next, the excitement fades.[16] In this game the plot level and the action level are very closely connected, but there is the risk that we very quickly stop caring about the gaps (what to do now? why did this happen?) because our character knows the answers and continues anyway.

WHERE ARE THE PUZZLES AND QUESTS?

Players of adventure games often enjoy solving complicated puzzles, something absent from *Blade Runner*. As mentioned above, picking up clues is just a matter of clicking every time the arrow turns green, and once they are listed in our inventory we are not required to do anything else with them: no combination of objects in complicated arrangements is needed to gain access to hidden areas or discover secrets.

As for quests, there is a general one, 'find and retire the replicants', that

permeates the whole game and gets the player started through the animal murder investigation. The subsequent discoveries work as new mini-mysteries that the player has to solve until we have connected all the dots and found the links between the replicants. *Blade Runner*'s mini-quests (search the Runciter crime-scene, search the Tyrell crime-scene, investigate the Early Q club, and so on) work well at the semantic level, the player at all times knowing what needs to be done and why, but not so much at the structural level (since the manipulation of objects and the interrogation of characters feels totally random and is not challenging enough).[17]

A more interesting feature is that, unlike other games, the player is not given these mini-quests explicitly by non-playing characters;[18] rather, they appear as we pick up the different clues and new spaces open in our map. Actually figuring out the space of the city becomes a quest in itself after we have lost the Spinner in act 4 and with it the ability to just fly anywhere.[19] McCoy has to move in the sewers and experience the city as the 'negative space' that Scott Bukatman describes (1997: 42).

It would seem that the initial idea of the designers to do away with puzzles and facilitate the ways in which players know what to do next backfired to an extent and contributed to the feeling of having very limited choice in this game; but how is this supported or contradicted at the plot level?

BLADE RUNNER'S CUT-SCENES: THE DESTRUCTION OF SUSPENSE

Blade Runner has a cut-scene at the beginning of each act, plus two others in the middle of acts 2 and 3:

- Act 1. The Runciter animal crime (present: Clovis, Zuben, Lucy and Runciter).
- Act 2. The murder of Eisenduller at Tyrell Corporation (present: Eisenduller, Sadik).
  – Mid. Act – brief movie with Tyrell and Rachel.
- Act 3. Sadik beats McCoy up (present: Sadik, Clovis, McCoy and Lucy).
  – Mid. Act – fake cops interrogate McCoy.
- Act 4. Assault to DNA Row (present: Clovis, Sadik, Luther and Lance).
- Act 5. Tyrell and Clovis.

With the exception of the mid-act movies and the final clip during act 5, the acts are introduced by a cut-scene which shows the crime that has just happened or offers some important backstory about the characters. When McCoy gets to the crime scene the player already knows the facts, although of course McCoy does not since he was not present in the cut-scene events (in the cut-scene introducing act 3 he is unconscious). The third-person perspective plays an important role here since as players we know more than McCoy. The search for clues is thus not aimed at finding out who did what, since we already know that, but becomes a sort of bureaucratic filling of forms, a way to trig-

ger the next action so that we can move on in the game. The cut-scenes thus destroy suspense and make the mechanics of the adventure game fall apart. They dwell, instead, on giving more depth to the replicant characters and their struggle, so that the player gets to know them better and maybe *empathise* with them even though most cut-scenes show the replicants committing acts of violence. As in the film, we are encouraged to understand and feel a human affinity with these non-humans, which might make us in turn wonder about the legitimacy of the blade runner profession of our character: a level of moral sophistication that is entirely innovative for a computer game.

Despite all the criticism above, it is not my intention to portray the game as a failure. In an aesthetic twist, the result of knowing everything about the crime scenes before we even get there causes the player to wonder instead about what we do not know, which happens to be the most human of questions: *who is McCoy?* If we fully identify with our character, the question becomes *who am I?* A few characters ask McCoy throughout the game if he could be a replicant as well, something that he waves off with good humour. But soon there will be too many things he cannot explain: the dream of Mars and Lucy, his picture on the Moonbus with the escaped replicants, and even the fact that at some point McCoy appears as a suspect in his own clue database (as if the inventory was controlled by someone else). This points to a level of control and manipulation above us as players: a god, not of bio-mechanics as in the film, but a game designer intent on the players doubting themselves on this very fundamental level. Ambiguity is key. Even further in the game, most players realise that there is no fixed answer to that question, that we can actually tweak the result ourselves: by being hostile to the replicants we affirm our humanity, while by being sympathetic we will end up being one of them.[20] It is ironic that feeling empathy makes us into a replicant, when the way to detect one is precisely by measuring their lack of empathy through the Voigt-Kampff test. It seems that there is something fundamentally wrong with the test, both in the movie and the game, since most questions are about inquiring whether the subject feels horror about torturing or killing animals, but there are no questions to find out if the subject can empathise with other human beings or replicants. And as in the film, to be a human blade runner, able to kill replicants who just want to live, seems less *human* than actually letting them go; in another moral twist, humanity means behaving 'inhumanely'.

This is a strange but interesting experiment with destiny, not unlike the moral determinism of *Black and White*, where game actions have ethical consequences. It is as if McCoy could take the conscious decision of developing the empathy that Deckard lacks in the film (and Roy Batty demonstrates in the end), and this has enormous consequences for our feeling of agency (see Murray 1997: 126) in the game. It suggests that the illusion of free will is better achieved through clever orchestration of decision points than through augmenting the possibilities for action handling (such as puzzles) or randomising the nature of some non-playing characters (replicant/non-replicant), which feels rather pointless. In fact, trying out the different combinations of choices

is what makes players want to re-play this game: as replicant friend, as replicant enemy, or as mere sympathiser (the middle-way option, not entirely coherent since it involves being nice to some replicants and killing others).

CHOICE AND REPLAYABILITY

The success of this game, then, lies in providing the player with the ability to take decisions about crucial plot points always related to McCoy's identity. This willingness to let players choose a moral approach manifests itself in a few elements that enhance the *replayability* value of the game. As argued above, players will soon realise that their investigation of the crime scenes progresses very much on 'rails', so that they are instead able to concentrate on exploring other avenues related to personality and character development. According to my observations in the players' fora, I argue that many players of this game actually *set their own emotional quests* in order to keep their interest in the game alive, such as befriending the replicants, or trying to find the branches that will allow them to develop a romantic relationship with one of the female characters.[21]

In order to talk about options in this game, I would like to distinguish between non-conscious variables and conscious choices. Non-conscious variables occur when McCoy misses a clue in one of the crime scenes, which might or might not have any further consequences in the game. In some cases the game 'stops' because the clue is needed to trigger further action (the picture of Lucy at Runciters), in others it does not matter at all (Lucy's doll in the hotel), yet in others still, the action continues but the missed object has more subtle, long-term consequences for the story. For example, not picking up the DNA information at Tyrell's means that if in the end the player escapes with one of the replicant women, she will die soon; if McCoy had found the DNA string, the voice-over would inform us that her life can be extended.

The really interesting options are, in my opinion, the conscious choices, which happen mostly in confrontations with non-playing characters, where the player can decide to talk to them or have a confrontation with them (which can be verbal, for example when trying to force them to do a Voigt-Kampff test, or physical in armed combat). As the fora and my own experience show, players soon discover that this kind of choice will affect their status as replicant enemy, replicant sympathiser or replicant, so they start trying to influence it consciously as it ties in with the main philosophical question of the game. All walkthroughs, produced by enthusiastic players and available on the web, contain indications as to whether a particular action will have consequences in the determination of our alignment and ultimately our identity.

The genius of this idea is that it allows for conceptual branching (that is, in our perception and expectations about the story and its ethos) while keeping structural branching under control. This happens because the key confrontations of the player with the possibly replicant non-player characters[22] always occur at times when the game 'doesn't need' that character anymore,

so that no matter the outcome of the confrontation (whether the character lives or dies, for example) the game can progress without the designers having to cater for major amounts of branching. Some extra design is of course needed since the fact of not killing Lucy, for example, means that she has to be present in the final scene one way or another. But let us illustrate this with an example from our encounter with Zuben, the cook at Howie Lee's. Zuben is always a replicant, and he is the first suspect we encounter face to face after the first Runciter investigation. When McCoy interrogates him, he will try to run away by throwing a big bowl of soup at him; McCoy can either try to dodge or stand in surprise.

In the first case, where we are too slow, we will lose Zuben here, and our only interaction possibility is with a tramp. If we *stand* and lose Zuben he will reappear later to try to kill McCoy at his apartment and then there is no choice but killing him. In the second option, *jump*, we can either interact with the bum as above and waste our time, or we can follow Zuben and find him, in which case we have the option of letting him go or killing him here. As I hope is clear, this tight cluster of branching gets reduced to a very simple result: Zuben either lives or dies. If he dies, the game continues as it was supposed to, and the same if he lives, only he will reappear in the last scene as part of the replicant team in the Moonbus.

Another interesting consequence of these confrontations being optional is that violence actually is not the only possible way out of conflict, which also provides a certain feeling of agency in that each player is able to accommodate his or her style into the gameplay. To a lesser extent, the operation of the Esper machine to investigate photographs, and the Voigt-Kampff test to interrogate suspects, contributes to the sense of our activity being meaningful just by sheer mechanics, even if the clues found in the photographs work as statically as any other in the game, and we cannot choose the questions in the
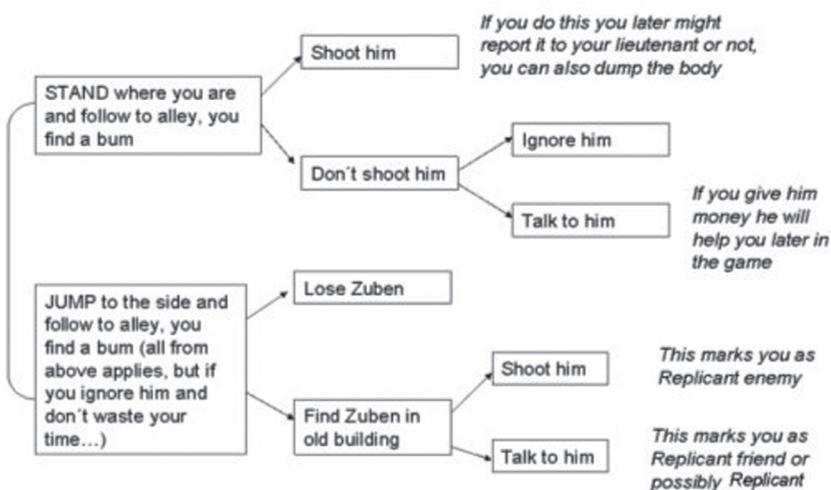
Voigt-Kampff test, but only their intensity (high for the most offensive enquiries, medium, and low for the most innocent).

The *replayability* value of the game therefore springs from the importance of the confrontations, with many players trying different options and saving different paths in order to experience a variety of outcomes. The ultimate success of this strategy is to be able to witness as many final scenes as possible – allegedly thirteen different ones, although I have only reached five myself[23] – a compulsive endeavor that makes *Blade Runner* into a form of hypertext, with its readers always worried about not having found all the branches of the story. They are all variations of two main themes:

> McCoy is a human; he retires all the replicants and ends up alone/with Crystal.
> McCoy is a replicant; he kills Crystal and goes away either in (i) the Moonbus with different combinations of replicants (depending on who is alive in the end); (ii) a car, with either Lucy, Dektora or alone.

Some players in the fora complained that changing a single action, like forcing Dektora to take a Voigt-Kampff test or not, could have so much influence upon the outcome (not doing it you might end up going away with her), which they saw as a near incoherence if the plot could not stay still.[24] However, I would say that the point of the story in this game is not that there is a single plot to be found, but precisely that each action matters towards the end and that we contribute to the evolving story as we go. Trying to guess which actions those are, and how they lead to each conclusion, is a sort of narrative reverse engineering where, in my opinion, the pleasure of the game lies. And once we know, of course, we can always exert our free will and choose another path.

CONCLUSION: IS McCOY A REPLICANT?

Only the player can answer this question, which is what makes the game interesting, as this version of *Blade Runner*, like the movie, also resists a clear answer. In his book about the film, Scott Bukatman argues that the question of Deckard being a replicant or not should be left unanswered (so that not even the dream of the unicorn and the origami of the Director's Cut can provide certainty), because ambiguity is essential to our questioning of what it means to be human (1997: 82). Is it the biological birth or is it the behaviour? I would even suggest that the game is a simulacrum to explore this question, since real gameplay in the conventional sense is mostly absent, and the process of playing instead pushes us to concentrate on questions of empathy and identity. If we kill all the replicants and are confirmed as blade runner and human in the end, we still have a bitter taste in our mouth. After all, the game spends a lot of time explaining the motivations of the replicant characters, so we may well feel compelled to play again in order to find out what it is to be one of them…

To conclude I will follow two avenues, as I consider the contribution that

Westwood's *Blade Runner* PC game brings to the *Blade Runner* universe in general, and what innovations it brings to the adventure game genre.

With regard to the *Blade Runner* universe, the game allows for enhanced immersion in its carefully reproduced environments. The spatial exploration of the rainy streets and the derelict buildings effectively transports us to the diegesis of the film. More importantly, the scenarios become alive in that we can interact with them, so that we go beyond the mere looking that the film allows. The game also expands on several topics that the book or the film only suggest. For example, McCoy clearly loves his dog Maggie, whereas the attachment of the Deckard in the book to his sheep is merely a question of status. McCoy is always worried about Maggie, buys her a collar, and the most upsetting part of another guy living in his apartment is not the apartment itself, but what might have happened to his dog.

The game also introduces an interesting addition related to the empathy theme: a group of human activists helping replicants, called CARS, or 'Citizens Against the Replicant Slavery'. At some point it is not clear if this group is as pacifist as they claim or whether they collaborate in some of the replicant terrorist acts. What are their motivations and how far can one go in supporting oppressed groups? This question also remains unanswered, but their appearance provides the replicant problem with more texture and contemporary urgency.

As for the contribution of this game to the adventure genre in general, I hope it has become clear throughout this chapter that *Blade Runner* is a successful if unique example of this genre. Instead of exploiting the recognised strengths of adventure games (puzzles and quests) or incorporating features of other computer game genres (simulation or action fighting), it bravely does away with them and tries a new approach. This game, which is almost not a game at all, involves the player in a hunt for decisive narrative turns and gives him or her the chance of moulding their own destiny. In his article about interactive narrative, Heide Smith identifies the secret of mastering the craft:

> A designer who wants to tell the story of how A leads to B while maintaining an interactive element will start going to great lengths to ensure the interactor that the choices he makes are important while making absolutely sure that they are not. (2000)

This is what the game succeeds at so well, with its game choices that do not matter and its emotional identity choices that are all-important. *Blade Runner* creates a digital suspension of disbelief that players are willingly drawn into through the excitement of the different moral choices, where trusting our implanted memories will bring us the illusion of free will. The possibility of Rick Deckard being a replicant is one of the film's most enduring and intriguing questions. The possibility of actually being a replicant ourselves throws up even more fascinating questions, and makes playing, rather than just watching *Blade Runner*, a remarkable experience.

NOTES

1　Both lines belong to dramatic scenes on top of the Bradbury building. The first one is spoken in the film by replicant leader Roy in his final fight against Deckard; and the second by Clovis, the computer game's replicant leader, who witnesses McCoy (the player) being beaten up by another replicant and then mysteriously comments on McCoy's lack of freedom.

2　This idea has been a constant in philosophy since Aristotle, who in his *Ethics* argues that voluntary action is incompatible with ignorance. Knowledge is all-important in the work of a rationalist like Descartes, whom Pris also quotes in the film.

3　For a historical perspective on the genre, see Aarseth 1997 and 2000, who traces its history back to *Adventure* (1976). The trend was structurally continued by graphic adventures of which *Myst* (1993) is the best known. See also Montfort (2003), who considers the first textual adventures as a genre of their own in his book *Twisty Little Passages*.

4　For an introductory history to the genre, visit http://www.lancs.ac.uk/postgrad/watsons/bhadvent.html.

5　From Westwood's original website, now defunct: http://www.westwood.com/games/bladerunner/br/html/advfrmsw.htm. Accessed August 1999.

6　For example, this player's opinion: 'I was a die-hard fan of classic adventure, which offers much more interaction and actual adventuring than *Blade Runner*. Indeed, anyone who is looking for wacky puzzles and unlimited exploration should stay away from this game. It is an interactive movie in the best sense of the word, a piece of art which offers a similar experience like a real movie, [sic] only that here you have control of the actions' (http://www.mobygames.com/game/view_review/reviewerId,6226/gameId,341/platformId,3/).

7　Ron Dulin (03/12/97) in http://www.gamespot.com/pc/adventure/bladerunner/review.html.

8　Louis Castle, interviewed by Gloria Stern; see Stern 1998.

9　Ibid., note 8.

10　For more on the visual and adaptation specific aspects, see the chapter by Barry Atkins in this volume.

11　'Once the game starts, we work at two levels: that of the plot, where Iser's gaps are applicable, and that of the game, where the problems we encounter have to be solved, not interpreted. Our mind is busy with the plot level and the action level at the same time. The first one, that we experience on the fly, can be narrated afterwards (it is *tellable*) and makes sense as a story (complete with character motivation and feelings); the second is about solving action problems, and if it was to be narrated it would correspond to what we know as walkthroughs' (Tosca 2003b: 6).

12　'My personal favorite is Clovis, the poem-quoting Nexus-6 rep and main antagonist. It's the first time in a game that I've actually liked the bad guy better than my own good guy character' (Darren Zimmerman 22/12/98) *Gamespot*. 'You can either kill the dying Clovis or suffer his poetry reading until he dies. Of course, McCoy never did like poetry' (http://www.cheatbook.de/wfiles/

bladerun.htm). 'In the movie, Roy Batty quotes from Blake once – here, the replicant character Clovis spouts Blake almost every time he opens his mouth. "Without contraries is no progression", he says at one point, an apt quotation from Plate 3 of Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. It's just a sound-bite, an empty way of trying to create a consistent character' (http://home.gold-en.net/~csp/cd/reviews/blade_game.htm).

13 For example I got into a situation where I had to kill Lieutenant Guzza in order to continue the game and not being killed by the replicants, when that was the last thing that I wanted McCoy to do.

14 It is difficult to actually aim with the mouse, so that sometimes McCoy can be killed because the player is too slow at aiming, but this can be prevented by playing on the 'easy' level.

15 Only if we have chosen the option 'player's choice' in McCoy moods. Any other mood (polite, normal, surly, erratic) will mean that he does all the talking by himself, without player intervention.

16 A new area appears in our map, or we will be specifically told by a non-playing character.

17 For a full explanation of the concept of quests and their use in game design, see Tosca 2003a. The semantic level of a quest is related to how it contributes to telling a story, and the structural level has to do with gameplay, that is, which actions the player needs to perform in order to complete the quest.

18 As Louis Castle, executive producer of the game, said: 'the game does not lend well to missions' (http://www.westwoodsurf.com/index_blade.html) official site, accessed August 1999.

19 The sewers have exits to McCoy's apartment, Izo's shop and Bob's Bullets in Animoid Row, the Metro in Nightclub Row, the Garage of the Hysteria Hall and Howie Lee's Backyard. From these spaces we can walk to all the others as they are connected in a dense net.

20 As is obvious from reading the different fora and websites that offer walk-throughs for the game. These examples are from the *Gamespot* players reviews area: '*Blade Runner* makes you think before you act and lets you decide whom to befriend and trust, and whom to hate and fear. Once you get halfway through the game, you'll realise that there are actually no good guys and no bad guys. Certain characters become your friends or enemies depending on your actions' (John Loos 22/06/99); 'You can make subtle decisions that greatly affect the outcome of the story. For example, shooting a certain character or letting them go will spin the storyline into two different directions, and then relates it to the multiple endings' (Darren Zimmerman 22/12/98); 'The game sometimes gets heavily philosophical, and asks, "What is it to be human?" so fans of *Duke* and *Quake* will be bored!' (Jordan Rosanne 09/09/98).

21 All walkthroughs contain advice as to how to reach the different endings, as-suming that every player will be interested in this multiplicity of the story. A common topic in the fora is the discussion (and demands for help) about per-sonal (emotional) goals, for example: how can I save Izo?, how can I talk to Dektora?, how can I meet Crystal on the roof again? (http://www.bladezone.

com/phpBB2/viewforum.php?f=5).

22 I have counted at least thirteen while playing.

23 This is one of the main questions in the fora, as well as a part of most walk-throughs that try to describe different endings and hint at how to get to them.

24 In the *Gamespot* players forum, Frank Kowalkowski mentions the incoherence problem. After ending a game as a replicant sympathiser he loads the game again a few scenes before and 'The ending changes, I'm human again, and the blade runner I killed five minutes ago is now allegedly a rep sympathiser. Say what?! One action not only changed the story, it made it incoherent, inconsistent, and gave me a far worse ending' (22/12/97).