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# Beyond *Blade Runner*

## A dialogic of the everyday in Macau's fictional landscape

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### *Abstract*

The movie *Blade Runner* has been posited as ‘a metaphor of the postmodern condition,’<sup>i</sup> a proposition advanced by Giuliana Bruno and David Harvey. The hybridity of the landscape depicted in the film evokes postmodernism’s emphasis on ‘fiction rather than function, signs rather than things’<sup>ii</sup> drawing as Bruno suggests on objectified, synthesised images of Hong Kong or Tokyo Bruno.<sup>iii</sup> Narratives of film afford much in helping us to understand our world, and ourselves within it; sci-fi cinema is no exception to this, offering us “an arena in which we can explore exactly what it is to be ‘human.’”<sup>iv</sup> Yet as David Byrne reminds us, ‘we can get more from science fiction than nightmares from *Blade Runner*.’<sup>v</sup>

Upon initial encounter the city of Macau would seem to have much in common with *Blade Runner*. Its urban fabric and its cultural and political history have generated a palimpsest-like landscape built up of layers of differing urban planning and architectural styles and typologies, each giving evidence of their temporal as well as spatial origins. The more recent addition of the commodified edifices of the casinos, utopian artefacts which offer behind their recycled facades (seemingly reproduced from, and reproducible anytime and anywhere) an intensity of introverted experience that draws one further and further into an interiorized world. The equally recent addition of the preserved landscape of the now World Heritage Site Portuguese Old-Town would seem to reinforce critiques of the sell-out of place to corporate image and commercial transaction.

Moving beyond the signage however, upon further investigation through a Bakhtinian, dialogical lens we find a life present in the city that has played out in the everyday. Both away from and even amidst the seeming stage sets, people ritually navigate through and appropriate space for their own intentions, and through their actions offer up other, yet simultaneous and interdependent trajectories of patterns of urban living. Such actions offer clues for future development, and a framework through which to view the past. It is such transactional events between inhabitant and their surroundings, and between inhabitant and inhabitant, that leave nebulous yet meaningful mnemonic traces of our lives upon place. As Kevin Lynch reminds us, these define the city for us as much as the strategic, panoptic projections of grand narratives upon space.<sup>vi</sup>

This paper will use as a point of reference contemporary Macau’s landscape, a setting defined by juxtapositions of culture and politics, as well as *hubris* and humility. It will consider what we can learn from it about urban renewal, and the dialogical relations that underpin how Macau’s citizens inhabit and make meaning in their lives and lived environment.

### *Acknowledgements*

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## Introduction

'All he'd wanted was the same answers the rest of us want. Where do I come from?  
Where am I going?'<sup>vii</sup>  
(Rick Deckard, *Blade Runner*)

Guilano Bruno's incisive text 'Ramble City: Postmodernism and "Blade Runner"' advances the intriguing proposition that, 'the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* is China(in)town.'<sup>viii</sup> Elsewhere she suggests 'the city is called Los Angeles, but it is an L. A. that looks very much like New York, Hong Kong, or Tokyo.'<sup>ix</sup> Ultimately, she posits the movie *Blade Runner* as 'a metaphor of the postmodern condition.'<sup>x</sup>

These propositions are engaging. As architects, any discussion about the city and its meaning peaks our curiosity, as does the co-joining of one discourse (science fiction) with another (urbanism<sup>xi</sup>). It's also interesting owing to our respective academic, professional and scholarly engagement with China, especially with Macau. Having read David Harvey's 'Time and space in the postmodern cinema' in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, and subsequently Bruno's essay which Harvey draws upon and points toward, this prompted reflection upon the insights Bruno's essay reveals and what an examination of Macau through such a lens might offer?

Our intention is to pursue this inquiry, considering where Macau has come from (i.e., its past and how that informs its present) and where it is going (i.e., possibilities for its future, and implications posed for our conception of urban renewal). Within this interrogation, and pertinent to thoughts of multiplicity underlying discourse on postmodernism and Macau itself, is an act of bringing together multiple perspectives. This approach embraces Mikhail Bakhtin's discourse on dialogism, understanding that things are defined in their relationship with other things.<sup>xii</sup> Drawing upon disciplines of cultural theory, film and urbanism, our methodology reflects what Robert Stam identifies as the 'migratory' cross-disciplinary drift of the Bakhtinian method.<sup>xiii</sup>

This text builds upon Bruno's formative essay, and its discussion of *Blade Runner's* examination of place and identity. This paper takes forward this enhanced understanding to explore the formation and inhabitation of our cities through a dialogical lens, and the possibilities this reveals for the making of the urban.

## Methodology

In *Subversive Pleasures – Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*, Stam pursues a 'threshold encounter', employing Bakhtin's ideas, notably dialogism, to critically examine film. This re-appropriation of Bakhtin positions Stam with others who have drawn upon Bakhtin to examine cultural theory, and a range of disciplines from education through to psychotherapy and more. Stam takes Bakhtin's 'concepts "beyond" their original field of reference' to probe the medium of film.<sup>xiv</sup> As Stam recounts, Bakhtin's intentional open-endedness offers possibility for such discussions.<sup>xv</sup> Bakhtin saw discourses as purposefully on-going acts; to aim for conclusion would delimit the discussion's evolution. For Bakhtin, 'when dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end.'<sup>xvi</sup>

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is concerned with relationships, and what happens when disparate entities (e.g., ideas, people) meet at the boundary between each other. Within this

relationship, what is central is how these entities interact and inform each other, even across any differences. Stam notes, ‘the concept of dialogism suggests that every text forms an intersection of textural surfaces where other texts may be read.’<sup>xxvii</sup> This intertextuality offers up opportunity to bring two disparate entities together, and through their encounter enable each to reveal not only one (the self) to the other, but equally the self to the self.<sup>xxviii</sup> Within this methodology we bring together three elements: director Ridley Scott’s 1982 film *Blade Runner*; two texts using *Blade Runner* as a springboard for discursive discussion; and the city of Macau. These are co-joined to explore the conception of and inhabitation of place, and what this reveals about (re)making of the urban.

Narratives of film help us understand our world, and ourselves within it; science fiction<sup>xix</sup> is no exception to this, offering “an arena in which we can explore exactly what it is to be ‘human.’”<sup>xx</sup> In parallel, science fiction affords an incisive lens on the urban condition, with a ‘growing call within urban studies for a greater appreciation of the critical common ground offered by sf, and its relevance to expanding conceptions of the urban.’<sup>xxi</sup> This observation intimates two possibilities; science fiction as a framework to anticipate future urbans, and to interrogate past and existing cities. In either case, science fiction is used to (re)present our world and ourselves within it.<sup>xxii</sup> In this sense, science fiction provides insight about what the city as imagined might be, or what the city as real is.

The latter tactic of interrogating existing cities underpins our intention to consider what the urban condition is not. This approach understands cinematic landscape’s potential to make and contest meaning.<sup>xxiii</sup> Our point of reference is Macau, the former Portuguese colony and now (semi) autonomous region within China. Macau is identified as the most densely populated city on the planet, and shares commonality in terms of colonial history and recent intensive urbanisation with nearby Hong Kong. While Hong Kong is a place of finance and commerce, Macau’s current outward profile (and skyline) is generated by the gaming industry, which provides approximately 50% of Macau’s GDP.<sup>xxiv</sup> Its value as a point of reference is offered through the coming together of disparate beliefs, customs, ideas, values, people and morphology in the constrained space of this very dense city.

The lens employed to examine Macau is *Blade Runner*. This seminal film is based loosely on Phillip K. Dick’s 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Set in Los Angeles in the year 2019, the city like the planet Earth has seen better days; decay, overcrowding and scarcity, simultaneously overlaid with advanced technology, define life here. Many of those who can have fled Earth to live on colonies in space. Inhabitation off-world is enabled through the work of replicants, bio-engineered, synthetic humans produced by the powerful Tyrell Corporation; the replicants are in effect slaves tasked with the dirty work of making outer space inhabitable. They are limited by a four year life span and are not allowed on Earth. The film centres around the protagonist Rick Deckard, a ‘blade runner’ whose job it is to seek out, identify and ‘retire’ (i.e., eliminate) four replicants who have managed to return to Earth. Providing a crucial counterpoint to the four replicants and Deckard is Rachel, herself a replicant but unlike the others one endowed with childhood memories and a life not limited to four years. Underpinning Rachel’s belief she is human is a photograph of what she believes to be her mother and her younger self. The film moves back and forth across the city as Deckard tracks down the “illegal” replicants, juxtaposed with the developing relationship of Deckard and Rachel.

*Blade Runner* is a threshold in terms of cinematic influences; in one sense retrospective, it draws upon imagery of 1920’s German Expressionism (e.g., *Metropolis*) and narratives of 1940s – 1950’s detective-based film noir.<sup>xxv</sup> In turn it has significantly influenced subsequent films, its imagery adopted as a *de facto* urban future in cinema.<sup>xxvi</sup> Simultaneously, it serves as one model for

nightmares of a dystopian future.<sup>xxvii</sup> Its value as a lens here is to (re)examine Macau, and their joint potential to afford speculation on an ontology of place and identity.

Our final points of reference are Bruno's 'Ramble City: Postmodernism and "Blade Runner"', and Harvey's 'Time and space in the postmodern cinema.' While the subject of numerous critical essays, *Blade Runner* and these texts interest us owing to Bruno's discussion of the postmodern-presence of the future Los Angeles cityscape.<sup>xxviii</sup> Of concurrent interest is Bruno's designation of Hong Kong as a geographic reference, and identification of *Blade Runner's* Los Angeles as China(in)town.<sup>xxix</sup> While we can question the selective interpretations of Hong Kong (and Tokyo) underpinning their identification as reference points for *Blade Runner's*, that is beyond our scope here; the intention here is to use these texts as a springboard to discuss what Macau is not.

### *Blade Runner's postmodern city – fusion and confusion*

Bruno recalls Frederic Jameson's suggestion that 'the postmodern condition is characterized by a schizophrenic temporality and a spatial pastiche.'<sup>xxx</sup> In this pastiche there exists an 'effacement of key boundaries and separations, a process of erosion of distinctions,'<sup>xxxi</sup> while schizophrenia is 'basically a breakdown of the relationship between signifiers'.<sup>xxxii</sup> Examining this proposition, we deduce that the latter arises out of the former; that is, the lack of distinction, the erosion and blurring of boundaries, creates a condition of schizophrenia. Within this text we will reframe these concepts, particularly with regards to their relevance to *Blade Runner* and Macau, as a state of fusion and confusion. Fusion, which can incorporate elements of pastiche, represents a blurring together of cultural representations in terms of substance and time, notably here in the field of urbanism. Concurrently, we understand schizophrenia as a confusion between multiple things; a moving back and forth between each and not having the certainty of being in any one or the other.

In *Blade Runner*, the sense of place that defines the urban landscape of 2019 Los Angeles is borrowed and fused into a whole. It is not autogenic, but rather reflects Bruno's proposition that *Blade Runner's* urban image comprises forms and styles appropriated from across both space and time. We see glimpses of buildings and spaces that remind us of others: the Egyptian-like pyramid of the Tyrell Corporation; the Mayan-like interior of Deckard's apartment (echoing Frank Lloyd Wright's Mayan-inspired Ennis House); and of course the ground-level streetscapes that as Bruno suggests look 'very much like New York, Hong Kong, or Tokyo.'<sup>xxxiii</sup> Even the language evokes this fusion, a "'mishmash of Japanese, Spanish, German, what have you.'<sup>xxxiv</sup> Jameson's sense of pastiche dominates in this landscape, but it is not simply a copy. The landscape does not replicate the original, but instead in borrowing from it simultaneously negates it, just as it does any authenticity as a copy. It represents itself as an original. This 'pastiche is intended as an aesthetic of quotations pushed to the limit; it is an incorporation of forms, an imitation of dead styles deprived of any satirical impulse.'<sup>xxxv</sup>

As Bruno continues, 'the postmodern aesthetic of *Blade Runner* is thus the result of recycling, (of) fusion.'<sup>xxxvi</sup> We can recognize elements, but they are only glimpses of something we think we recognize. But they no longer reflect where and when they are from; indeed, they don't refer to a specific time and place. 'The pertinence and uniqueness of architecture to specific places, cultures, and times has been lost in postmodernism. The metropolis of *Blade Runner* quotes not only from different spatial structures but from temporal ones as well.'<sup>xxxvii</sup> These words echo Edward Relph's warning of an 'instant environment machine' which is capable of reproducing an image of place at anytime and anywhere.<sup>xxxviii</sup> There is not a dialogue between past and present, or here and there. In fact, there is no longer a here and there. There is simply a reductive aesthetic,

in which the whole is far less than the sum of its parts; indeed, the parts have been synthesized into one totalizing image.

Moreover, the film's hybridized landscape evokes postmodernism's emphasis on 'fiction rather than function, signs rather than things.'<sup>xxxix</sup> That is, the images presented of place are objectified and synthesised; they are no longer tied to the people who made them or inhabited them, and the meanings that accrued to place through this. Instead, just as spatial form is appropriated and refabricated without reference to its origins, so too without reference to its meaning. Time, place (and meaning) collapse into one another.<sup>xl</sup> Gone are the narratives embedded in place through the lives of its inhabitants; rather the stories of place are of the images themselves.

In the absence of any deeper meaning, without anything of substance or tangible experience, what representation resorts to spectacle. Bruno notes that *Blade Runner's* post-industrial society 'is the "society of the spectacle," living in the "ecstasy of communication."<sup>xli</sup> Spatial form has no substance other than itself; it has no meaning beyond visual stimulation for its own sake. What we are left with is scenography.<sup>xlii</sup> Emphasis here shifts to the processing of information over lived experience.<sup>xliii</sup>

For the replicant Rachel in *Blade Runner*, image is everything. Questioned on the realities of her existence, she holds to an image of her mother and herself. The image, more than memory of any lived experience, is proof of her humanity. In lieu of something real, symbolic existence captured in an image becomes real. No matter that the image is a simulacrum. The image is objectified, displaced from its experiential, spatial, temporal and conceptual origins; here the image can become anything you want it to be. Not only can we be anywhere at any time, but things can be anything, and even we can be anyone.

Yet if we can be anyone, who then are we? Various discourse attests to our identity (i.e., who we are) as linked to where and when we are, and how what we do relates to both.<sup>xliv</sup> Without any external stability, our internal stability is shaken, and so are disengaged from place and time and ourselves. In this condition confusion overtakes. 'The schizophrenic condition is characterized by the inability to experience the persistence of the "I" over time...the schizophrenic does not have our experience of temporal continuity.'<sup>xlv</sup> For the replicants in *Blade Runner*, whose short lifespan affords no future, neither is there an authentically lived past. In the absence of the latter, Rachel (who does have a future) attempts to give her present and future life an authenticity through an image of a borrowed past. Bruno observes, 'their assurance of a future relies on the possibility of acquiring a past. In their attempt at establishing a temporally persistent identity, the replicants search for their origins.'<sup>xlvi</sup> This identity, and a meaningful existence, is found in an image. 'The photograph (image) represents the trace of an origin and thus a personal identity, the proof of having existing and therefor of having the right to exist.'<sup>xlvii</sup> As for Rachel and the replicants, so too for the urban landscape of *Blade Runner*. Borrowed uncritically from here and there, and now and then, place is reduced to a land scene devoid of the real meaning that might come from those who make it; this scenography is projected on to space, which affords the inhabitants an 'instanciation of a new form of historicity.'<sup>xlviii</sup> Who they are is reduced to what the image of the place defines them to be.

### *Macau is Blade Runner – fusion and confusion*

Upon initial encounter the city of Macau would seem to have much in common with the Los Angeles depicted in *Blade Runner*. Within the landscape are scattered elements: fragments of southern China (including Hong Kong), 1500s and 1700s Lisbon,, early 20<sup>th</sup> century European

Art Deco, late 20<sup>th</sup> century Western generic office and utopian-esque social housing blocks. A stretching of spatial form is unsurprisingly present in the exuberance of the Las Vegas-worthy casinos, but also in some newer commercial and cultural buildings which compete with the casinos in terms of form and lighting as ornament. These artefacts evidence no apparent critical thinking, or even a knowing sense of parody, in form or siting in Macau's cityscape.

These buildings are of course not in Hong Kong, Lisbon, Europe, the West or Las Vegas – the latter have their own history, which is not Macau's. Equally, Macau's buildings have become disconnected from their roots: Portuguese colonial architecture inhabited by Chinese shopkeepers selling Chinese or international goods; the Chinese old town inhabited by Phillipinos and other recent immigrants; a replica of Venice's St. Marks Square inhabited by Australians. The recent addition of the preserved landscape of the Portuguese Old-Town would seem to reinforce critiques of the sell-out of place to corporate image and commercial transaction – architecture reduced to a backdrop for selfies and yet another box to tick off of some notional tourist list. Echoing John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze*, the images people capture become the stories taken home with them.<sup>xlix</sup>

In this landscape image is everything; the image projected to tourists, to neighbouring China.<sup>l</sup> The streetscape is dominated by images as if 2D screen sets. They are meant to be merely looked at but not too closely; they quickly remind you of something so that you can then move on your way into the depths of the casino to unquestioningly give up your money. There is of course a game of one-upmanship played out by the casinos, resulting in a landscape in which buildings evoke fantasies of wealth, the West, or whatever dreams the spectator might harbour. These environments offer a facsimile of that life, even if momentarily; after everything is done what remains is the overpowering image of Macau.

In its early years Macau was only a stopping point, inhabited by Portuguese merchants who settled here in temporal intervals as they moved back and forth along the trading route from West to East, and a Chinese diaspora who sought trading and working opportunities within and on the periphery of Macau.<sup>li</sup> A sense of economic mobility still pervades Macau. Alongside the tourists, much of Macau's population is from somewhere else; 1/3 of the population for example is first generation Chinese. They have been dropped into an alien landscape, working in the otherworldly casinos performing hospitality and service jobs and living in super-dense blocks of housing, far removed from what is for many their agrarian roots. This displacement is reinforced by the movement of over 300, 000 people each day across the Macau-Chinese mainland border for employment, shopping or study, as well as tourism.<sup>lii</sup>

Within such a spatially and temporally-distorted landscape there is huge potential for disorientation – shifting from one language to the next, one political and socio-cultural context to the next, one sense of time period to the next – and potential for identity to be thrown by this experience. It makes for a duality, if not multiplicity, of existence. Confusion comes not so much from a fluidity of inhabitation but rather from the potential of not belonging to either place. This challenge is further exacerbated as the frivolous and serious long ago merged in this landscape.<sup>liii</sup> In this context it is understandable how image can become such a huge marker of where, when and even who you are. Jameson carries this forward, noting our spatial environments have simultaneously overwhelmed and undermined 'the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.'<sup>liiv</sup>

*Macau is not Blade Runner – palimpsest and ritual*



In the above we talk more about the possibilities of Macau as if *Blade Runner*, rather than to suggest its reality. Despite seeming continuities, Macau tells a different story. To understand this story, we first need to reframe the discussion, moving away from Bruno's characterization of *Blade Runner's* urban image as postmodern metaphor.<sup>lv</sup> As an alternative, we will posit a reading of Macau through a dialogical lens.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of *dialogism*, and with it *chronotope*, recognises that our identities, and the artefacts (including place) and actions that form part of our lives, are formed not autogenically but through their relationship, even across difference, with other people, entities and/or events. These concepts stand in opposition to discourses which would project a monological, totalizing narrative. Bakhtin viewed such narratives, including those which through a Hegelian dialectical synthesis would posit some form of unified hybrid, as ultimately closed and reductive.<sup>lvi</sup>

Bakhtin's dialogism in contrast is open and relational.<sup>lvii</sup> 'Bakhtin was not sympathetic to the ultimate fusion or erasing of differences'<sup>lviii</sup> that would result in the merging of two into one. Rather, he advocated they remain independent, though still interrelated. What Bakhtin sought was a mutually beneficial relationship between different entities. Bakhtin's concept of chronotope understands events as being situated in an interrelationship of space and time. Place and time become more present; place is no longer displaced, time is no longer detemporalised, but rather the event occurs as something particular in particular place, at a particular time and carried out by particular people.<sup>lix</sup>

Through a lens of dialogism, and with it chronotope, we posit that Macau is not a fusion of borrowed elements. Nor do its elements suggest a reproduction of images anywhere, at any time and for anyone. Granted, there is an element of mixing, notably between East (Chinese) and West (Portuguese),<sup>lx</sup> but this is part of a natural evolution of what was immediately present in place and time, and not an uncritical hybrid generated across time. This condition also evidences an understanding that cultures are always (and long have been) in a process of 'hybridity,'<sup>lxi</sup> and is not a specifically postmodern phenomenon.

Echoing Bakhtin, buildings and spaces in Macau's urban environment are individual elements (or more to the point, individual approaches in their conceptualisation), and yet also have relationship with each other across the city, and with similar approaches across time. There is a narrative in which each is testimony to their temporal as well as spatial origins – they are not borrowed but very much part of their time and place.

We can see evidence of this in Macau's historic Chinese and Portuguese architecture. Each reflects the aspirations of their builders, and the limitations delineated by what they knew. Whether as Chinese diaspora or Portuguese trader, each arrived and brought with them what their knowledge of aesthetics and tectonics rooted in their origins. It was only over time, through a natural process of interaction between each group, that influences of one upon the other were seen, as opposed to an unthinking appropriation of the other.

In her text Bruno describes an urban structure in which conditions are superimposed and condensed on one another.<sup>lxii</sup> She further suggests that this structure exhibits a polyvalence of multiple parts, and yet these parts are interchangeable – again reminding us that they could be anything, anywhere and anytime. Macau is also polyvalent, but not in the sense that Bruno writes. Rather than a fusion, Macau is a palimpsest, understood as the accumulation of layers formed over time. Reference to palimpsest typically elicits an interpretation of tangible physical layers, but they are equally intangible, embracing a cultural dimension as much as a physical dimension.<sup>lxiii</sup> Moreover, palimpsest is not a mere repository of fixed conditions, and should be

understood as something more active with the potential for layers to be ‘interconnected and interdependent.’<sup>lxiv</sup> The layers of are not one synthesised thing, but rather remain as multiple, independent and simultaneously interrelated things. One does not necessarily negate or temporally demarcate the other. Traces of the past layer the present, growing and evolving over time as subsequent layers build on its surface.

Macau is moreover a particular type of palimpsest. It is not the expected vertical layering, but rather a palimpsest of layers that sit horizontally side by side. This relationship reflects Macau’s history of development, with distinct zones of spatial and temporal growth which grew as distinct pockets across time. A key aspect of this is evident in a literal east / west split, as if a line across the island of Macau, demarcating Portuguese/European Macau and Chinese Macau. These areas have not fused and remain independent yet influencing each other across this notional line.<sup>lxv</sup> As Jonathan Porter adds, ‘a visible and very real cultural frontier was thus established in Macau. It is easy to make too much of mingling that occurred across that frontier...blended at some points but remained distinctly separate at others.’<sup>lxvi</sup> Porter further notes, ‘Macau was a threshold between two worlds, which some Europeans and Chinese succeeded in crossing and others did not.’<sup>lxvii</sup> Distinctive here is the use of the word threshold to suggest a point of crossing over, not of fusing. By way of illustration Porter refers to the presence of two spiritual maps – one Buddhist, the other Catholic – that overlap but don’t intertwine across Macau.<sup>lxviii</sup> The meeting of these two worlds does not however negate each, nor do they fuse into some form of synthetic hybrid; they touch and inform each other, together creating a collagist construction of place.<sup>lxix</sup>

This place making occurs on a broader cultural scale within the urban landscape in Porter’s discussion of Macau. Yet the construction of place equally occurs at much smaller scale, in the quotidian interaction of individuals and communities. It is realised in the distinctive performances people carry out in everyday life. Various performances are enacted in Macau’s streets and open spaces. These range from the more private act of making an offering in a small shrine outside the front door home, to more communal rituals in gathering spaces within the neighbourhood, such as the appropriation of public space by mothers and grandmothers watching children play nearby, to early morning exercises by the elderly in the cool of an overhead tree canopy. Similar activities can see being carried out by the relatives, friends and former neighbours back where they are from in mainland China.

While some of these performances are carried out unthinkingly, they become what Catharine Bell has identified as ritualized behaviour, a process that distinguishes one act from another and makes that act meaningful.<sup>lxx</sup> Through the practice of performing that act, ideas, beliefs and values are brought into action and exposed.<sup>lxxi</sup> Repeated practice, and possibly (though not necessarily) conscious reflection on it, cultivates a distinct sensibility towards the world. Ritualized behaviour extends beyond the act itself to the making of space. Through performing an act in a particular place we come to understand that place as the site of the ritual,<sup>lxxii</sup> and so conceptually re-schematize that place.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Through this, we come to understand that the meaning of place is not only what it gives us, but equally what we emplace upon it through our actions. Through emplacement we are able to locate and orient ourselves within that place.<sup>lxxiv</sup> The sensibility cultivated through ritual can extend beyond the site,<sup>lxxv</sup> as this sensibility is not fixed and can be manipulated to respond to other places and times.<sup>lxxvi</sup> In this sense rituals and the sensibility they engender are not static but are mobile and transformable.<sup>lxxvii</sup> It is this that allows the inhabitants of Macau to deal with the multiple spatial conditions of place and time present in the palimpsest of Macau.

In discussing the postmodern and *Blade Runner*, Jameson refers to how the lives of characters are lived only in the present.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Through ritual, the lives of the participants have continuity with the

past and future, even extending beyond their own life span. The ritual's meanings, memories and values carry on beyond the immediacy of its place and time, passed on from one to another (e.g., generation). Through such actions, whether individually or shared through communal knowledge and understanding, mnemonic traces are emplaced on the landscape. These traces become markers for others, who understand how the space is defined by the ritual not only in geometric terms but in thought and feeling.

The power of ritual ensures that place, time and meaning don't collapse onto each other, but rather are re-invigorated, providing a connection between past, present and future, spatial form and the self. Thus, one can experience the 'I' over time, with the identity of the individual now reaffirmed, connected back to place, time and others. While acting to recall, ritual also acts to frame future inhabitation of space. Amidst even the seeming stage sets of Macau, people ritually navigate through and appropriate space for their own intentions, and through their actions offer up other, yet simultaneous and interdependent patterns of urban living. Ritual frames how we understand space, and our experience is not reduced to an image. Rather a set of behaviours and meanings associated with that place makes that place for us, and also make us; these, and not an image, become the proof of our existence.

### *conclusion*

Given the power of rituals to generate a sense of place, rituals should have a greater presence in how we approach the making of place. We wouldn't go as far as Michel de Certeau to suggest that visions of place are generated in a laboratory and then imposed on space as if some *tabula rasa*,<sup>lxxxix</sup> while there is unfortunately a degree of truth to that critique, holding that singular perspective fails to acknowledge a breadth of work that engages with people. What is overlooked however is the role that rituals play in the people's lives. Ritual is typically marginalised as an activity associated with religion, primitive societies, or as if routine.<sup>lxxx</sup> While true, rituals are equally understood by anthropologists, historians, philosophers and sociologists as a universal trait of human experience.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Rituals play a powerful role in making us aware of who we are, and how we relate (in terms of outlook and identity) to the wider world. It thus seems short-sighted not to consider how ritual might inform the making of that world.

Our making of place equally needs to move beyond image. While we recognise that 'in a global economy, city image matters',<sup>lxxxiii</sup> to approach and represent urban renewal with an emphasis on image is reductive. Doing so frames the urban within totalizing narratives, which rather than being accepted uncritically must be questioned. An understanding of the dialogical nature of the city provides a way forward. The palimpsest-like evolution of the city, including its ability to absorb different spatial-forms over time, and the potential of ritual to enable inhabitants to make sense of that multivalent condition, is part of that dialogic. We need to move away from strategies of a reductive unity that Bakhtin has critiqued, and more towards an accommodation of difference, with individual entities activated through their relationship with others.

In closing we go back to where we began, and Bruno's proposition that *Blade Runner* is 'a metaphor of the postmodern condition.'<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Bruno, and with her Harvey, use this metaphor to call attention to the presence in the film, and in contemporary life, of a loss of a sense of place, and with it a loss of identity. They argue that place and identity have been replaced by an excess of image, manifested in a simulacrum of place and with it a simulacrum of identity. What better space then to interrogate this proposition than Macau, a city long caught between different worlds and whose landscape is seemingly a celebration that image is everything?

Yet Macau is not *Blade Runner*. Identities still remain, both within the urban fabric and more significantly for the people that inhabit that place. Macau's urban fabric is defined by, if not celebrates, an assemblage of different cultural representations. These representations are not fused together in some false synthesis, but rather sit side by side together in a palimpsest where they relate to and inform each other. Within this people negotiate what might otherwise be a destabilising condition, and celebrate their sense of self and memories through ritual. The enacting of ritual, and the mnemonic traces they inscribe in the palimpsest of the urban fabric, guide future inhabitation and our making and remaking of the city.

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#### *End notes*

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<sup>i</sup> Bruno 1987, 62.

<sup>ii</sup> Harvey 1990, 102.

<sup>iii</sup> Bruno 1987.

<sup>iv</sup> King and Krzywinska 2000, 12.

<sup>v</sup> Byrne 1997, 2.

<sup>vi</sup> Lynch 1972.

<sup>vii</sup> Scott, 1982. This quote, part of the voiceover narration spoken by Harrison Ford, is found only on International Editions of *Blade Runner*. This, and other parts of the voiceover, were removed from the Director's Cut version; their removal is attributed to director Ridley Scott and actor Harrison Ford, who were apparently unhappy with it. 'Bladerunner', *Wikiquote*, Available at [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Blade\\_Runner](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Blade_Runner) (Accessed 03.07.18)

<sup>viii</sup> Bruno 1987, 66.

<sup>ix</sup> Bruno 1987, 65.

<sup>x</sup> Bruno 1987, 62.

<sup>xi</sup> The word 'urbanism' is used throughout the text, in lieu of either architecture or urban design, to shift attention away from how either of the latter which are unfortunately sometimes reductively understood as being about a building or (the relationship of) a collection of buildings, and not as also being about the meanings of building(s).

<sup>xii</sup> Bakhtin 1984.

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- <sup>xiii</sup> Stam 19, 1989.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Stam 1989, 16.
- <sup>xv</sup> Stam 1989.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Bakhtin 1984, 252.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Stam 1989, 15.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Bakhtin 1984.
- <sup>xix</sup> Though stated as science fiction, which would include representations such as novels, short stories and artwork, this point is applicable to film more generally.
- <sup>xx</sup> King and Krzywinska 2000, 12.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Merrifield.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Burns 2000.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Hopkins 1994-imperfect cinema
- <sup>xxiv</sup> ‘Macau GDP Annual Growth Rate’, 2018.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Williams 1988)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Barlow, 2006.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Byrne 1997.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Bruno 1987.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Bruno 1987, 66
- <sup>xxx</sup> Bruno 1987, 62.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Bruno 1987, 66.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Bruno 1987, 62
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Bruno (1987, 65
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Bruno 1987, 66
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Relph 1993

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<sup>xxxix</sup> Harvey 1990, 102.

<sup>xl</sup> Bruno 1987; '(meaning)' added here by authors.

<sup>xli</sup> Bruno 1987, 67.

<sup>xlii</sup> Bruno 1987.

<sup>xliii</sup> Heynen 1999.

<sup>xliv</sup> Bachelard .

<sup>xlv</sup> Bruno 1987, 70.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Bruno 1987, 70 – 71.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Bruno 1987, 71.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Bruno 1987, 62.

<sup>xlix</sup> Urry 1990.

<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Tieben (2009) has noted how a very conscious decision was made to give the Ponte 16 Casino, which sits on Macau's western edge and is highly visible across the water from China, a European theme, in order to project a distinctly theme to distinguish the resort from the mainland China, and its competing American and Australian-funded casinos.

<sup>li</sup> Porter 2000.

<sup>lii</sup> Breitung 2009.

<sup>liii</sup> Porter 2000, xiv.

<sup>liv</sup> Jameson 1991, 44.

<sup>lv</sup> Bruno 1987, 62.

<sup>lvi</sup> Bakhtin 1984.

<sup>lvii</sup> Clark and Holquist 1984.

<sup>lviii</sup> Emerson 1984, xxxii.

<sup>lix</sup> Bakhtin 1981.

<sup>lx</sup> Porter 2000; Pinheiro and Rong 2016.

<sup>lxi</sup> Bhabha 1990; cited in Menon 2001.

<sup>lxii</sup> Bruno 1987.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Singh 1997.



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- <sup>lxiv</sup> Brown and Clark 2010, 8.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Pinheiro and Rong 2016.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Porter 2000, 184.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Porter 2000, 186.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> Porter 2000, 184.
- <sup>lxix</sup> Giddens 1990, 108; cited in Dovey 1999, 49.
- <sup>lxx</sup> Bell 1992.
- <sup>lxxi</sup> Kawano 2005.
- <sup>lxxii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> Bell 1992.
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> Leach 2005.
- <sup>lxxv</sup> Kawano 2005.
- <sup>lxxvi</sup> Bell 1992.
- <sup>lxxvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>lxxviii</sup> Bruno 1987, 70.
- <sup>lxxix</sup> De Certeau 1984.
- <sup>lxxx</sup> Hester 1993.
- <sup>lxxxi</sup> Bell 1992.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Tavenor 2007, 159.
- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> Bruno 1987, 62.