

Factsheet

<i>Blade Runner</i>	1982, USA
Running Time	117 min
Certificate	AA (now 15)
Production Companies	A Ladd Company Release in association with Sir Run Run Shaw through Warner Bros.
'Director's Cut'	1992, 112 min

Key credits

Director:	Ridley Scott
Screenplay:	Hampton Fancher, David Peoples
Original Novel:	Philip K. Dick: <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i>
Producer:	Michael Deeley
Production Designer:	Lawrence G. Paull
Director of Photography:	Jordan Cronenweth
Editor:	Terry Rawlings
Music:	Vangelis
Special Photography Effects:	Entertainment Effects Group

Cast

Rick Deckard:	Harrison Ford
Roy Batty:	Rutger Hauer
Rachael:	Sean Young
Gaff:	Edward James Olmos
Captain Bryant:	M. Emmet Walsh
Pris:	Daryl Hannah
J.F. Sebastian:	William Sanderson
Leon:	Brion James
Doctor Tyrell:	Joe Turkel
Zhora:	Joanna Cassidy

Synopsis

Five NEXUS 6 Androids or 'Replicants' have rebelled against their 'maker', Dr. Tyrell and the Tyrell Corporation. They have arrived on Earth from 'Off-World' to discover when they were 'born' so that they can in turn know when their pre-programmed deaths will be. They also seek revenge on those humans who designed them to have such a limited life-span in the first place. Ex-Blade Runner (a particular variety of law-enforcer), Rick Deckard, is forced out of retirement to handle the assignment to kill – or 'retire' – them. In the course of his investigations Deckard falls in love with Rachael, one of Dr. Tyrell's most advanced replicants. It is in part through discovering the truth about her replicant status that Deckard finally comes to question his own human identity. An archetypal anti-hero, Deckard kills three of the rebels and fights a final battle with the lead replicant, Roy Batty, in the derelict, rain-soaked Bradbury building. Roy Batty emerges triumphant but instead of allowing Deckard to fall to his death, rescues him, moments before his own programmed life-span comes to an end. In the original 1982 release, Gaff, a fellow policeman, allows Deckard and Rachael to escape to the country away from the suffocating city. In the 'Director's Cut' the film ends in the city, with an uncertain future for Deckard (and Rachael) since by the film's closure he has arguably also been revealed to be a replicant.

Budget

\$28 million

US Release Date and Strategy

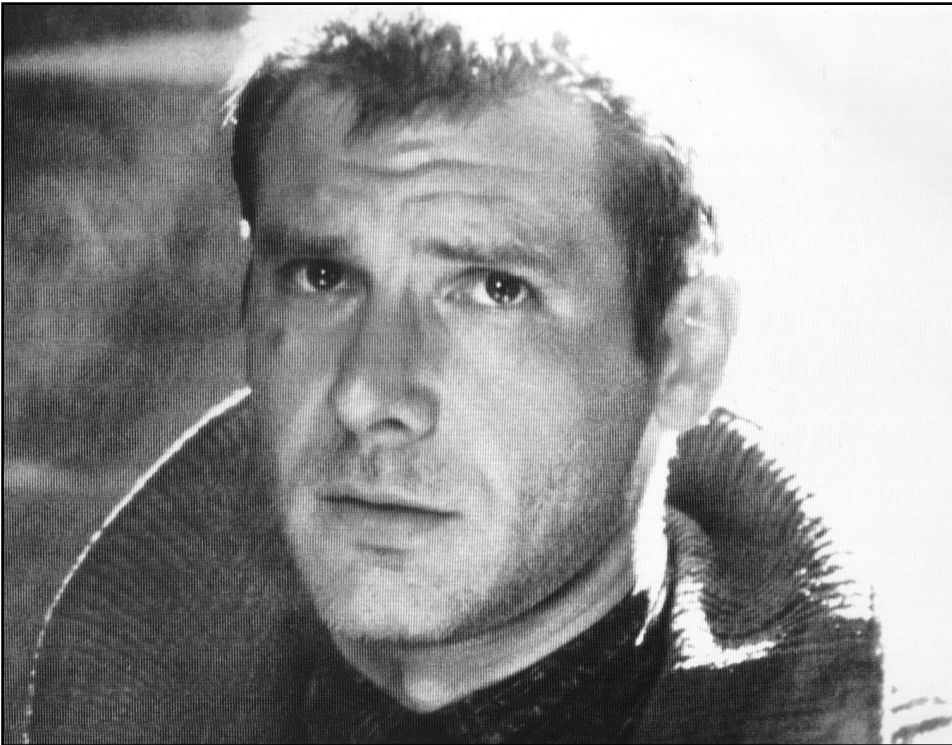
Opened on the 25 June 1982, on 1290 screens, throughout the United States.

Opening weekend: \$ 6.15 million

Total gross: \$14.5 million

Introduction: Reading (into) the Greatest Science Fiction Film Ever Made

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Harrison Ford as Deckard

Few things reveal so sharply as science fiction the wishes, hopes, fears, inner stresses and tensions of an era, or define its limitations with such exactness. (H.L. Gold in Kuhn, 1990)

***Blade Runner* (1982, Director's Cut, 1992) has become one of the most lauded science fiction films ever made. Cult fans dedicate websites to it, such as *The Replicant Site*, and organise conventions to consider again and again its cultural and aesthetic merits, and to offer collective answers and solutions to its ambiguous or open-ended narrative. Academics have written about it in terms of its racial and sexual politics, its exploration of humanity, and of the way it challenges many of the accepted/expected codes and conventions of the science fiction film. *Blade Runner* is considered by the British Film Institute to be a 'Modern Classic' (see Scott Bukatman's excellent *Blade Runner* book, 1997), and is often one of the most written about films when it comes to science fiction readers such as Annette Kuhn's *Alien Zone* (1990). Science fiction courses, such as the one I run at the Southampton Institute, use *Blade Runner* as the seminal text with which to explore the poetics and politics of**

the science fiction genre more widely. *Blade Runner* gets repeat viewing on late night terrestrial television, and its visual and narrative influence extends not only to other science fiction films, such as *Dark City* (1998), but to fictional films more generally, such as the rain-soaked thriller, *Se7en* (1995). *Blade Runner*, with its dystopian future, nihilistic impulses, psychopathic cyborgs and mesmerising cityscapes is a film that seems to effect profoundly those who come into contact with it – so much so that one can argue that it acts as a doorway into the wishes, hopes, fears, inner stresses and tensions of an era that now stretches beyond the 20 years or so since the film's making.

This, of course, was not always the case. The film's opening weekend receipts were disappointingly just over \$6 million, and by the time Warner Bros. decided to pull the film from distribution, due to these poor and declining ticket sales, *Blade Runner* had made only \$14.5 million at the box-office, making it one of the biggest commercial failures of the summer, bringing in less than half the cost of its production. Critics struggled with the film also: *Variety* (16 June 1982) called it 'dramatically muddled', while Gene Siskel of the *Chicago*

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Tribune argued that the film 'looks terrific but is empty at its core' (25 June 1982). The initial commercial and critical reception for *Blade Runner* was little short of disastrous.

However, if one were to examine the history of cinema, or in fact the history of almost any art form, one would find countless examples of a film being poorly received, or an artist's piece of work being lambasted, only to eventually become accepted as a masterpiece of its genre/form. Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) is one such film example, while the misunderstood genius of the painter Van Gogh another. In fact, films that innovate, trouble or straddle the commercial with the artistic (as *Blade Runner* surely does) often suffer from this sort of misunderstanding and critical mauling. One might contentiously argue that one of the acid tests for whether a film is truly great or not is whether it was misunderstood or poorly received on its initial release.

Blade Runner dared to be generically and culturally different. Against the rise of the science fiction blockbuster in the late 1970s and the repeated promise of action, special effects and awesome spectacle by films such as *Star Wars* (1977), *Blade Runner* instead 'layered' its depressing, noirish *mise-en-scène* and laboured over its intricate storytelling. *Blade Runner* meditated on the nature of human existence, explored humanity and talked seriously about the (post)modern world, while other science fiction films of the time took you on a cinematic roller-coaster ride that left you breathless but ultimately disappointed.

Commercial science fiction films of the period generally offered up utopian solutions to earth-bound crises, often in the form of an Alien Messiah figure who comes to represent hope and redemption to faulty, failing human lives. In *E.T.* (1982) the loveable, cuddly, healing hands of E.T. rescue Elliott's one parent family from disintegration so that by the end of the film each family member has come to know their true worth *through* E.T. In *Blade Runner*, by contrast, narrative ambiguity and a partly inexplicable sense of loss and alienation permeate the entire film, and by narrative closure the only thing certain is that certainty itself (over one's identity and how long one can or will live) has disappeared beneath the skin of humans who could well be robots, and robots who could well be humans. *Blade Runner*, for all its concealed and revealed humanity, examined the modern world through a dark lens. This is a virtual 'doorway' worth entering, then, if only to discover more about *ourselves* and the world we *really* live in.

There are a total of six different versions of *Blade Runner* that have been screened to date: the workprint (1982); the San Diego sneak preview (1982); the US Theatrical Release (1982); the International Theatrical Release (1982, the version shown in the UK); the U.S. Broadcast version (1986) and the Director's Cut (1992). However, for the purpose of this guide two versions of the film will be analysed: the original U.S. Theatrical release of 1982 (only marginally different from the International release) and the Director's Cut of 1992.

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Because of poor test screenings where people complained about a confusing plot and a dour ending, the original theatrically released version has a studio enforced voice-over narration (delivered by Rick Deckard/Harrison Ford), and a 'romantic' ending that shows Deckard and Rachael (Sean Young) escaping from the city into an idyllic mountain landscape (footage that was actually taken from the out-takes of Stanley Kubrick's horror film, *The Shining* (1980)). This utopian ending in part suggests some sort of narrative closure. The voice-over is removed in the *Director's Cut* and the ending, now set in the city, perhaps symbolically suggests that Deckard is a replicant, whose own death is therefore imminent and whose entire life has been built on a photographic lie.

In this study of *Blade Runner* explicit reference will only be made to the two different cuts when the similarities and differences between them throw up interesting issues and arguments – as will be the case, for example, when addressing the constraints put on directors in the production process.

Studying Blade Runner is divided into five areas of investigation, areas that mirror the five key concepts of much media analysis: Genre, Narrative, Representation, Institutions (Authors) and Audiences. Much of the work will involve close textual analysis of the film but this will be supported by reference to wider cultural and ideological issues, and to production and reception contexts. What I hope to do is get beneath the surface of the film to reveal its hidden messages and textual complexities. This is a work of textual excavation and contextual appreciation. It is a study very much in keeping, then, with the rational, clinical and yet ultimately humanist methods that are employed by Deckard himself to hunt down the replicants in *Blade Runner*.

Since I can remember I have been in love with science fiction film and television. The light saber was always my toy of choice, the science fiction season the only thing worth staying in or up for on TV. I would stand in the garden and stare at the stars, imagining time travel and alien encounters. I still do. When I first watched *Blade Runner*, on late night TV in the early 1980s,

I was so moved by the film that I spoke about its architecture and existential angst (if not in those words!) for weeks – to my Mum and Dad, sisters, school friends, relatives, even to people whom I normally wouldn't speak to. This study guide evolves out of this love, a labour of love, and I hope that if you are not already in love with the film you very soon will be.

Genre

Genre analysis came relatively late to Film Studies. As Annette Kuhn (1990) observes,

Its origins (usually dated to the late 1950s) lay in a populist reaction to the perceived elitism of a film criticism which stressed authorship – the genius or the creativity of one individual, usually male, and usually the director – as the key to understanding films.

Genre analysis, by contrast, attended to the shared visual and narrative codes and conventions that could be detected across a body of filmwork, regardless of who was making the film. So, for example, the western could be examined through its generically specific iconography of stetsons, six-guns, horses, cattle plains, wagon trains, ranches, cowboys, saloon girls, etc. and its narrativised binary oppositions – garden : wilderness, insider : outsider, individual : community.

However, the move to genre-based analysis was also predicated upon the recognition that the Hollywood cinema machine pre-sold and packaged films according to genre related impulses. Posters, press packs, adverts and merchandising all spoke in the signs and codes of genre, and films were green-lit on the basis of their likely generic appeal. Today, one only has to think about how films such as *The Matrix* (1999) are marketed to see how central the genre of science fiction is to films' promotional imagery and sound bites.

Appeal, and pleasure and subject positioning were also given serious consideration under the umbrella of genre

analysis: spectators were increasingly placed centre stage and their engagement with these supposedly repetitive commercial forms critically examined. For the first time in Film Studies popular art or mass entertainment was being examined on its own merits. Genre analysis gave critical weight to film texts that had been previously labelled as 'low art' or commercial nonsense, and to audiences who had been viewed as passive dupes.

Genre analysis, nonetheless, immediately ran into a number of problems; the first being what might be referred to as an 'empiricist dilemma' (Kuhn, 1990). When one attempted to find the origins of a film genre, to go to the very first example of, say, a western, one was faced with the issue of having to use established codes and conventions that had supposedly only emerged after a period of time – after the very first western had been made in fact. This dilemma posed the unanswerable question: how can a 'western' exist *before* its specific visual and narrative codes and conventions have been isolated and established?

Another problem with genre analysis was classification and transformation. When one began to try to put together criteria for what constituted the codes and conventions of a particular genre one found slippage and leakage in terms of consistency in *mise-en-scène* and what were supposedly established narrative patterns. This was because while genre was/is always about repetition and prediction it is also about innovation and renewal. Genre films often try to offer something new and something unexpected in their visual language or storytelling modes. This notion of subtle transformation is tied to both production changes, such as more money being directed to genres that are successful commercially, audience demands, and

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wider historical and cultural transformations. If one were to examine, for example, the B-movie science fiction films of the 1950s with their 1990 counterparts one would, in the main, discover a world of difference in terms of imagery, special effects and narrative concerns. The fear of the Cold War between the USA and Russia dominated the cardboard cut-out look and feel of 1950s sci-fi; while the terrors and pleasures of cyberspace and genetic engineering dominate the concerns of the lavishly produced contemporary sci-fi film.

Hybridity was also a related problem when trying to pin down the specifics of a film genre. Films such as *Calamity Jane* (1953) could be identified as a western, but also as a musical, comedy and romance. Many films, in fact, can be 'unpacked' in this way, not least *Star Wars* which one contemporary critic argued is a western set in space! Of course, the notion of hybridity neatly leads into *Blade Runner*, a film that combines the codes of science fiction with film noir and the police story. But first, an introduction to science fiction more generally.

What is Genre? What is Science Fiction?

Over the last 20 years or so the science fiction film has come to dominate the production and distribution landscape of Hollywood. Each summer, a new, more expensive, more spectacularly lavish sci-fi film makes it to our cinemas to thrill and entertain us. As this is being written in 2003, *The Matrix: Reloaded*, *X-Men 2*, *Terminator 3*, and *Hulk* are the big science fiction blockbusters to hit the multiplex screens. Special effects, once the 'home' of science fiction, stitch together films from all genres, making the 'awe and wonder' factor of science fiction commonplace. Some of the top grossing films of all time are science fiction films – including *E.T.*, *Jurassic Park* (1997) and *Star Wars*. Science fiction, in short, is one of the most important film genres being produced in contemporary Hollywood.

Science fiction can be defined through its recurring *narrative themes*, its shared *visual iconographies*, and its *mode of address* or

particular storytelling apparatus – audiences are addressed in highly specific ways in the science fiction film. I want to now briefly examine these in turn.

Annette Kuhn argues, in relation to genre study generally, 'Perhaps more interesting, and probably more important, than what a film genre *is* is the question of what, in cultural terms, it does – its "cultural instrumentality"' (1990). Cultural instrumentality refers to the way that genre films have an interdependent relationship with the real world at the time they are made. Genre films, all-be-it subtextually or allegorically, deal with the fears, hopes, panics and anxieties that circulate in wider society, bringing these issues or *themes* into the belly of the film under the disguise of a western, gangster or science fiction scenario. Genre films, then, interpret what is going on in the real world and contribute to the way the real world is understood through devices which divert one's attention away from considering it to be 'real' or to be about one's real life.

In terms of science fiction, a whole series of cultural fears are played out through the overall distancing device that *alternative possibilities* are being entertained in the text. These possibilities allow for alternative futures, social structures, human relationships, lifestyles and technologies to be imagined, but imagined in a way that through code and symbol simultaneously speak to the present – to the here and now. Science fiction does this looking to the future but speaking about the present in two different and often opposing ways.

First, science fiction's alternative possibilities are conjured up through the disaster/dystopian narrative. In this scenario, the future is one of apocalypse and despair. The world has been taken over by cyborgs, clones or automatons, or technology/techno-science has more widely produced a society where human emotion has been extinguished or is *on the run* from these hyper-rationalist/scientific forces (see *The Matrix* or *Terminator* series). Alternatively, consumerism, globalisation, corporate greed and media dumbing down and disinformation have so taken a hold on the power bases of the world, and the ordering of everyday life, that freedoms have been eroded and life is given meaning only in relation to the amount of dollars it can accrue or the amount of TV

time it garners. The poor, the weak, the racially Other are often forcibly excluded from these future worlds. Natural resources are scarce and the synthetic, the manufactured and the virtual dominate everything from eating habits to sleeping arrangements. Privacy has been outlawed and the only family one belongs to is the corporate state, or the one found online. In *The Running Man* (1987), television airs and organises murder trials like a game show and the Presidency has its own entertainment division. The masses are kept diverted and under control through the propaganda of the visual image, which is everywhere, and personal freedoms are kept in check by totalitarian police and army regimes that kill 'rebels' on sight.

Second, science fiction's future worlds are imagined in terms of the utopian narrative or the structuring theme that the future is bright, harmonious and in many cases miraculous. In these utopian visions, technology has allowed humankind to travel across time and space, and techno-science has cured cancers, infertility, and in some cases can cheat death. In these prosperous new world orders, once warring nation states have unified and tackled together new problems off-world. Poverty has been eradicated and liberal democracy ensures that prejudice and nepotism no longer take place. The *Star Trek* franchise best exemplifies this utopian vision with its multi-racial/national crew, its life-healing technologies and its liberal democratic political structure.

Unlike other film genres, such as the western or the gangster film, science fiction has a much more loosely defined set of visual codes or iconographies. This is in part because science fiction can be set in the past, present or future and the worlds that are visited there can be stripped bare

of invention and difference so that they look just like the world we presently live in or did once. It is also because the possibilities for the visual landscape of science fiction are that much more extensive since science fiction is so often *about* visual invention. Nonetheless, there are a number of shared iconographies that would put one in a conventional science fiction film.

New weaponry, clothing, transportation, architecture and sentient species are often the central key markers for entry into a science fiction world. Lasers, light sabers, phasers, etc., suggest a world of evolved precision-crafted weaponry. Silver suits, space suits, oxygen masks, space helmets, crystal uniforms, etc., help visualise the futuristic nature of sci-fi but also the power relationships between people. Flying cars, spacecraft, hoverboards, time machines and teleporters so increase movement that time and space become conflated, disconnected, increasingly crowded and totally universal. One is seen simply flying through time and across different planes and realms of space in the science fiction film. Vast edifices of aluminium and steel, bubbles made of polystyrene, and whole cities that rise seemingly into infinity provide the futuristic setting, subverting perspective, increasing social division in their high : low organisation, and re-imagining, at the same time, the concept of home and work. Aliens, Alien Messiahs and extra-terrestrials populate the narratives of science fiction, sometimes bringing terror, sometimes celestial-like hope, but always in a visually striking form – with tentacles, bug-eyes, wide-eyes, phallic and razor sharp teeth, etc.

However, and in sum, science fiction best visualises itself through the articulation or relationship *between* these iconographies. Proton phasers that fire from warp speed

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space ships at alien marauders as a worm hole approaches, firmly place one, at least visually, in a science fiction text.

Science fiction has a particular mode of address or way of engaging with and involving audiences in their possible alternative realities. This has been best expressed by Annette Kuhn as ‘complete sensory and bodily engulfment’ (1999). Science fiction addresses or bombards all the human senses through its kinetic, highly charged and yet sensuous and cerebral stimulus. On the one hand science fiction is all about making the audience giddy with its hyper-fluid and breathtaking creations; on the other it asks the audience to ponder over these creations, to feel and think through them as more than just special effect since they often attempt to say something profound about the human condition. In one sense, according to Barry Keith Grant (1999) science fiction addresses the spectator as a ‘wide-eyed child’ – as one who is caught in a state of awe and wonder as the shots of deep space, new horizons, galactic travel and cityscapes dramatically appear on the retina of the frame/lens.

Of course, one of the central ways that science fiction addresses the audience is through the spectacle of special effects or the partly self-conscious display of technological wizardry. In science fiction, while the ‘how’ of special effects is meant to be effaced or made invisible within the diegesis of the film, the knowledge that one is watching a state of the art effects sequence is meant to manifest in the ‘wow! that’s incredible!’ moment that accompanies these scenes. So in one sense the pleasure of science fiction is a pleasure of the special effect.

Blade Runner as Science Fiction

In terms of its themes, iconographies and mode of address it seems pretty clear why *Blade Runner* falls within the science fiction genre. In fact so dystopian, iconic and visually spectacular is the film that it can be argued to be an exemplary case study for what constitutes a science fiction film.

Thematically, the film offers us a despairing

view of the future. This is immediately represented through the crowded and media-saturated city space that is Los Angeles 2019. The film constantly returns us to high, low and expansive shots of the Gothic/patch-work city as it belches flames, chokes on its own smog, and produces the discernible sense of an omnipresent decay that eats into the very fabric of the (street level) buildings. As Giuliana Bruno (1990) observes,

The city of *Blade Runner* is not the ultramodern, but the postmodern city. It is not an orderly layout of skyscrapers and ultracomfortable, hypermechanized interiors. Rather, it creates an aesthetic of decay, exposing the dark side of technology, the process of disintegration.

Blade Runner is all about disintegration: earth is so over-populated and polluted that (white) people are encouraged, through adverts that adorn everything from mobile advertising hoardings to the sides of hi-rise buildings, to move to off-world colonies. Advertising, consumer goods, media and consumer conglomerates fuel the economy and indoctrinate the populace. Anything can be bought and sold on the black market because the city itself has become one giant marketplace – a metaphoric Chinatown no less. The city is chaotic, crisis driven: made up at the lower levels of waste, acid rain, tumble down dwellings, hovels, faceless racial Others, and a maze of dangerous side-streets. Deckard eats here, confronts and kills two of the replicants here, but retires to his apartment in the higher levels to escape the filth and the squalor that he is nonetheless attracted to. According to Ridley Scott, (quoted in Sammon, 1999)

One of the major visual ideas we had for BR was ‘retrofitting’, this overlaying of pre-existing architecture with patch jobs that side-steps the problem of tearing down old structures and replacing them with new ones.

This ‘aesthetic of decay’ is compounded by the open display of technology and the encroachment of technology and techno-science into all areas of social life so that the very nature of what the ‘real’ is, and what it means to be human, becomes blurred in the film. In *Blade Runner*, simulation and the synthetic reach into all

Genre

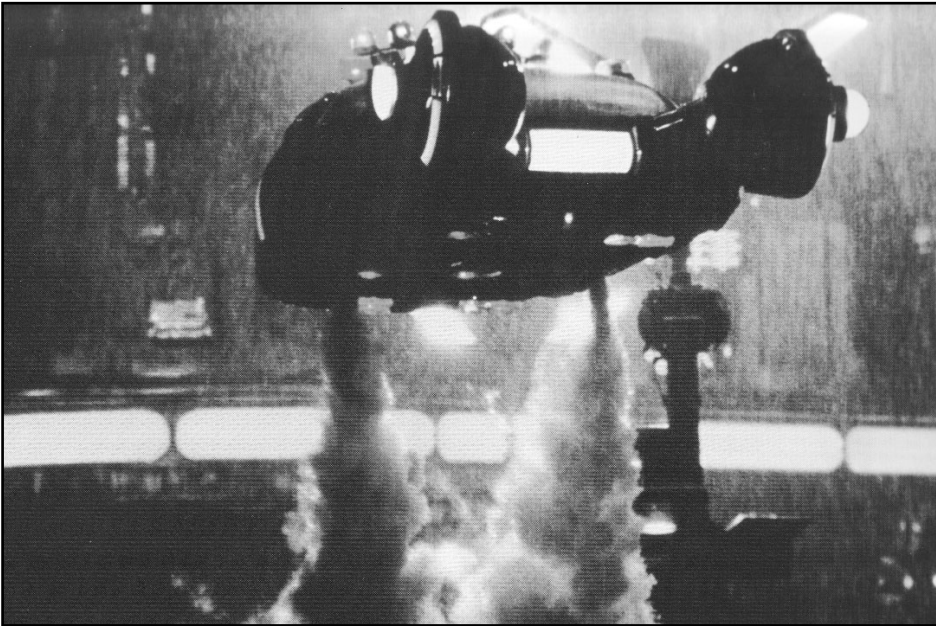
areas of social life. Surveillance and media devices are everywhere – in fact one only really knows that one is human through an electronic emotional response test. The geneticist J.F. Sebastian surrounds himself with cyberpets and suffers from ‘accelerated decrepitude’, a wasting away disease that ages him prematurely – as if he is himself a genetic experiment gone wrong. The towering Tyrell Corporation building is a mock Egyptian edifice that overlooks the *image* of the Egyptian pyramids. Deckard is possibly revealed to be a replicant (expressed more explicitly in the Director’s Cut), living an artificial lie about the nature of his own origin.

the Murdoch media empire. The first stories about the hole in the ozone layer appeared, and recurrent fears about genetic engineering found their way into the press. Asia was imagined to be an economic and cultural threat to the hegemony of the west with the emergence of Sony and Honda as super-companies. Migration and immigration were seen as threats to national identity (in Britain, the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, referred to immigration as a ‘swamping’ problem). Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner (1990) locate a specific critique of modern capitalism in the film, suggesting that,

Blade Runner calls attention to the oppressive core of capitalism and advocates revolt against exploitation. The Tyrell Corporation invents replicants in order to have a more pliable labour force, and the film depicts how capitalism turns humans into machines.

In terms of iconography *Blade Runner* has many of the visual trademarks of the science fiction film. Flying cars called ‘spinners’ move menacingly across the landscape. ‘Trafficators’ direct the flow of traffic and people. Advertising ‘blimps’ hover above the city promoting a ‘better life’ ‘Off-world’. The entire cityscape is nightmarishly futuristic: it constantly pours with acid rain and the sun is partly blotted out because of the pollution. There is no discernible difference between night and day in *Blade Runner*. People have neon reflectors in their umbrellas to get around. The media are an omnipresent force – one cannot go anywhere in Los Angeles 2019 without media technology shaping one’s behaviour. In short, in one clear sense the entire *mise-en-scène* of *Blade Runner* speaks the visual language of dystopian science fiction.

Blade Runner, then, taps into real concerns about techno-science, globalisation, population flows, media manipulation and environmental catastrophe that were in circulation at the time of the film’s release and are, if anything, more prevalent today. The 1980s were a time of media corporate takeovers that saw the rise, for example, of



Blade Runner’s ‘spinner’ flying car – a classic visual trademark of sci-fi-film

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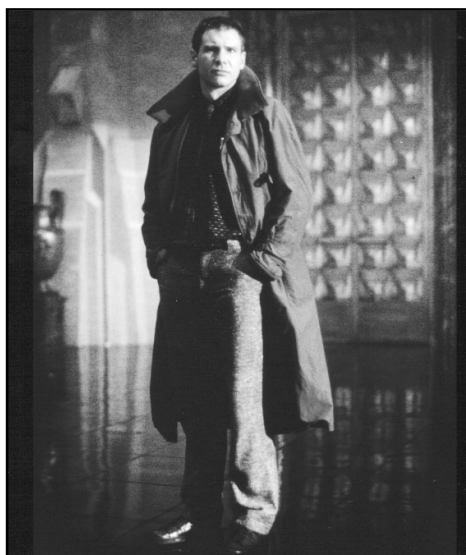
But on a sonic level too, the futuristic synth score, by Vangelis, anchors the technophobic visual field of the film. The haunting electronic pulse of the soundtrack adds semiotic weight to the dystopian images and settings that hold the film together. At key moments in fact the music almost seems to weep in (to) the film. And as Ridley Scott comments, 'every incident, every sound, every movement, every colour, every set, prop or actor has significance within the performance of the film' (quoted in Bukatman, 1997).

Nonetheless, it is *Blade Runner's* mode of address that also positions the audience within a science fiction film. From the opening panoramic long shot of a brooding futuristic LA, the audience is treated to a visual extravaganza in which spectacle and display dominate the screen and stimulate the pleasures on offer. *Blade Runner* functions in terms of awe and wonder but this is also tinged with melancholy and introspection since *Blade Runner* City is a paradoxical ugly : beautiful place. One is asked to marvel at the textures in the spaces of the city while recoiling at what these spaces have come to mean. In fact, the ugly : beautiful introspection of *Blade Runner* is one of the things that makes its genre classification more difficult or rather more complex to identify, as I will now go onto suggest.

Blade Runner as Film Noir

Blade Runner is also clearly marked by some of the key visual and narrative motifs of film noir, a downbeat, investigative genre that emerged in the 1940s. In fact, Ridley Scott has described the overall design of *Blade Runner* as 'set forty years hence, made in the style of forty years ago' (Bukatman, 1997).

Deckard, the world weary and alienated ex-cop, is reminiscent of the Humphrey Bogart, Private Eye character, found in such films such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). Rachael is the archetypal 1940s *femme fatale*: mysterious, sexually dangerous and potentially duplicitous. (Critics such as Bukatman have noted how much she resembles the wronged Mildred Pierce from *Mildred Pierce* (1945), or the double-crossing character Phyllis Dietrichson from *Double Indemnity* (1944).) The down-beat



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Deckard: A Philip Marlowe for 2019

voice-over narration of the original release, allowing Deckard to recall events that have already happened, is a device also borrowed from film noir and one that closes down the options for a happy ending (since the protagonist is always caught looking back mournfully). The moral ambiguity found in all the central characters is again a feature of film noir: trust, morality, and the lines between good and evil, right and wrong are blurred in *Blade Runner* as they are in films such as *Touch of Evil* (1958). Deckard, for example, kills replicants that he knows haven't committed any real crime, and who also reflect his own psychosis. Deckard is arguably also a replicant himself, probably a NEXUS 6, and so in essence one could argue that he is killing his own brothers and sisters.

Visually and stylistically *Blade Runner* has the look and feel of a film noir. The rain-soaked Los Angeles streets, the plot change from 'penthouse' apartments to inner-city hovels, the forties fashions, the long, dirty mac worn by Deckard, and the low-tech interiors and concrete brick exteriors of many of the buildings all recall the bleak setting and dress codes of a classic film noir pot boiler. The chiaroscuro (light and dark) lighting codes add to this effect. Shafts of light break through into dingy interiors and strike the sides of the characters' faces to suggest moral uncertainty or an embedded identity crisis. Deckard and Rachael first make love (although this starts out as a rape scene) in a low-key lit, sparsely furnished room, at the precise moment they are the least sure about one another. But this noir environment is also supported by parts of the Vangelis