“Scholars like Hardisty are keeping Blade Runner where it belongs, on the edge of modern culture.”
– Dr. Will Brooker, Editor of The Blade Runner Experience

TEARS IN RAIN

AN EXPLORATION OF THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF RIDLEY SCOTT’S BLADE RUNNER (1982)

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“I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I've watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those... moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.” - Roy Batty
INTRODUCTION

Blade Runner is considered one of the most influential science-fiction films of the 20th century and, quite frankly, represents the biggest U-Turn that the science-fiction genre has ever experienced. It was launched in the nest egg of *Star Wars* and *E.T.*, this was meant to be filled with optimism towards the future. The Cold War was thawing, Vietnam was a long gone memory and we had a smiling President of the USA. *Blade Runner* treated that differently.

Instead what was shown was an explosion of futurism blended with noir into a whole new visual style. The future noir, the *Blade Runner* look, and it all lead to one definite conclusion: the future wasn’t a happy place to be. *Blade Runner* showed a future of 1984 used as a guidebook, corporatism ruling supreme, an ecological mess, an America on the run, the population crushed into docile sheep, a rise of synthetic beings more human than human, our very perception of reality in jeopardy and rampant overpopulation.

These fears stemmed from the times: Reaganomics, Thatcherism, the rise of the Murdoch Empire, the brewing of genetic sciences, a technological evolution, the Eastern markets flourishing into a near superpower and so on and so forth. *Blade Runner* is a painting from the past; it went through development hell to become the relic of a scared time, so why uncover it now?

Because it’s never been more relevant.

Recent times have shown that Murdoch has been revealed as a villain orchestrator, the US debt has climbed to monumental heights and the economy put into double-dip jeopardy, the Eastern markets now rage to dwarf the once mighty America with it only being a matter of time now, genetics is the new rage with life extensions on the plate, corporatism rules politics with an iron fist and so on and so forth.

*Blade Runner* is a portrait of the future, and it’s a future we’re heading towards. I feel it important to go back to this film and uncover the nasties at hand, why it’s such a celebrated film, go beyond the film and investigate its influence, dip into the novel it is based on and perhaps consider some of the most powerful philosophical conundrums of all time. I’m Nathan Hardisty, I’ve been a writer of ludology for a long, long time and I have no experience nor filmic knowledge to even consider writing this as a serious ‘academic’ discussion, but I do promise something accessible. A fan work. I’ve read books and essays on *Blade Runner* and all of the authors and writers of such works have blended into this project too, this is a mere labour of love standing on the shoulders of academic giants.

*Blade Runner*, to me, is one of the most powerful films of my life. It revels in absolute intricacy of ideas and themes and beauty. This is a tortured, beautiful world that haunts my very dreams. It nostalgia bombs me into remembering the likes of *Shadow of the Colossus* and *BioShock* from my video-game heritage and yet leads me to re-evaluate my film experiences. I want to investigate *Blade Runner* because *Blade Runner* deserves it and there’s never been a better time to do so.

For clarification, I will be using the *Final Cut* edition of the film in order to express my ideas. I will specifically mention certain editions and comment on such changes, but otherwise, this is the first collection of filmic investigation, to my knowledge, that is using the *Final Cut* as a basis of argument. I will of course be also referring to *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in some chapters along with many other works. For clarity reasons ‘Voight-Kampff’ will be used to refer to the machine that Deckard uses and ‘Rachael’ to refer to both Rachels. If I do mention other works, expect them to be spoiled, so you have been warned. I don’t intend this to be a serious ‘academic’ work but I’ve done my homework.
With that all been said, it’s time to dive into *Blade Runner*.

**SECTION I: IDEAS**

A dive into *Blade Runner* about its exploration of those wonderful ideas. Not necessarily philosophical, though I will imply some things, but otherwise a dive into its parallels with *Sheep*, its relevance to the modern world and how it fits the traditional glove of sci-fi ideas.

**SECTION II: BEYOND**

*Blade Runner* is a rare film. It is a text spread across various versions all telling various things along the same wavelength. I look beyond the veil and into the heart of its influence, the core of science fiction today along with investigating what happened to everyone involved.

**SECTION III: SYMBOLS**

*Blade Runner* is a film of eyes, Mayan temples, Egyptian relics, doves, rain, snakes and other collections of iconography. It is the one of the most visually busy films of all time and, as such, this needs some special care.

**SECTION IV: POLITICS**

Reagan was in the White House, Thatcher was launching a new wave of Conservatism in Britain and the whole world was experiencing a gigantic power switch across East and West. Well, they always say, history does repeat itself.

**SECTION V: EVOLUTION**

*Blade Runner* is the last great analogue special effects film, and as such, it’s a perfect juxtapose against its own evolutionary features. The social commentary, the philosophy of immortality and the driving force of nature itself. Evolution.
SECTION I: IDEAS

I don’t think it’s any coincidence that the release date of Blade Runner happens to coincide with George Orwell’s birthday. I read that the release date was chosen, by Bud Yorkin, out of box office ‘good luck’ given Aliens and Star Wars released on a similar date of May 25th. Blade Runner’s parallels with Orwell’s ideas, of dystopian heights and big brother revelations, they’re all connected. Blade Runner feels like a cobwebbed collection of elements sometimes, a puzzle to be figured out, it’s a thinking man’s film if you will. It’s a mirror image of itself. Just as Deckard peels apart the jigsaw mess of the snake skin, the photos and the other trials of detection, so too are we thrown into re-assessing, investigating and going deeper into Blade Runner. It’s a film that requires intellectual dedication.

The 1980s was a shift of change in American society and American culture. Films were hitting their stride, with the best film year of all time about to hit the industry, they had a smiling man for President and a happy future ahead. They wanted Star Wars, instead they got Blade Runner and rightfully so. Ideas scare people, unless they; people don’t want to be told everything they think is a lie.

In this section then I will investigate the ideas of Blade Runner in the more obvious parts: its parallels to Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, its central themes of life and death, chaos and order and also dive deep into the character of Deckard and how a protagonist in a film helps reflect or express these ideas.

Blade Runner is about ideas. The very complexity of its mise-en-scène reflects and delivers these ideas. It is of futurism blended with detective noir and the delicacy of that blend helps evoke the ideas across various tastes, interpretations and (in doing so) reflect our intimacy or distancing of characters. For example, those who deny Deckard is a Replicant because they feel only a human is capable of emotional connection may look not so kindly upon the Replicant gang.

All this and more will be explored in this section, eventually tying into the true question and hell of it all. Blade Runner is a film about ideas, undeniably, but is Blade Runner a film also about interpretation? If so then it’s something else entirely: it’s about philosophy.

(1.1) DECKARD: An investigation of Blade Runner’s primary specimen, its real lab rat, and how he doesn’t fit the typical protagonist archetype.

(1.2) CHAOS AND ORDER: An exploration of the nature of chaos, order and the effect and use of power within Blade Runner. Is this a film of chaos or is it of Orwellian order?

(1.3) LIFE AND DEATH: When you have a film universe that allows the creation of human life then, naturally, it is haunted by death. I look into the meaning behind death itself within the confines of Ridley Scott’s most ‘personal’ film.

(1.4) ECHOES OF SHEEP: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? is the most ‘Philip K. Dick’ of Philip K. Dick’s career. It has led to Blade Runner and the continual success of the author, but is Blade Runner weaved from Sheep’s flesh or rather its echoes?
DECKARD

Any film, video-game or book or work of fiction requires connection. Emotional connection: a bridge to flow the story goodness directly into the reader or player or whatever. This is usually achieved by a protagonist of some sort, a main character whom the film follows throughout the fiction and a character who asks questions for the audience’s benefit. How does this work? What does this do?

Deckard is not, by any definition, a ‘protagonist’ or ‘main character’ simply because he cannot be connected to. When we first join him he is already a paranoid, lonely man who stays quiet and asks too few questions. All of our knowledge of 2019 has to come from inferring from the visual elements of the film, which starts mere seconds into the picture. Belching, industrial complexes and a blinking eye; it must be Orwell.

Does the film then require some base literacy in order to know what is going on? I think Orwell’s themes are easy to identify, but they’re not necessarily strictly Orwell. The ever-watching eye is a staple of modern society after all: CCTV cameras, private information banks, government checks and internet filters. All of these are to funnel the populace in a way to keep them safe, or so they say, and in the dawn of the 21st Century the main populace are already feeling alienated by the politics that drives these ‘watching’ techniques.

Deckard, then, should be a relatable character. He’s been alienated by this world, by the people and by the technology. The very first shot off him is showing his back to a television shop, face in a newspaper as he glances up at the ‘Off-world colony’ advertising blimp. He gives a look of hopelessness, that his life is over and he is forced to walk amongst the Earth. All of this should re-enforce our connection, more so than a 1982 audience given the rise of technology and societal pressures so on and so forth.

Yet, Deckard is not a protagonist in any sense of the word. He doesn’t bridge the gap and he does things that are ultimately unsympathetic. He chases down women and shoots them in the head, Replicants, yes, but as we discover there is no line between human and Replicant in this world. Deckard himself falls in love with a mechanical female, perhaps finding himself at odds with his humanity and tries to heal himself through Rachael.

Deckard is not emotional in the typical sense of the world, in many ways he is incapable of emotion. He tells Rachael she’s a Replicant like its small talk, he can’t seem to find a friend in anybody and still goes on to kill more Replicants further on in the story. He is devoid of emotion and compassion, he is inhuman in every sense of the word, and he is fighting a battle against himself.

Protagonists like Marty McFly and Luke Skywalker do none of these things. They are heroes, not anti-heroes or anti-human, they are cheerful and upbeat and throw questions at everyone. Their childlike optimism, sense of wonder and sense of curiosity all reflect the audience’s own needs and wants to follow and investigate the storyworlds they inhabit. Blade Runner is a film that, if you don’t keep up, then you are left without any answers. The difference between Star Wars and Blade Runner is perhaps its demand of its audience, as the latter is more predominantly visually told rather than through typical dialogue/exposition.

Is inhumanity simply humanity? The humans of the world test Replicants for their lack of empathy or emotion, and yet Deckard himself lacks all of the above. Further still, Tyrell seems to lack it too. Sebastian is the only character who empathises with Pris, other than the Replicants with each other, and he even says “There’s some of me in you.”
I think a more important question to ask is whether or not Deckard was born this way. He clearly has memories, a history, whether they are implanted or not is up for that long fan debate. Was Deckard dehumanized by his upbringing or by this world that he inhabits? I like to think that Deckard was, perhaps, once a good man. That he was on the beat and now he’s scurrying on the blade, that sharp line between humanity and inhumanity. He’s trapped within the confines of the world, by the “little people” as Bryant calls it; he could be a great detective off-world but he is trapped. It seems like an Objectivist’s nightmare.

Ayn Rand would certainly be pissed off by Blade Runner, seeing this great detective lose his humanity simply because of a tide of working class and middle-class demanding the absolute protection. Actually, that brings up another point, protection. Deckard protects the people of the world from the Replicants’ search of more life, more power, yet some of them seem blatantly harmless.

Zhora is simply a snake charming dancer trying to get by, Pris seduces Sebastian to give up information, Leon is just trying to get by and Rachael becomes Deckard’s lover. The Replicants that came to Earth slaughtered the crew and passengers, yes, but they couldn’t find any other way of getting away from slavery. The majority of the Replicant gang are wanting to get by, wanting more life, and soon their life will be over anyway, it seems a waste of tax-payer’s money to send this expensive detective around to slaughter them.

Slavery is a good word to use when describing the Replicant’s history, but it’s also a good word to describe Deckard’s history. He seems indoctrinated by his job, a husk of a man simply tip-toeing to the next face to shoot. Look at him in The Snake Pit, drinking and drowning his sorrows while trying to charm up Rachael. He has given him and allowed himself to be shackled by this Orwellian nightmare.

Then who does Deckard belong to, if he is a slave? Bryant? Gaff? The system itself? Perhaps all of the above, it certainly seems that way. Bryant yells the word “Little people” and he comes walking back, Gaff taunts him with Origami and the system of oppression would normally keep a working class man, like himself, down in the gutters. He is not meant to be rubbing elbows with the likes of Taffey, if anything, he should be still at the Noodle Bar still ‘giving up’.

Yet, with his status as a blade runner he manages to squeeze himself above the ranks and put him in this alienated zone. In some sense, he is of the system rather than against it, but being on the other side of this Orwellian nightmare makes it all the more worse. He holds no friends, no lovers and nothing to his name. He doesn’t even bother to clean his home, resorting to alcoholism and cold conversation to get by.

This makes Deckard probably the least relatable protagonist in the history of cinema. He’s a killer, a misogynist, borderline rapist, emotionally cold, part of the system, holds no personality quirks or any trait that is ‘likable’ other than the grin and some of his wit. Yet, Blade Runner succeeds in its protagonist, because it is the perfect reflection of what it is to be human in this world. It is hard for the audience to connect, but only because he isn’t the typical ‘hero’ archetype.

Rick Deckard, as a blade runner, is given both privileges and responsibilities. He can run elbows with the finest, although it seems no-one rubs back, but he must swear to serve the peoples of this world. He is then trapped between a selfish desire to ‘ascend’ the social ladders but a forced desire to protect and serve.

Deckard is only good at one of those things.

He’s an alcoholic, inhuman in the empathy sense; he is quite unfit and has no real lust for power to himself. His duty to himself, as a self-serving human being, as a ‘tough man out for himself’ isn’t going very well. He’s pretty useless when it comes to his sorrow solving, trapping himself in the same place for nearly the whole film. As a blade runner, he’s one of the best, according to Bryant. I’m not so sure.
Yes, he does detecting and manages to track down the Replicants. Once there, however, he seems unprepared and perhaps serving some sort of selfish desire when it comes to Zhora. When she asks to “dry her”, look at the big cheesy grin on his face as this half-naked woman stands in front his Jerry Lewis impression and proceeds to almost kill him. He is so unaware, perhaps ‘stupid’ in a sense, that the Replicants are now ‘more human than human’. Although, given the world they’re in, that doesn’t sound like a hard thing to achieve.

Deckard almost gets killed by Zhora, gets battered by Leon (saved by fate), kills Pris almost by accident and could have easily have just fallen to his death with Roy. He’s pretty useless then, he makes mistakes, and perhaps this is what makes him human against his inhumanity. In the protagonist sense, this is what makes him empathetic. We can’t exactly identify with his alcoholism because we don’t know why he is an alcoholic (the Theatrical Cut narration throws about some ‘divorce’ or something) and we can’t exactly see why he is so inhuman. This is an inhuman world, so there’s no-one to really carry a connection besides the Replicants and Sebastian.

In a weird sort of way, the film asks who we should be cheering on: the humans or the Replicants? I’m not exactly thrilled when Deckard chases after some Replicant trying to make her way in the world, and then shoots her in the back. Yes, she’s done terrible things, but I don’t think she’s deserving of being shot to death. Deckard simply carries the “I only enforce the rules” excuse as he wanders over the broken glass and looks at Zhora’s corpse.

As a hero, Deckard fails out of the gate. As an anti-hero, he succeeds in every way but that isn’t exactly a good thing. He is inhuman, he remains unchanged for the vast majority of the film and the reflections he takes upon his humanity are any revealed towards the end. He changes, eventually, but it takes quite a lot of inhumanity to throw him into a new state of mind.

Being useless in this world seems to be a recurring image. The general populace seem to be faceless sheep that walk about digesting the adverts and the media and the hell of it all. They seem quite docile in a world of laser-weapons and robots who break people’s faces. Perhaps they feel safe; perhaps they accept their inhumanity whereas Deckard chooses to simply pull a sad face over it all. The Replicants certainly aren’t useless, they fail their goal of more life, but they only fail because Tyrell succeeded in the life shortening. Sebastian fails to ever bring up his crush on Pris but Deckard doesn’t really succeed in anything, or at least, anything he’s told to ‘do’. The biggest winner, out of all of the characters of Blade Runner, is the audience.

“It’s about a man re-discovering his humanity.” says Frank Darabount (Director of The Shawshank Redemption)[1] I could not agree more.

Deckard is inhuman, but the film is about him progressively becoming more human. It’s about him dealing with his sorrows that we find him mashing into his noodles at the beginning. He’s a lost man, who finds his soul and discovers who he is. It’s only right there be a debate about his ‘humanity’ since our sense of the word is of a literal one, but in the world of Blade Runner it could be anything.

Deckard goes about failing his attempts at seducing Rachael, failing to understand emotion which is now an alien word to him. He tries to give in to his lust when Zhora asks to dry him, and then proceeds to shoot her in the back. He then border-line rapes Rachael, accidentally kills Pris and then becomes humanized by a
literal inhuman. Throughout the film, he has no desire for life, and then Batty saves his meaningless life from death. If he fell to his death, it would make no difference to Roy dying. It would make no difference at all, but by the end of it all, there is a difference.

He now carries meaning, Rachael, and changes as a result, discovering who he really is. The nod he gives at the end isn’t one of fear but of acknowledgement and perhaps thanks to Gaff for re-assuring him that everything is going to be okay. “Too bad she won’t live, but then again who does?”

With this new found humanity, does Deckard become a protagonist? Does he become a proud hero? By the end of it all, I’m only proud of Roy. This murderous, skull crushing, insane, charming bloke ends up saving Deckard’s life all to tell him how alive he is with memories. He seems to carry unimaginable memories, beyond Earth, all of them completely alien to both the audience and Deckard. We have no visual reference, simply trying to piece it together from the words, like a book. For a film that prides itself in visual minutia, the words of Batty aren’t reflected in a visual landscape that started the film nor any stylistic flashbacks. We’re simply told it because it’s alien to Deckard too, and we are now Deckard. Our life, our only base ‘human’ connection with the film has been restored with a purpose in the story: rebel.

Deckard, as a protagonist them is one that is paranoid in his trapped little world. He is trapped between cold emotion and a desire for love, and he is indeed trapped between Replicant and human. He searches for meaning to his life, perhaps one of the reasons he takes the case. “Deckard has already begun to lose his humanity.” says Ridley Scott [2], in reference to the beginning.

Perhaps he’s on the edge of his humanity, which reflects well on what happens at the end of the film, hanging over into the abyss of the working class and rain-soaked urban sprawl. He could so easily lose himself, become docile but he carries on with his sorrows. It takes one real human to pull him up and save his life in every sense.

Deckard is an ugly character who becomes healed by love and emotion, choosing to carry on when he could simply fall into the abyss and his job would be done regardless. His whole position as blade runner seems somewhat useless given the Replicants will be dying very soon anyway.

A lack of humanity gives Deckard an edge in some respects; it gives him something to hold on to. The whole of the world has unusual alien, inhuman grime to its texture and Deckard fits in perfectly yet imperfectly. He is a white, American amongst a largely Asian populace and they all seem alien to him. Deckard is trapped, on the edge again, looking up at what he once was and choosing to simply forget.

“Do you know what it’s like to be homesick with no place to go?” asks Roy Batty of Deckard in one version of the film.[3]. I think Deckard knows this feeling perfectly well. After all, he doesn’t really have a ‘home’.

Deckard tells Rachael to go “home” after he tells he she never really had one, Sebastian asks Pris if she’s going home, Deckard tries to stand ‘tall’ after killing Zhora by telling Bryant he’s going “home”. Home, home, home perhaps carries no weight to any of the main characters of this world.

Sebastian surrounds himself with friends he himself has constructed, who welcome him home every day, yet seems to identify with Pris more so than anybody else. Rachael has just been told her memories have been implanted; she doesn’t really
have a home anymore, perhaps making it easy for Deckard to fall in love with her later on. Roy and Pris are ‘homesick’ in a sense, looking for more life.

Deckard has no home or at least doesn’t care for it like anybody normally would. He has bottles and dishes and dirt about the place. His photos around the place hold no relevance to him, all of different time periods and peoples. Deckard is perhaps the most lost, trapped between worlds, but perhaps more lost in a different sense. He has no care of his home, no real feel for it, but he is perhaps trapped in the worse possible way.

But why does any of this matter? Why are you reading this? *Blade Runner* wasn’t ever intended to be such a wide-spread massive web of easily interpreted moments and characters. But isn’t great art not made by artists but by audiences? I fully believe that the best works of art are independent of their creators, and that *Blade Runner* holds no ‘concrete’ creator anyway. The workprint, Director’s Cut, Theatrical Cut, Final Cut and so on and so forth have all been touched by different folks. Happy endings have been injected, narration rushed, the narratives crushed and crumbled. *Blade Runner’s* very existence is clouded in one of the most interesting aspects of any work of art: Ambiguity.

He is trapped between Replicant and Human and, more so, across *Blade Runner* itself. There are over seven versions of the film, all with a different spin on the ending and all different spins on how human that Deckard becomes. The *Theatrical Cut* calls it ‘love’, the *Final Cut* calls it ‘acceptance’ and all the versions in-between may or may not have clues in every single one of them pointing towards either end of the spectrum.

I’d like to mention that, in my mind, being a Replicant in this world would be a result. They seem to be the most emotional, most empathetic and most ‘human’ in our sense of the world. If Deckard turned out to be a human, he’d be different from all of them; he was already different to begin with anyway. What makes *Blade Runner* different is that its protagonist is not stuck within fiction but meta-fiction. He is stuck across the *Theatrical Cut, Final Cut* and so on and so forth. He is the only protagonist in the history of cinema that is stuck within the film itself, never learning who he really is, given it is so easy to then throw on the *Theatrical Cut* and see the Unicorn as a sign of brotherhood from Gaff.

This entrapment of Deckard has probably led to his paranoia and obdurate view on the world. He seems quite comfortable in telling Rachael her whole life has been a lie, then tries to cover it up with what he knows best - “a drink” - all of which pointing towards one definite fact: Deckard is both trapped in the meta-fiction and the fiction in more than a few senses. His character with all the paranoia he carries differentiates him from the fickle sheep that mull the world, but also the Replicants who dis-regard everything and search for the truth to life.

In fact, I feel Deckard might fit in well with Roy’s gang, don’t you think? He’d find a meaning, a purpose, and that seems like the rarest trait in 2019. There is no ‘truth’ in this world, it seems everyone is affected by this system or this Orwellian nightmarish structure that invades homes with lights and allows the richest of the rich to produce life. This is a world away from 1982, and a world away from some of that year’s films such as *E.T* (more on that later). As Harrison Ford himself said in an interview with David Letterman: “It’s no musical comedy, David.” [4]

*Blade Runner* could be said to be an amalgam of all popular science-fiction film traits and of the typical film noir, together creating future noir, perhaps an oxymoron.
Considering this, we see a very vague *American* sense to the whole picture, yet *Blade Runner* does not come across as an *American* film. We have Harrison Ford, a new heavyweight on the block, fused with a cast full of Dutch and English and Mexican and French.

Considering this then, here is an interesting thought: was Rick Deckard built as a protagonist for the Western audience? He is an alien in a world of the alien, to a 1982 audience; this would come across as a very scary thought. Reagan was in the White House, the ‘American’ sensibilities still held and a small ounce of nationalism to bind the people together. Rick Deckard then is *perfect* for a 1982 audience to confront its fears about immigration, but he is also the worst possible protagonist for confronting something scarier: the ever-watching eye.

In fact, *Blade Runner* does not end with Deckard throwing something into the all-seeing eye or re-enacting the 1984 advertisement for Mac computers (also directed by Ridley Scott), it ends in himself accepting his differences and moving on. The ‘happy ending’ on the *Theatrical Cut* ends on a tone that’s a world away from the rest of the film and I don’t see it fitting into the film myself. Yet, whichever version you watch, Deckard does not bring down the system he merely leaves it. If anything, one of his selfish goals has finally been realized.

Throughout *Blade Runner* we’re treated to language barriers, Gaff’s cityspeak coming in the first section along with Japanese and a very heavy feel rests over the film’s tone. These lingual barriers all corners Deckard into his American heart, but there is no heart, America is dead. The street signs all read of Asian language, there are no red white blues and perhaps America has moved off-world. A blimp yells out “Easing America into the new world!” and spouts words such as “golden” and “opportunity” all leading to that literary idea of the great American Dream.

The American dream is usually dead, dying or not what it seems in works of popular fiction. *Of Mice and Men* is one literary example, but it isn't exclusively literature that gets that idea. Film of course has had its fair share but so have video-games, albeit in a very filmic way. *Grand Theft Auto IV* showed Niko Bellic, a fresh immigrant lured to the country by his cousin's extravagant emails filled with lies and tales of the great America. When Niko comes to the city, he finds its dead at the doorstep of crime and corruption.

On paper this all sounds fine and dandy, artistic exploration if you will; it’s kind of saddening to then discover that all of those themes that are being explored are done through cut-scenes and not the actual interactive nature. It was largely a video and not a game, which is a shame, but it did show how far this little idea can stretch.

*Blade Runner* shows a world then that is devoid of the American dream or one that has been twisted to fit the ‘off-world colonies’ and other elements of the world. Deckard’s dreams are not of a great America or great freedom, they are of the Unicorn. I like to leave this little note to interpretation but I do think it represents either Rachael (“More human than human.”) or a piece of Deckard’s past that he keeps hidden.

Whatever the case, the American dream does not cross Deckard’s mind and neither does any hope of opportunity. He spends the majority of the film wallowing in his sorrows before taking a leap of faith with Rachael.

I don’t think *Blade Runner* was built as an explicitly ‘Western’ film. If it was then things would be very, very different. Perhaps it is built as a twisted ‘Western’ film as it
treads some very scary grounds for many Americans. The 1980s was a time of the Murdoch media’s rise to power (still relevant by today even) and also a time that Asian economies started to leap and bound, tippling the dollar’s power. This coupled with the Reaganomics meant for a disastrous change in American society.

Rick Deckard then does not represent the American or Westerner; he doesn’t have to represent anything. He carries flaws and paranoia and some attributes that tie him to a loose connection, but nothing so concrete to point us in the way of an American man in a dead America. The America is dead, certainly, but Deckard is not American. He is troubled and lost, homesick without a home...

Considering Deckard’s re-humanization as it were, perhaps we can take on a different approach. He gains a new outlook on life by being saved by Batty but also gains a purpose in the form of Rachael. One thing is worth considering: would Deckard make a good husband? The love encounter with Rachael borders on rape and he certainly throws around his male chauvinism a lot - “I’ve had people that have walked out on me, but not when I was being so charming.” - He seems to take a more ‘traditional’ male role.

Perhaps his ties to the working class limits his emotional expression, as too tightly it may be, or perhaps he is as far removed from a feminist as can possibly is. Throughout the film, however, Deckard gains purpose and life and a value of life. He learns to appreciate the Replicants, identifying himself with them and accepting it, but he also learns to appreciate other life. Female life.

I wouldn’t say Deckard become humanized as much as he become feminized. For instance, he both borderline rapes Rachael and has a massive grin when Zhora asks him to dry her back. He seems to take pleasure in his power over women that is until, he is shown the reflection of his power. Zhora dies through glass walls (reflection itself) and the look on Deckard’s face turns to a grim uncertainty. When he also kills Pris (almost accidentally) it brings out the wrath of Batty and Deckard runs for his life. It’s not until everything comes together in the possible last moments of his life does he accept all of the above. He spits at Roy as he drops to his death, but is caught by the Replicant.

As he is raised above and on to the rooftop and dropped, there’s a look of confusion and fear in his face. Batty kneels down and starts his soliloquy, one peppered with almost foreign languages melted together to form some sort of emotional outpouring of memory. There’s a real twitch in the system here, a reversal of roles in some ways. Batty is now appreciating his life more than ever before, but he’s still trapped like Deckard is, he’s still very aware he’s about to die. He accepts it too, almost peacefully, and in that moment does Deckard realizes that his life was worth saving perhaps less than Batty’s but he did so anyway.

Deckard asks Zhora, to gain admittance to her dressing room, whether she’s “Felt exploited in any way?” with this comes a very interesting idea. Here, Rick has used the disguise of a feminist or someone who cares for the value of females in society, and he’s using it to go in and kill Zhora. In fact, Deckard only ever kills the females of the group (Pris and Zhora) with the male Replicants death being left in the hands of fate.

Perhaps there is a reason above basic ‘working class male’ confines that Deckard has used to require this chauvinistic attitude. The reason could be that Deckard feels not only oppressed by the system and his ‘born’ locale but by his peers.
He never seeks or gains friendship, perhaps love at one point, but otherwise is alone and paranoid. When Bryant yells that he’s “little people” then this perhaps puts a twitch inside Deckard’s head. He needs a way of expressing his inner-most anger.

One way of doing that, of perhaps trying to find some catharsis for his loneliness and anger is to find some form of comfort in misogynist attitudes or try and find it in the work he does. The work itself grows too much for Deckard who leaves all of his battles somewhat beaten and bruised, he’s a pretty useless blade runner really or maybe he’s not prepared.

Yet, at the end of the film, he accepts who he is and absolves his sins. He seems to go in with the intent on protecting Rachael, then ends with him guarding her like he perhaps some new found dependence on her. The thought of losing her has entered his mind for the time and it pains him, the unicorn origami being a note of acceptance. In the Theatrical Cut this shows that Gaff was there but allows Rachael to live, a sign of brotherhood, in the Director’s Cut and Final Cut then it means he is a Replicant. The acceptance of his human flaws becomes more literal in this sense.

The flaw of a dehumanized state is certainly Blade Runner’s cup of tea. What is interesting is, and we’ll explore the book more extensively, is how Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? takes us in a similar direction. Deckard becomes progressively dehumanized through his killing of the Replicants and at the end of the novel just collapses into this weird mental state of accepting the artificial life of the planet. The novel differs massively, as said we’ll get to that soon, but one important fact lingers over Rick Deckard: love.

Deckard’s love of his wife conflicts with his lust for Rachael which culminates in him giving in to his lust but not finding some form of help in this. She tries to stop him bounty hunting for the last Replicants, but instead he goes off to kill them. He accepts his dehumanized form, perhaps as Blade Runner’s Deckard accepts his flaws, and chooses to become progressively more dehumanized. Blade Runner I feel is the opposite in that, while the structure is different, Deckard chooses acceptance of his dehumanized state and thus becomes human, finding love and life with Rachael.

Deckard’s exit from the system, by doing this, promotes a certain idea that I feel the film tries to explore.

“Quite an experience to live in fear isn’t it? That’s what it is to be a slave.”

Deckard looks up and sees the face of God who has just told him what his whole life has been like. Slavery to the system. For a moment he sides himself with the Replicant, becomes a Replicant, and then spits in the face of such thoughts. He slides his hands of the rooftop and embraces the crooked concrete below to his death.

Rachael will die, Batty will die and this world has nothing for him.

This line, I feel, awakens Deckard’s humanity. It cracks it open to be filled with Batty’s memory. Deckard becomes the living obituary of Roy Batty, and it is quite fabulous how the vast majority of everyone who has ever watched Blade Runner also carries the same impact in that final ‘tears in rain’ speech. It’s almost as if we’re all being reminded of what it is to be human, not just flesh and blood but compassion and emotion.

Deckard’s narration, which I detest, does include one line that I think may sum up the film’s true impact. I’m glad it’s gone, but it fits in perfect with Frank Darabont’s
interpretation of the main theme. Deckard narrates “I thought I’d have a shot at being human again.”[5] Which opens up a whole string of commentary.

I am glad this is gone as I feel it wouldn’t be too subtle for audiences, who would immediately begin look for Deckard’s inhumanity and humanity. There’s a more literal question that is asked through little clues like “You know that Voight-Kampff test of yours, did you ever take it yourself?”

Here we are with the greatest, biggest elephant in the room. The fan debate rages decades on, it will probably never come to a conclusion, but I feel I must get it out of the way. I’ll probably re-visit this later in the book, but for now, let’s ask this timeless question.

Is Deckard a Replicant?
No.

Is Deckard a human?
No.

I’m not answering it because it’s a meaningless question. It’s naturally affiliated with the story of Blade Runner and not the wider philosophical questions that it asks. What does it mean to be? Who am I? Where did I come from? So on and so forth. The important question is not whether Rick Deckard is a human or not, it’s whether or not it matters if he is a Replicant.

In my view, being a Replicant would be the best thing to Deckard. I’ve already said they appear the most human in this world and, as such, being one would be natural given Deckard has become re-humanized. This also opens up another thought of mine, that being ‘humanized’ in our time does not mean the same in 2019. Perhaps Deckard was once of ‘our time’ and lost it as they shifted in 2019. Considering this, then, we see Deckard has discovered the secret sauce. The key to humanity under this oppressive, Orwellian nightmare, it is of acceptance of our flaws.

Isn’t that the most relevant thing to our world right now?

Deckard accepts his past, his alcoholism, his raging misogynist attitude and his cold calculated emotional state and becomes reborn. His nod towards the unicorn is of acceptance that there is a hope, that he has been allowed Rachael, and he knows how dependent he is upon her love now. He is a changed man, a changed human being and one filled with an affirmation that he is neither human nor human, he is Rick Deckard. Though he may be trapped in loose, meta-fictional ambiguity, he has accepted his fate.

Can’t we do that? This 21st Century of ours isn’t really all ‘shiny’ as the ‘future’ promised. It is full of the Murdoch media, the resurrection of Reaganomics and a predominantly male centred societal hold on a minute.

Has 2019 come early?

Think about it. All of those themes reflected in Blade Runner of paranoia, rehumanization, acceptance, life values, an Asian sweep across the world and many more are all right here in 2011. China is about to become the strongest economy in the world, Murdoch’s media empire has become the Kingmaker of the Western world, many of the arts and journalism have fallen prey to the ‘Celebrity culture’ that propagates envy and a tide of inferior complex. We are living in a world when there is more CCTV in the UK than there is in China. So I ask the most uncomfortable question: is Orwell turning in his grave?
Deckard’s acceptance against this oppressive system is a confirmation of our humanity. That, yes, we are not celebrities or higher-ups of the system and we are not rich or powerful or in control. We are human, and if we accept that then we are better people. If we accept that, we are the best example that the human race can offer: a caring, compassionate individual.

There are lessons for 1982 and 2012, and I cannot think of a better time to sit down and watch Rick Deckard run about slaughtering people and regenerating into an accepting human being. Any time between 1982 and 2011 has been filled with ups and downs of the problems that are reflected in Blade Runner but now, more than ever, has 2012 and 1982 look virtually identical.

2019 has come early.

NOTES

2. Final Cut Director’s Commentary.
3. One of the variations of the ‘Tears In Rain’ speech, one not made by Rutgur Hauer, seen in the Dangerous Days documentary.
4. The David Letterman interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QcyX9JWMMo
5. Seen in the “Deleted and Alternate Scenes” section of Disc 4 of the 5 Disc Special Edition set.
“I have a secret love of chaos.” says Philip K. Dick [1].

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is set in a dead, dead world. It is not of Orwellian like heights or filled with minutia or human filth; it is a world after a war. It is a world where power is scarce, in which there is no real ‘Big Brother’ but there is power out of both order and chaos of this world.

Naturally then *Blade Runner*, as all artistic endeavours usually are about, includes a complex exploration of the nature of power. This coupled with the existence of two ‘humanities’ (Replicant and Human) makes for a change of pace in the usual exploration of power. I feel that this world is one devoid of God in the supernatural sense, but of course, power carries on.

The film even begins as two characters, Holden and Leon, wrestle over the conversation. Leon keeps questioning the questions as Holden continues to try and probe Leon with the Voight-Kampff test. There’s a very clear gap here between the two, man and machine. Holden’s power lies in his occupation, a blade runner himself, whereas Leon relies upon more brute force methods.

Leon wins, naturally, and sets off the film’s storyline. Already we have a swing of power in the Replicant’s favour and from then on it seems like the pendulum doesn’t come back. We pick up the story on Deckard, a retired blade runner, who sits around all alone watching the sheep walk by. Already we have some display of power from decade, at least socially, he seems to have evolved from the basic docile template the citizens are all about. He’s aware.

Knowledge is power.

Deckard’s nose is dug into a newspaper when we first meet, back towards the TV screens which spout advertisements which easily brainwash the populace. He has a leg above the vast majority of the film’s inhabitants already but we already place him below Leon. When he sits down at the noodle bar we’re treated to a sequence in which Gaff tries to ‘arrest’ him and Deckard resists.

Deckard’s power over Gaff isn’t one of strength or wit but rather just a dis-regard of his power. It’s not until Gaff mentions Bryant’s name does the old blade runner get up. The grin on his face may indicate he feels some power over Bryant that he went to the extension of ‘arresting’ Deckard just to get him. Maybe he feels some appreciation over his skills?

In the next scene with Bryant, we are treated to a show of weakness from Deckard. As soon as Bryant says “little people” does Deckard turn back and is suddenly caught up in the case. Gaff himself taunts Deckard with the chicken origami, and already we see him at a somewhat weakened state.

Deckard is not a powerful character; in fact, from the minute he walks into Bryant’s office he is stripped of most of his power (his wit) and is then sent on a chase of the Replicants. Gaff seems to still exhibit some power over him, as he mocks him with the origami of the matchstick man with an erection, pointing out Deckard seems to have a ‘hard-on’ for the case.

He kills Zhora as if by luck, not before getting nearly killed by her, and after being battered by Leon he is barely saved by fate. Power is clearly not of Deckard’s character.
and all power in this world seems to reside with the most human, the Replicants, it’s not just the power of strength but also the strength of sexuality. As evidenced by Pris’ seduction of Sebastian and Zhora’s tricking of Deckard, all of the Replicants have some power over him.

As such, we as an audience are experiencing Deckard’s journey through 2019. His trials and tribulations all affect our outlook on the power struggle that is being fought out and it’s hard not to look towards the Replicants with both respect and empathy. Roy destroys Tyrell, who we already despise given the relations with Rachael, and to us it seems like a good thing that Tyrell dies.

Rachael herself exhibits some characteristics that perhaps place her as the weakest character. She seems to fit into the femme fatale role a la the typical film noir, but lines like “I’m not of the business, I am the business” and when Deckard stammers into his apartment almost crying out “Rachael.” she does hold some power over him. Yes, the rape scene and the “Do you love me?” “I love you.” say she is quite weak but I would argue that she is only weak because Deckard himself is weak.

His continual lack of power or happiness or any real drive of motivation is what really compels him to act so antagonistic towards Rachael. He’s taking out his anger, fitting perfectly into his working class man boots and stereotype.

Power in the world of Blade Runner comes in many forms: physical, knowledge, wit and sexuality. Leon is armed only with the physical, Rachael, Zhora and Pris armed with their sexuality (far away from a ‘feminist’ film isn’t it?), Deckard has the wit and both Tyrell and Sebastian exercise knowledge. There is one giant power struggle going on in this world, and neither power fits perfectly together. Pris can conquer Sebastian, Tyrell can conquer Rachael, Deckard can be conquered by just about anybody.

Then there is Roy.

Roy shows off all types of power. He is stronger than strong, is happy to jam a nail in his hand and can take a beating from a lead pipe. The chap is also quite bright while talking to Tyrell about possible ways they can stop the termination date, he’s also very witty and charming such as when he draws out the conversation with Chew and he also has some elements of sexuality to him. He has some control over Pris with this and draws in Tyrell. In some sense he also manages to use this to conquer Sebastian, who becomes jealous.

Roy seems to be the most omnipotent force in Blade Runner and the weakest appears to be Rachael, but I wouldn’t call it a day at that. The weakest of all seems to be the most common character in the whole film.

You.

The sheep that walks the streets could easily be the audience here, showing what we as a general populace devoid into. Deckard has his wit to save him from becoming one, the Replicants are blessed by the omnipotent Tyrell, Sebastian has his work and Gaff/Bryant have their occupations to save them. The rest of the populace and the city itself never feel ‘alive’, in some respects it almost feels ‘dead’, the ghosts walking around.

As a general rule of thumb, it’s considered that there is power in numbers. Well, that’s what the populace has become: a number. This is a city without any real individualism or heart or soul or humanity or community, there’s nothing really worth salvaging either. The populace aren’t evil, they just don’t seem ‘alive’, in The Snake Pit
we see some of the middle-classes fill their nightlife with excitement and socialize and... not be a Deckard.

Deckard, as I’ve argued, is not the protagonist of this picture. There simply isn’t one, we’re following him but he doesn’t fit the typical template of a main character. If anything, he is devoid of many things that we respect in society: intelligence, bravery... power. Deckard has no real social power, physical power, sexual power (he even just outright nearly rapes Rachael), knowledge or intellect and he seems to be witty but still not witty enough.

Yes, he solves the case of the snake scale but otherwise he’s useless. He’s susceptible to power if anything: not really challenging Tyrell, letting Zhora’s sexuality get the better of him, getting thrown about by Leon and simply following Gaff’s lead. In fact, there’s something interesting.

_Blade Runner_ is a world in motion over one specific power struggle: the slaves and the slavers. Tyrell is a slaver, Roy is a slave, Deckard is a slave, Gaff is a slaver and so on and so forth. What is interesting is how the slaves try and reach some form of slaver status, choosing to use what power they have in order to become (in this world) more socially acceptable.

Deckard is lured in by his “best blade runner” title; the Replicants are all seeking power except Rachael who is still finding out her whole life has been a lie. Sebastian and Chew could be called ‘slavers’ since they construct the slaves but it could easily be said he is also a slave or becomes enslaved by Pris’ sexuality. The same similar thing happens with Zhora and Deckard, although he quickly brings down the thunder until being nearly killed by Leon.

Deckard fails then, in his attempt to become a ‘slaver’. His power over Rachael doesn’t give him any solace and neither does his work. He becomes a slave, until a certain event happens.

Roy Batty kills the last remaining slaves of the world. It seems Gaff ‘frees’ Deckard telling him “You’ve done a man’s job, sir. I guess you’re through, huh?” with real respect (or perhaps a trick of language to show Deckard is a Replicant). Batty destroys Sebastian, destroys Tyrell and becomes the most powerful being in the film.

What ensues is the last ticking off of all of the ‘power’ characters. Pris, Sebastian, Gaff and then it ends with Roy. It is only fitting that Roy fully bring down the entire system after being part of it for so long. His ‘tears in rain’ speech filled with all of his ‘slave’ career, perhaps he does the impossible. Perhaps he accepts his fate, accepts his life and loves it. He wants to live on and figures the true meaning to this world, the true way to live on, and it may be true of real life.

Memories.

Roy becomes the ultimate power in the whole of _Blade Runner_ but never truly dies. The dove flies into the sky bearing his soul, a quiet chill of rain pitter patters across his back like his heart is still beating and (more importantly) the act of the film fading from Deckard into Batty as if absorbing his essence. Deckard will always remember this, as we will always remember this. Roy Batty lives on in both our world and in 2019. There are no Gods or Kings anymore; perhaps _Blade Runner_ ends on the happiest note possible.

Perhaps it ends with the chaos cleansed...

“Do not believe order and stability are always good.” says Philip K. Dick [1]
I agree.

A common theme throughout *Blade Runner* is not only the traditional view of power and its distinctive categories but of a modern type of power. It is one commanded by Tyrell and one that echoes into our time: corporate power. The advertisements, the docile populace, the power to create life and so on and so forth. These are all Orwellian elements and with the film beginning with the eye of Big Brother it’s kind of hard to dispute the fact that this is a world without a government.

The politics of *Blade Runner* are quite simple: there are none. There is no socialism or capitalism or right-wing, left-wing etc. etc. politics is dead. If anything, capitalism has run and overthrown the government. The true carers, the leaders and the only people who are built to potentially serve and help the public are the corporate rulers. They have been left on Earth to filter out what is left of the riches and now all the power has flooded into them.

As evidenced by the industrial landscape, the sweeping motion across which sets off the film, along with the eye of Big Brother and Tyrell himself. Tyrell being a spin on the word ‘tyrant’.

Roy destroys Tyrell and upsets the system, becoming the power player of *Blade Runner* through his killing. Reflected against the neon-soaked cityscape full of advertisements and brainwashing material all leads us to the conclusion that nothing can really change.

If *Blade Runner* ends on any note it is that this is a scary world. Deckard and Rachael try to escape; I doubt they will, permitted by Gaff. Now, one thing I have always had in my mind when discussing this film is not only the power that Gaff has over Deckard but how he uses it. More importantly, if Deckard belongs to Gaff then who does Gaff belong to? The corporations? Himself?

Was Gaff trying to make a statement or was he just getting a job done? If Deckard is indeed a Replicant and Gaff is his ‘owner’ then is Gaff a good guy? He lets Deckard and Rachael free, perhaps an act of compassion on his part. If he let them free while Tyrell was still alive then they wouldn’t get very far. Perhaps Gaff wanted to set up a chain of events to drive Roy towards Tyrell and Deckards towards Roy, to realize his humanity.

Humanity.

I think a core power in *Blade Runner* isn’t just the traditional categories, but perhaps something integral to the film altogether. Its question that it asks throughout, of what it means to be, it is of humanity. The power of being human allows the slaves to rise up and destroy their master, “More human than human is our motto.” and surely is Tyrell’s ultimate demise.

In fact, perhaps Tyrell is one of the weakest characters. No, seriously, he does display Godlike powers with his manipulation of light and can literally create life but... he isn't exactly human is he? It's kind of juxtaposed against how powerful he is as a geneticist, he is ultimately powerless when it comes to dealing with humans and emotions.

“Dr Tyrell has forgotten what it means to be human: in his pursuit for scientific knowledge and economic power he has become the one true unfeeling, arch-rationalist in the film - an embodied tyrannical machine.” says Sean Redmond (Senior Lecturer in Film at Victoria University, Wellington) [2].
If the real power in *Blade Runner* is of being human, then Tyrell ultimately becomes the weakest of the lot. It is quite ironic how he himself has become a ‘machine’ while creating artificial life. It’s all the more fitting he be murdered by his creations too, as a true upset of his abusive power.

Tyrell’s lack of humanity leads me to think that while *Blade Runner* is a film more about Rick Deckard rediscovering his humanity it is also conversely about losing it. All the characters of *Blade Runner* seem to have some inner conflict. The Replicant Crew with their need for more life, Zhora just trying to get by and Rachael filled with the fact she might not be able to differentiate from her memories and Tyrell’s niece’s memories.

These conflicts could easily lead the Replicants to all go against what it means to be human. They could display a lack of empathy, becoming ravenous animals; Roy Batty at one point becomes this maniacal almost suicidal monster hunting down Deckard. Yet his real power is shown in his ‘tears in rain’ speech.

What about Deckard?
What about *his* humanity?

Well, as clearly evidenced by my arguments earlier, *Blade Runner* is about a man re-discovering his humanity. Roy kills Tyrell, upsets the system and the most human in the room becomes Deckard. Tyrell had measured his humanity by his totalitarian power whereas Roy measured it by a value of life and emotion, and Deckard learns his lesson that in order to escape slavery you don’t have to become a slaver.

**NOTES**

1. ‘How To Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later’
   http://deoxy.org/pkd_how2build.htm
**(1.3) LIFE AND DEATH**

*Blade Runner*, in its most distilled form, is a film about life and death and consequences. It is both built out of order and chaos, but also out of the very nature of what it means to be human. As such, that statement carries weight with it. Morals, ethics, identity and what it means to be. Free will and the hell of it all so on and so forth.

Considering this we already see *Blade Runner* as a film that acts within the contemporary, a stark wedge between 2019 and the film noir cinematography that it so viciously captures. This is a film about living, dying and what life lives and dies in 2019. The answer being not exactly human life.

The definition of ‘human’ is changed in 2019 into some loose corporate abstract definition, that a company can create life with both free will and superior human traits is quite scary. *Blade Runner* is definitely a film that pokes and prods at social issues, relevant in both 1982 and more relevant in 2011. Genetics and cloning being the prime example here, but perhaps a more traditional question that is asks, one that is being answered very recently, is the question of immortality.

I don’t think anyone wants to live forever, I know that I don’t, but saying that I can completely understand the debate. We, as homosapiens, are the only species capable of going against typical animal instinct into learning and developing our knowledge and culture and so on and so forth. All human beings are fashioned out of memories, the fuel for our emotional fire, we might not even realise the impact that our life experiences take on us. Deckard certainly does.

The nature of life in *Blade Runner* is one that naturally asks the question of what it means to be alive. What it means to be human, as already mentioned, and I think the perfect answer it gives is ‘memories’. Roy becomes explosive with life towards the end of his span, becoming more human, he’s a four year old who has lived more in his short lifespan than so many of the docile populace will in their entire lifetime. Tyrell too has lived for so long and built his life upon his knowledge and morals; his memories.

Deckard instead comes across as quite emotionally cold, calculated in a sense, sort of human but not all the way there. He’s flesh and blood, certainly, but he’s not entirely a ‘human being’ as we define it. What makes him a more perplexing character is his approach to memories in the film. He even says to Tyrell, after he speaks about giving them a ‘cushion’ for when the Replicants come into the world, that he’s talking about “memories” as if slightly inquisitive about that sort of thing.

Deckard’s life isn’t built upon memories, or at least to our knowledge it’s not. We have no speeches or cries of him recounting his history or his failed trials with love or his previous jobs or of his time as a blade runner. That’s cool; we can accept all of that history because we’re here to watch him unravel. In fact, it makes it more interesting, because as Roy Batty becomes more human towards the end of his life, so does Deckard appear so inhuman at the start of the film. It’s as if Deckard was only just flushed out of the womb...

Roy’s search for immortality is a question posed by modern geneticists and scientists, all working to unravel the code that binds us to die. We are living longer and longer lives filled with better health than ever before. I’ve argued that human beings are
different from animals in their learning and ‘memories’, yet, we are not different at all. We all have the will and drive to survive. A survival instinct.

That makes Roy Batty no different from a fly; it makes him no more different than any animal but... isn’t the same true of us all? None of us want to die, but none of us really want to live forever. Batty’s search for more life is simply a fight against the inevitable, something which Deckard himself faces but never truly fights himself.

In fact, there’s an interesting question, if Deckard is a Replicant given his lack of any ‘memories’ or perhaps implanted memories then when does his life ‘begin’? Did Rachael’s life begin in Tyrell’s niece’s memories or when she was processed from the bowels of the laboratory?

When does our life begin?

Obviously these aren’t questions Blade Runner asks explicitly, but it is a thought that crossed my mind, I think the 2010 film Inception can point us in a specific direction. “You never remember the beginning of a dream, do you?” Inception also discussed layers of reality, the meaning of reality, emotional connections and memories. Inception asks us to consider the same ideas that Philip K. Dick put across in his career and Blade Runner has deep in its veins.

Perhaps a more abstract, philosophical approach to this is to consider where our lives begin, not just Replicants, if so then we come across something scary.

Do you remember being born?

Of course not. But does Rachael remember being built? Does Deckard try and summon all of his energy in trying not to answer the question of his experience? Life and death is paramount to Blade Runner, but as is perception. The eyes, the Orwellian tones and corporate power is prevalent just as the more internal perceptions are. I feel that Blade Runner isn't just a question of humanity but of reality.

Death is another keynote of Blade Runner's structure; in fact, the film relies on it in order to escalate the film’s pace and rhythm. Pretty much all of the main cast are killed with the exception of Deckard, Rachael and Gaff. Roy Batty’s pursuit of power, of life, leads him to take it from others in his pursuit of power. In fact, as Batty nears his ‘tears in rain’ moment it leads him to be more alive than anything else which is odd given he has just taken so many lives.

Pretty much every character we see either dies or doesn’t fulfil their goals or wishes. Deckard and Batty are the last ones kicking and are the only two to ever accept their humanity.

Batty’s pursuit of life eventually leads him to destroy Tyrell, visualized as a God amongst men from his economic power, the control over the son, the very control over life and his language referring to Batty - “prodigal son” - and as Batty drains the life from Tyrell then perhaps he too becomes a God. As Hampton Fancher says, of the final battle, it is “A mythic duel between a God who’s dying and a man who wants to live.”[1]

Can a God die?

I remember a speech given by Liam Neeson’s character, Ra’s Al Ghul, in Batman Begins when he is pretty much telling Bruce Wayne to go out and beat people up at night. He says that when you devote yourself to an “ideal” then you become something else entirely. “A legend, Mr Wayne.”

Isn’t that what God is? Isn’t that what Blade Runner is about? Legends. The Godlike powers of Tyrell, the mystical nature of Roy Batty’s powers (that dove comes
out of nowhere) and all sorts of legends chucked in for good measure. A legend cannot die, a God cannot die; symbols are incorruptible. As such, Roy Batty does not die in any shape or form. The dove flying into the sky is a sign of his soul releasing from his tortured body, but his legend, his memory lives on.

That is why, at the end of Blade Runner, the ‘bad guys win’. Roy’s goal was for immortality and he succeeds. At first he asks for biological life, before coming across a revelation. Perhaps in some sense he lived so much that he learnt so much, became so human he knew what it meant to live on.

“To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.”[2]

Does Deckard feel this message? I think at the end of Blade Runner we see him running out of options, accepting something else entirely. Whereas Roy accepts his biological death, he also accepts the fact he will always live on through Deckard. Deckard however has never accepted anything, merely milling about in some memories or torture we never learn of. As he hangs off into the urban sprawl below we’re treated to some insight, as he just falls off he spits right in Roy Batty’s face; is this a complete disregard for life. Is he brave or stubborn?

After Deckard throws away his chance at life we’re treated to a moment in which he throws away something else. His paranoia, not at death but at his life, the ever-watching eye and the job that he’s in naturally creates this paranoia. He’s out to kill non-humans who look exactly human.

Life is defined by choices and memories

“It is not what I am underneath but what I do that defines me.”[3]

If Roy’s actions defined him as a person then people would speak of him as a tortured soul willing to change his life. He would be seen as a murdered, yes, but of one with actual reason in an unreasonable world. Deckard’s actions are perhaps more darkly ambiguous.

Roy kills out of a pursuit of life, whereas Deckard kills out of a pursuit of his job. He does get a feeling for the case (as evidence by Gaff’s matchstick man when investigating Leon’s apartment) but he’s not really fighting to turn the tide or stop the system in any way. Roy, as evil and as maniacal as he seems to be, is more of a hero than Deckard ever will be. In fact, no-one in this world is truly a hero.

People die in Blade Runner, a lot; it’s what always seems to be inevitable in this world of short lifespans and meaningless existences. What makes it different is its reflection on the life: Deckard’s constant reflection and sadness, Roy’s absolute explosive persona, Tyrell’s exile, Rachael’s fight over her own inner thoughts and Gaff’s motives. If there is a character more interesting than Roy Batty and Deckard then it is Gaff.

Not because he lives or dies, but because of what he speaks.

“It’s too bad she won’t live, but then again, who does?”

Who does Gaff belong to? Is he a harbinger of death or a peacemaker, is he freeing Deckard or shackling him with the burden of being a Replicant? Gaff’s actions all seem to define him as a character, but they don’t define his allegiances or moral position, for all we know he is merely doing this to free Deckard and prove a point to him: that you don’t have to become a slaver to be free from slavery.

NOTES
1. The Screenwriter’s commentary on The Final Cut.
2. Thomas Campbell - Hallowed Ground
3. Batman Begins
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? is a world away from Blade Runner. It is post-apocalyptic, slowly-paced, Deckard is more lively and has a wife along with many other details. What separates it more than anything else is its structure and how it handles the whole philosophical, societal and technological questions posed.

Dick’s book centres around both Deckard and another guy by the name of J.R. Isidore as they both become entangled in the web of the Replicants. The story starts with Deckard waking up and talking with his wife before shifting into (already) social commentary. Deckard and his Wife argue about the mood organs, programmable devices that can interfere with human emotions, essentially making human beings themselves programmable. For a story about Replicants and ‘what does it mean to be human?’ this is a perfect way to kick off the story.

Blade Runner however starts with a blade runner being shot by a Replicant after he tries to poke him with the Voight-Kampff. What we already have is still the same exploration of ideas: how human are the Replicants and what does it mean to be human anyway? The novel then breaks off into a discussion between Deckard and his neighbours about their electric animals, but the film instead shows Deckard for the first time alienated and separated from the world.

It can be safely said that the main theme of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? is of a man becoming progressively dehumanized before completely collapsing. Blade Runner however is about a man’s search to become rehumanized, eventually giving in and accepting death but not before being given life by Roy Batty. The two aren’t so different in this respect actually, both Deckard’s search for some form of solace with Sheep’s Deckard longing for animal companionship but Blade Runner’s Deckard longing for a purpose to his life.

One is outright darker than the other in this respect, with Blade Runner not explicit in its suicidal tendencies but Deckard’s acceptance of death really does stand out. He even spits in the face of Roy Batty as if proclaiming he does not need life anymore. Sheep has Deckard go out into the desert and gain an epiphany through interaction with an ‘empathy box’ (another element to re-enforce that ‘what is human’ thing).

Sheep’s structure re-enforces the theme it tries to carry. As Deckard becomes more mechanical and more reliant on the empathy box and actually questioning his own humanity at one point (in a bizarre sequence in which he is told that his police department does not exist) he thus becomes dehumanized. Blade Runner follows these lines but ends on a more... lighter note, although that’s open to interpretation, while Blade Runner is the darkest work it is still the lightest ending.

By the end of Sheep, Deckard hasn’t really gain anything. He does learn to appreciate android life a lot more, understanding why Rachael kills his pet goat and “prefers” to know his new pet toad is artificial. Blade Runner is more open in that the nod that Deckard gives to the paper unicorn is (in my view) an acceptance of who he is and an acceptance of new purpose in his life. Of course, he could be nodding to accept his doomed fate as a human being or he could simply be accepting his android state of mind.

Whereas Sheep is definitely centred on Deckard being a human being, I feel Blade Runner is a lot more confusing. In the early, less Ridley Scott heavy versions then the unicorn was a sign of brotherhood from Gaff. It was a symbol that he was there, but he let Rachael live, that he found new respect for Deckard - “You’ve done a man’s job, sir.” - But with the later versions it’s clear that line and the nodding to the unicorn take on entirely different meanings.
Deckard's humanity is destroyed throughout *Sheep* whereas in *Blade Runner* it's already gone, in *Sheep* he doesn't rediscover his humanity but rather accepts new elements into it. *Blade Runner* however ends with Deckard finding purpose for his life, accepting his flaws and becoming human.

The character of J.R Isidore is used as a peeping hole into the Replicant's world. He is the way we see the Batys move about and see their humanity, their curiosity with the spider and many other things that come about his perception. This is all reflected against Deckard's rather cold, unemotional actions and dis-regard for life. What separates *Sheep* and *Blade Runner* is, ironically, perception.

*Sheep* tells us that you need human characters to relate to a story whereas *Blade Runner* tells us it could be anything. The whole definition of 'human' is put into jeopardy by the ambiguity of Deckard's humanity or inhumanity; he is spread across many versions, trapped within a state of meta-fictional ambiguity that no other character in fiction has ever endured. He will be forever both human and Replicant, even in the most Ridley Scott influenced version there is room for interpretation.

That is the key, interpretation through perception. It's no mistake that the 'eyes' were a main symbol of *Blade Runner*, the mood organs and empathy boxes of *Sheep*s world were not misplaced either and (most importantly) the separated protagonists of *Sheep* open up something important.

Whose stories are we following in *Blade Runner*?

It could be easily seen as two sides: Deckard and the Replicant crew, with the first scene giving the Replicants screentime. We then shift into a movement between Deckard's actions and the Replicants finding hospice in J.F Sebastian, a spin on the character of J.R Isidore, we don't necessarily empathize with anyone in these sequences but we do understand Sebastian’s place in the story best of all. After all, he is the most human, and we just watched Batty murder Chew to get here.

Replicants and androids. *Blade Runner* used the word 'replicant' given the popularization of 'androids', David Peoples asked his daughter (whom was involved in biochemistry) for a better word and she suggested 'replicant' out of 'replication'.[1] The separation between non-human and human is made quite clear in *Blade Runner's* world: failure of the Voight-Kampff test, the same goes for *Sheep*'s world too.

What's also similar is the display of empathy in both texts and lack thereof. *Blade Runner* displays a dystopia full of a docile populace who fill their time with inhuman displays of themselves. In this world, inhumanity is humanity, perhaps the same goes for *Sheep* in which a social hierarchy is built around which animal you own.

*Sheep* goes beyond in having many elements such as the mood organs and empathy box which play around the perception of humanity in this world. All empathy and emotion is fabricated by machines, extending itself into the androids themselves. There are however some exceptions: “It pleased him to be telling them this.” when Roy is discussing the death of the androids, but then “Pris’ face at seeing her friends at once melted away.” showing something quite different. The Replicants aren’t perfect, they’re human, but there are showings of humans being human.

Luft comments “An android would never have done that.” after Deckard buys her the painting in the Museum gift shop. The nature of empathy here in *Sheep* fluctuates wildly throughout the text as Deckard tries not to admit his inhumanity. Perhaps in some weird way he feels more human in making love to Rachael and giving Luft the gift than he does being with his wife and going through the empathy box and mood organs.

It's pretty clear in the world of both *Blade Runner* and *Sheep* that our concept of humanity is dead. No one is 'human' in either world but in *Blade Runner* the most human appears to be Roy Batty’s crew. They feel for one another, they love each other and act with emotion and grace. It just so happens that Deckard is so inhuman in his character that, by the end of it all, he becomes healed and the most human of all of *Blade Runner's* characters. He is the last one left.
If one author is affiliated with *Blade Runner* and *Sheep* on the same level of Philip K. Dick then it's, without a doubt, George Orwell. Specifically, his work of *1984* which spawned the term ‘Orwellian’. There is however a stark difference between how the two texts deal with Orwellian tones, with one deeper than other. Obviously, *Blade Runner* carries a mise en scène and, as such, can’t exactly be compared with *Sheep* beyond its story, themes and presentation of actual characters. Nevertheless, it's quite evident one is more thorough in its exploration of Orwell, but neither is superior nor inferior for it.

*Blade Runner* depicts a world of absolute big brother; *Sheep* alludes to such a world. The Tyrell Corporation certainly carries some big brother weight but none of the fifty foot advertisements nor the neon nightmares flood the writing of *Sheep*. If anything, it’s more subtle in its exploration of the Orwellian tones. This is a post-apocalyptic world after all, a trapped dystopia, perhaps more of a hell than 2019’s Los Angeles.

Perhaps Orwell's writings are more relevant to a 1982 audience than a 1968 one? The 1968 was a time of the Cold War, the space race and all manner of things but the 1980s heralded the rise of the Murdoch media and corporatism fuelled by Reagonimics. There’s a reason why Orwell’s touch doesn’t linger over *Sheep* that much, though it’s still as heavy as the philosophical substance in the novel, it’s because it’s not that relevant to the 1968 audience. This was a time before Reagan and Murdoch, before big brother, the technology wasn’t there yet to be corrupted.

Not only are both texts so mature and brave in their messages but they are also so different and similar at the same time. I consider *Sheep/Blade Runner* to represent the biggest mixing pot of the same message repeated and cut using different tools and not necessarily per medium. Dick had language, Ridley had the camera but one chose to go into the depths of Orwell, one chose to rehumanize and one chose to cast a more empathetic light over the Replicants.

Whatever the case, these texts have become more than texts. I guess you could say they've gone beyond the call of duty.

**NOTES**

1. Interview with David Peoples in *Sacrificial Sheep: The Novel vs. the Film*. Enhancement Archive of Blade Runner Ultimate Collector's Edition
SECTION II: BEYOND

1980s.
This was an exciting, or rather; it should have been the happiest time in humanity’s history. We had a smiling cowboy in the White House, a strong woman for Prime Minister, a nice little peace throughout the world and another smiling man called Murdoch just starting up a little media business. Except, well obviously, everything fell apart. Reaganomics completely failed and led to some of the biggest unemployment since the Great Depression, Maggie Thatcher turned out to be quite unpopular in Britain, Murdoch became... well and the Western world was scared stiff by the economic advancement of the likes of Japan.

Blade Runner is a portrait of man on the cusp of another Renaissance but held down by the curse of intelligence, of realization, it is a film that reminds people of all of the above. As such, ‘all of the above’ needs to be put into perspective. In this section I won’t be investigating the very nature of Blade Runner as a film as much as I’m investigating it as an event, rather looking into the place it appeared in. I’m saving eighties philosophy and politics for another section, but in the cultural sense, I want to put a few things in perspective.

(2.1) STAR WARS IS FOR KIDS: Blade Runner rocked the boat by portraying an Earth that was pretty much lifeless. Star Wars was a film capturing a lonely boy’s search for true solace and ends with him becoming a hero. Blade Runner? Not so much.

(2.2) SCIENCE-FICTION: Science-fiction is possibly the most unlimited genre of fiction that has ever existed. It allows for grounded stories within an ungrounded world, it is twisted science but not twisted humanity. Blade Runner isn’t exactly your typical ‘sci-fi’ flick’.

(2.3) ONCE AGAIN: In which I address a certain discussion that has been floating around very recently: what would happen if we revisited Blade Runner? There was a false rumour about Michael Bay helming a prequel, Christopher Nolan has been said to want the real deal so... would it be that big of a deal?

(2.4) 1982: Also known as the greatest year in film-making history. I have to agree. The Thing, E.T., Rocky III, Star Trek II: Wrath of Khan, Poltergeist, Gandhi, Tron and many, many more. This was a year that cracked open the eighties and showed its ugly face.

(2.5) AFTERMATH: Whatever happened to Roy Batty? Did Harrison Ford ever find out whether or not he was a Replicant? Where did Pris go? Did Ridley Scott vanish off the face of the Earth, is he dead? All this and more in the final chapter that second guesses the places of the cast, crew and beyond.
(2.1) STAR WARS IS FOR KIDS

“If you look at Blade Runner, it’s been cut sixteen ways from Sunday and there are all kinds of different versions of it. Star Wars, there’s basically one version — it just keeps getting improved a little bit as we move forward. …” - George Lucas.[1]

“Just when the science fiction movie was heading off into a Star Wars space opera direction, Scott brought the genre (or a part of it) back to a more nuanced consideration of human character.” says Aaron Barlow (Assistant Professor of English, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania).[2]. Here’s an interesting question to ask.

Is Blade Runner a more mature film than Star Wars? I’m of course talking about the original trilogy, the ones that actually exist; the prequel trilogy is a whole other barrel of non-existent fish to me. Blade Runner is a film about philosophical ramifications, destruction of power, deconstruction of a system and sex and politics and all manner of ‘adult’ things, but does it make it mature? I can name countless films and video-games which follow along the same lines but don’t give it nearly the same ‘seriousness’. Does Star Wars follow into this camp?

Star Wars is a film series populated by Wilhelm screams, laser beams, dark lords who are evil and stuff, a higher level of optimism than Blade Runner and all manner of universal appeal. If we’re comparing Blade Runner to Lucas’ sci-fi opera then I think a fairer comparison would be Citizen Kane and the work of Pixar.

Yes, they’re not entirely the same thing with Kane locked in the halls of all manner of foreign themes to Blade Runner and Pixar barely registering under the palette of George Lucas. What’s interesting however is how linked they are: Kane being the true lungs of a noir soaked film industry and Pixar being the literal spawn of Lucas’ special effects team. What’s more interesting is they operate and different levels of appeal: the adult and the universal.

Pixar manage to say different things to entirely different groups of people. With Toy Story 3 they managed to remind old folks about their old memories, they managed to tell parents about their child’s lives, they managed to tell teenagers that their childhood was over but optimism never dies and they managed to tell children that all’s well that ends well. Pixar operate on multiple levels, multiple emotional plateaus and still manages to act with strong strides in every single direction. If you look at their entire filmography then you see their universal appeal stretches throughout.

Kane however, and the vast majority of Orson Welles’ filmic career, is deep within the confines of telling an adult story. There isn’t a whisker of child friendly fiction here and I’m convinced most early teens won’t identify themselves with the story as much. The difference that separates Kane and Pixar’s works is not how mature they are but how they approach maturity in their respective works. I think the same is exactly true for Star Wars and Blade Runner. The universal versus the exclusive and neither is superior nor inferior.

Star Wars is a story about a group of young fresh-faced heroes saving the galaxy and fighting evil and love and triumph and that entire good cowboy stuff. Blade Runner is a film about Harrison Ford questioning his own reality and being devoid of the basics of human interaction and set in a backdrop of a dystopia littered with a docile populace and brainwashing being a normal day thing.
Star Wars is mature, no doubt about that, it doesn't throw its arms up and call Darth Vader evil because he's evil, in fact one of the most emotional moments in the trilogy (in my opinion) is the shot of Darth Vader’s mask as his son is being electrocuted by his master. There’s that blankness that was always there but now transforms from an expression of emotionless to emotional. The same goes for its approach to love and heroism, this is a 12 year’s old boy’s fantasy alright but it’s stilled nested deep within a story of hope and love and all that good adult stuff.

It isn’t superior in its maturity, but rather just plain different. Blade Runner could be described as more ‘focus' but that isn't giving Star Wars the attention it deserves. To put it in the blunt sense, take a listen of John Williams’ work on the Star Wars films and then go and listen to Vangelis’ Blade Runner score. Vastly, vastly different but still fundamentally mature in their tones. Star Wars is more relaxed, but it still manages to feel adult at times, Blade Runner is raw in its adult content and pushes it over its possibility for universal appeal.

It’s probably why the film didn’t become a commercial hit, with people expecting Harrison Ford to show up with a gun and go all Indiana Jones or Han Solo up in the business and blow everything sky high. They were expecting a heroic man, like they’d seen before, to come out of nowhere and just be Harrison Ford. He was a staple of family-friendly fantasy fun and then Ridley Scott just had to go and ruin everything. Han Solo as a character is an interesting opposite to Rick Deckard. He is dashing, heroic and certainly human. Whereas Deckard is cold and calculated, Solo is suave and charismatic. Solo seems certain of his humanity, but this isn’t exactly one of the questions asked of him, the question certainly arises from Darth Vader’s character and the line between man and machine.

The tone shift from Han Solo to Rick Deckard may have been what attracted Ford to the part, but it certainly didn’t attract audiences. Star Wars could be seen as a film of universal appeal whereas Blade Runner would only be seen the parents of the families and not the kids.

An interesting thought is what if Blade Runner was made by Pixar? What if Blade Runner was made in the template of Star Wars? I think it’s safe to say it wouldn’t be a worse film, certainly, but it wouldn’t be Blade Runner. It would be have to heavily censored in its adult messages and probably less philosophical and less edgy.

In short, it wouldn’t be Blade Runner. Star Wars does a completely different thing to Blade Runner, once again its Vangelis and John Williams, that doesn’t negate either film because each strives to meet different goals and excels in each of them.

Blade Runner was spun from a novel by Philip K. Dick that was filled with themes that Dick revisited, refined and delivered again and again in new and interesting ways throughout his writing career. It just so happens that Star Wars was a series as well, but Blade Runner never caught on so much, it became a cult classic solely from the rise of the VHS technology (if it had been released any sooner or later then you wouldn’t even be reading this today).

Star Wars was a series that explored several things all within the same circus of ideas. The meeting of the whole ‘man and machine’ thing finally concluded with Jedi’s ‘blank stare’ moment as I call it, the spiritual nature of ‘the force' was resolved with Yoda’s death and many other themes such as David vs. Goliath and all that good stuff came to an end as well.
A New Hope set the location, the villains, the characters, the dilemmas and themes up into one giant domino multiplex. Empire Strikes Back evolved them into the typical ‘second act’ dark zone and it’s probably the most powerful of the films given it dares to let its characters lose. How those characters lose and how they change and how their arcs form and mould and become these concrete, inevitabilities all interlinked all make Jedi so strong. For example, Han Solo is destined in Empire Strikes Back to come back and save the day no doubt about that but his situation is affiliated with Leia’s growing character and growing strength. Luke’s story is a lot more separate, he rather splits off from the group, but his value of people around him destroys him in the Empire duel, before re-constructing itself in the meeting with his father in Jedi in which he becomes a meditated and more focused individual.

Philip K. Dick was always about losing in one form or another. Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? is solely about the idea of a man losing his humanity through taking humanity away from the world. Blade Runner is similar but becomes a film about a man rediscovering his humanity, a very different exploration, and this might be perhaps why Blade Runner was never destined for the Star Wars treatment; because it’s brave.

Star Wars was brave in pushing the science fiction into space opera territory, Blade Runner dared to push it into something human. Star Wars isn’t for kids, that are a silly thing to say, but it is for kids. Not exclusively, of course, but that’s something Blade Runner doesn’t have. To me at least, Blade Runner is more thought-provoking and more philosophical and more ideas-worthy. Star Wars being The King’s Speech to Blade Runner’s Social Network as it were.

Regardless, both films have left their mark on the history of filmmaking for decades to come. Even George Lucas tried to out-Ridley-Scott Ridley Scott with the cityscape scene from Episode Two. Although, that film and the rest of the prequels never actually happened anyway.

Blade Runner isn’t for kids, but it doesn’t make it any worse of a film, same goes for Star Wars which is also for kids. Whereas Blade Runner strives to be more adult and more focused upon its ideas, Star Wars is more focused upon its characters and heart and at the end of the day both strive and thrive as the most powerful fiction that science fiction has to offer.

NOTES

2. The Blade Runner Experience - page 58
(2.2) SCIENCE FICTION

Science fiction is a genre that has haunted me throughout my life. It has asked me impossible questions; it has made me question my own humanity and the nature of reality. It has also managed to become a part of who I am, I’m writing a book about Blade Runner after all, and I couldn’t be more thrilled with what our little culture has evolved into. Humankind gets a lot of flak but once in a while I remember a Ridley Scott feature or a Philip K. Dick novel or just something that reminds me that there’s a genre that cares about me.

Science fiction usually involves an askew version of our own reality, twisted in order to fit the message, but also a place to show off what would happen if humankind was living in these worlds. Sci-fi movies top my ‘films of forever’ list for the same reason I love video-games, or at least a similar reason.

Video-games make you make decisions and live the consequences of said decisions. They are set within realities beyond our own with the link being a controller and a television set. Science-fiction too stretches humanity, it places in situations you otherwise wouldn’t encounter in your usual life and asks you to answer questions we don’t usually see come up in friendly discussions.

Blade Runner is celebrated as the very pinnacle of science fiction, or at least the very tip of the spear, I’m inclined to somewhat agree but through in Space Odyssey and Star Wars as sci-fi’s ‘growing up’ moments. It’s quite interesting how Ridley Scott managed to turn science fiction away from space opera power fantasy into something more adult and concentrated. Star Wars type films never died, in fact I’d argue a lot of Blade Runner’s visuals are heavily inspired by the original trilogy, but science fiction did evolve.

Filmmakers today refer to some visuals as ‘the bladerunner look’, in which something mimics or replicates the same feeling of Scott’s densely populated world full of Mayan and Egyptian influences in its architecture. For example, Christopher Nolan’s Gotham City in the Batman trilogy he has produced seems to carry with it the detailed minutia that made 2019’s Los Angeles so memorable. You can almost feel the chill of Vangelis’ score throughout some of the sequences in Batman Begins such as in the slums or during Batman’s interrogations.

Something interesting to consider is the thought that science fiction is not about heroism but rather progressive dis-empowerment that eventually leads the hero to try something else and become empowered. Star Wars had Luke run to his friend’s aid and almost get brutally murdered by his own father, The Dark Knight leads Bruce to sacrifice his symbol for the protection of Gotham and shield it from the truth they can’t handle and Blade Runner is a film about a man dealing with his perception of reality.

Superhero movies aren’t exactly science fiction; Nolan tends to operate on a more realist plateau when it comes to his Batman films but there is still that feel of science fiction. The questions of when Bruce Wayne ends and Batman begins, the live of a symbol provokes questions of immortality, the endless battle between chaos and order but The Dark Knight isn’t one that rests itself in typical philosophical quandaries, rather provoking other explorations. It’s without a doubt a brave film, no less a brave American film, that explores post-9/11 commentary with such audacity and courage that
it champions questions as strong as *Blade Runner* does. The lengths Batman goes to save Gotham becoming extremist (brutally beating Joker, hiding the truth from them, surveillance) and the lines between freedom fighter/vigilante and terrorist start to blur.

*Blade Runner* asks contemporary questions too, using its science fiction mould to provoke questions of corporatism, freedom, the nature of reality, the ethics of genetics, the rights of live, what makes us human and all that good stuff. *The Dark Knight* is brave for its time, but *Blade Runner* may live on forever longer. Not because the questions posed in *The Dark Knight* won’t pose relevance in a few years’ time, they certainly will, but the questions *Blade Runner* poses are relevant *any* time.

*Blade Runner* would have been relevant for an 80s audience, a 90s audience and a 21st Century audience, *The Dark Knight* can’t attest to that fact. Scott’s masterpiece is rooted in such deep questions that affect everyone at any time, *The Dark Knight* has a few of those as well but it is largely focused on its post-9/11 commentary, if you showed the film to an 80s audience then they wouldn’t be as affected. There are too few films today that would make sense to an earlier audience and I’m not sure if that’s exactly a bad thing.

*Blade Runner* was the first science fiction art film, but it wasn’t a pretentious or explicit one, yes it was wrapped in its Orwellian dichotomy and its philosophical questions but it wasn’t ignoring its science fiction roots. It needed some ground to link it to reality, so as to disguise the questions, and while science fiction is largely a genre that is about alienating the human condition and seeing what happens to it, it can also be used as bridging tissue to keep the audience on their toes. We have flying cars, big special effects, the opening shot, miniatures and so on and so forth. *Blade Runner* is one of the most visually powerful films that has ever been produced.

If I were a film student then I’d be telling you about lens setups, camera placement, lighting, and the symbology that interlinks with the technicalities that Ridley setup but I’m not a film student. I’m merely Nathan Hardisty and this is an accessibly academic piece on a great movie, it’s a fan work, but that doesn’t detract from anything I’m saying. Science fiction is a powerful genre for one specific reason: it is more real to us.

Yes, dramas set within the modern days are all gritty and films like *The Hurt Locker* show off a harsh reality on our very own planet but *Blade Runner* is a film so real to us because it is realistically frightening. It’s a future we don’t want, but we have to admit, whereas showing reality is scary but the future... is much scarier.

Science-fiction has been treated, unfairly, as a genre that is 100% spectacle and zero story effort. The *Star Wars* prequels are vapid nonsense filled with green screens of void effort and doesn’t carry the charm of the homemade special effects that the original trilogy had. A lot of critics around the time of *Blade Runner* said it was visually spectacular but failed to deliver on the story front.

Personally I don’t get it. *Blade Runner* is a film, a series of images that display characters going about a story, its visual style and special effects are used to re-enforce this world and the story. The rain during Roy Batty’s speech poetically links in with what he says, the Orwellian blimp moves about the film and showers its light across all the characters and yet all of these details tell us so much about the characters.

In a way, video-games show us just how relevant *Blade Runner* is today because the film represents a sharp change. Lucas was throwing science fiction in the direction
of space opera fantasy, a universal film, and then Scott comes along and creates an explosion of adult themes and neither exactly won. Star Wars led on to giant science fiction fantasies, Blade Runner led on to the likes of Inception and Total Recall; neither film succeeded but allowed for a genre filled with co-existing methods of the genre.

Video-games are a long tortured medium that have been ridiculously linked to teenage violence and negative effects in general. I'm a video-game journalist kid, have been for years, and you can go and read my Up, Down, Left, Right series for a short idea on what video-games have been through and where they're going. The fact is: the science fiction genre is exactly parallel to what we're going through: a rift.

Culture is divulging and filling up new spaces, it's as if the water's rising and claiming new space, and interactive media has been born. Obviously, video-games have countless problems with their storytelling still heavily relying on cut-scenes and the general '90% of video-games are juvenile male power fantasy trash' being sadly true. We are a medium about shooting people, a repeated idea over and over, as if ever film was a romantic comedy. Thankfully games like Mass Effect, Portal, Limbo, Shadow of the Colossus and so on and so forth show either a more disempowered approach to violence or one that characterises violence rather than letting you shoot grunt #130 and not letting you know about his wife and kids back home.

Science fiction has been a genre accused of being nothing but spectacle, it was a joke on the literary scene for a long while, and now video-games are on the chopping board. Blade Runner not only speaks as a political time capsule, a portrait of the history but also as a cultural force capable of telling video-games exactly what's in store: divergence for effect. Universal media and exclusive media.

In the same way Blade Runner failed as a film because audiences simply didn’t want to be scared/weren’t ready for it, science fiction has long being a tortured genre filled with a history of an audience that 'isn't ready yet'. Metropolis being the standout real first ‘ideas’ film that led to the foundation of science fiction as a powerhouse genre, unfortunately popularizing it for a lot of the 30s/40s/50s sci-fi ‘trashy’ film with Ed Wood being one of the many victims.

It wasn't until Kubrick's 2001 was science-fiction actually taken seriously. Kubrick brought a whole new field of imagination to a genre that was now typically used to create absolute trash and then suddenly science fiction never stopped. Speilberg and Lucas came along, Ridley threw a few punches and then when James Cameron came along did it all take off. Science fiction was king, and the nerd was inheriting the Earth.

This is in large part to a certain historical event around the 20th Century that steered all themes and ideas right to its core, and we'll touch on Blade Runner's commentary later, but science fiction was the perfect way to tackle this issue. It’s like how Shakespeare used Denmark as the setting for Hamlet instead of England given the problems with the English monarchy around the time, but linked all the ideas into the actual time, sort of sneaking in commentary.

Superhero comics like Watchmen also dealt with this giant historical event by using the same subtle technique, but science fiction was perfect, this was reality but skewed in some way and was the perfect way to show humanity on its edges and show its true dark grin. The historical event was of course The Cold War, the most expensive war in the history of civilisation.
2001 was successful for a number of reasons, but the Space Race was probably the largest, Kubrick went past the Moon one year before America did. He conquered the stars and won hearts all while America spat in the face of the Soviet Union. He also re-ignited science fiction under a new flame, a serious angle suddenly appeared on the horizon and Blade Runner was about to be part of this new dawn.

1968, the year of 2001, just also happened to be the launch of a certain book by a certain author. No need to say what it is really.

If there’s one thing that haunts science fiction film is its influences, or more importantly, its origins. Lucas took the sci-fi trash, Flash Gordon and all sorts of influences and mashed them into a space opera pulp that transformed science fiction. Then Ridley Scott came along and threw everything into the mixer, but happened to stop by the local library on the way to his culinary class.

This metaphor isn’t going anywhere. What he did throw in however is something else entirely, a certain author had started to sweep into science fiction. It’s one I’ve already discussed, and perhaps truly separates Lucas and Scott.

“The eyeball, really, was the symbol of the ever watchful eye.” and “Orwellian” says Ridley Scott. [1]

George Orwell was one of the most influential writers of the 20th Century. In his life he managed to comment on something that was barely affecting Britain, yet managed to comment on it in such a way that it held more relevance as time went on. George Orwell was concerned with “Big Brother” and his novel 1984 is hailed as a guidebook to a dystopian future. His work influenced many writers to come, some of them included Watchmen’s Alan Moore, a certain Philip K. Dick and Ridley Scott who threw it into the mixing pot of his new pet project.

I talked extensively about Star Wars and Blade Runner in the last chapter, probably deserves a book in its own really, but I think this is something that separates both pictures. While Star Wars has its Evil Empire that seems omnipresent, Blade Runner has its Evil Empire seemingly non-existent, as if not tied to this world. The Stormtroopers of Blade Runner don’t exist, no faceless guards or grunts, and this tackle of Orwell’s material truly separates it from Lucas’ romp through space opera land.

This is what separates science fiction, and it’s what defines Blade Runner as one of the monumental works of art of the 20th Century. It’s what defines us as human beings, it what makes us real, it’s what Roy Batty was talking about and it was what Deckard finally found peace with.

Perception.

The irony behind the Orwellian eye is that the true way to unearth it is to show perspective, to show the extent of which corporatism and control and dystopian roots have clawed their way into our societal soil. Star Wars may not be subtle with its Stormtroopers, but it carries the weight of the Empire as this omnipresent omnipotent arm of a much darker threat, if anything, it reminds me of the Nazis. They had Stormtroopers, literally, though not literally with the laser guns and razzle dazzle.

So is science fiction naturally Orwellian? Metropolis has some of those tones to it, though 1984 came sometime after Metropolis was released. I think what science fiction naturally is, and what’s at the core of Blade Runner, is perception. Is Deckard a Replicant or a human? The important thing is perception of the question, is it a
questioning of Deckard or is it a question of ourselves? Are we too unlike Batty in his raw emotions at times? Do our memories make us who we are?

Do androids dream of electric sheep?

Philip K. Dick manages to open up a giant can of philosophical worms with his work on *Sheep*, it took all of his ideas on Orwell and mashed them into a fine paste of this age old philosophy meets this new-fangled futuristic genre that was hailed as a cheering up serum. Science fiction led to *E.T.*, it led to *Star Wars* and it made people feel good that heroes lived and good triumphed. Optimism was on the plate of the 20th Century, not Orwell, but it still managed to find its place in cinema. The ‘Galactic Empire’, the ‘Tyrell Corporation’ and perhaps even some elements of Tim Burton’s *Batman* have that feel to it.

Superhero films have long been affiliated with the science fiction genre, I personally think it’s the melding of the action genre too, and Tim Burton’s *Batman* heralded a new age to it. The film felt like a superhero movie, but it was darker, a lot more sinister like it had just taken *Watchmen* with it into the exam hall and using it as notes. There was a great rusty feel about it, it was obtusely Burtonesque, and it felt so... *Blade Runner* and so steampunk?

I don’t know why I get the vibe from Burton’s *Batman* given there’s nothing that steampunkly about it. The technology is all in the popular ‘gothic Batman’ aesthetic, the environments are of stench drenched trenches of labyrinthine alleyways and cities but yet there’s the smoke and fog and the church and just subtle things that make me think *Blade Runner*. It makes me think steampunk or future noir or whatever you want to call it.

The 1980s onwards was the beginning of steampunk, a term coined by K.W Jeter who was looking for a phrase to contain the works of Tim Powers. He settled on the word we know today, one that wasn’t really ‘contained’, it was of Victorian technology and design meets a new technological age. It was, quite frankly, future noir at its finest and it caught on. It infested into action movies like *Wild, Wild West* and burrowed deep into video-games such as the modern classic *BioShock* as well as into the revival of the beloved British show *Doctor Who*.

Is George Orwell responsible for what we have today? Can we blame him for *Inception* and all manner of sci-fi epics? Did Orwell write a science fiction? Interesting questions, but I think the star of the show has to be handed to a certain Philip K. Dick.

Philip K. Dick isn’t single handled responsible for the science fiction boom we see today, but he is somewhat of a major influence. You don’t even have to look that far to see it: *Blade Runner, Total Recall, The Adjustment Bureau* so on and so forth and that’s not counting all the philidickian inspired films such as *Unknown* and *Inception* to name a few.

*Blade Runner* started this trend; on June 25 1982 we were introduced to a whole new world. I wasn’t alive then, which is a shame, I would’ve loved to see this film on the big screen and I missed out on the Final Cut screening. Nevertheless, *Blade Runner* is a true showing of what exactly went on in the weirdest of periods. It is a true science fiction movie, and science fiction means a lot more than just aliens and lasers.

That’s of course not to say there’s anything wrong with that.

NOTES
1. In the Director’s Commentary of *The Final Cut*

(2.3) ONCE AGAIN

I am now considering that this is the absolute worst time to write a book around *Blade Runner*. Yes, the modern world has yielded manner problems and stuff that *Blade Runner* so brilliantly interlinks with but it appears I’ve not considered the whole “culture moves on” thing and the fact of, generally, Hollywood. The trouble of *Blade Runner*’s existence is it exists way beyond the laws of fiction, across multiple versions each throwing different messages at you. For example, without the Unicorn dream sequence then Gaff’s unicorn becomes a simple gesture of brotherhood and not of a sign of his humanity. In fact, perhaps Deckard’s acceptance of his humanity is affirmed by Gaff in the grand scheme of things...

Anyway, it appears that Ridley Scott has actually signed on for another *Blade Runner* film.[1] So this throws all manner of questions up in the air, for starters we now have a true consideration of just how beyond that *Blade Runner* can go. This is a film about to reach its 30th anniversary and yet we’re still discussing it. People are more and more inclined to believe in this movie, to watch it and still call it one of the best films they’ve ever seen. I was born in 1994 and I believe just that.

What would happen if Ridley Scott came back to the *Blade Runner* universe? What would happen if he opened up another giant can of worms on all of us all over again? I’m not entirely sure but this chapter will hope to explore that, starting with my thoughts on what Ridley could possibly do.

Nothing.

I’m not violently out crying for a boycott or saying that a sequel/prequel/whatever would be a bad thing, it would throw even more popularity into *Blade Runner*’s face, and that’s always a good thing. It depends on what you think Ridley could do and that probably includes making a good film, which is impossible given it will be compared to *Blade Runner*, a wine which has had thirty years to mature and sweep out into a work of fiction that goes beyond the fiction.

*Blade Runner* is too unique of a film to follow-up or remake or even touch in many respects. There was a rumour a while ago about Michael Bay been given the prequel helm, which turned out to be a hoax thank god, and it wasn’t just Bay’s name that made it stink but also the fact that we’d have another *Blade Runner* movie. There hasn’t been much of an out roar over the news that Ridley is coming back, but there have been objections, of which I confess I’m a part of.

If a *Blade Runner* sequel, remake or whatever exists then it will be immediately compared with the timeless masterpiece of cinema. But the timeless masterpiece would feel a little touched up, maybe even knocked off a little bit.

I imagine that if Scott manages to make a good movie, it really wouldn’t matter given how ‘good’ the original is. *Blade Runner* is a deep art film, one filled to the brim with ideas and philosophies and nothing can be prepared. It would kinda feel a bit odd too as I’m already predicting that Ridley will try and bring the ideas into a more modern
day mindset, when that’s really unnecessary. There’s a reason besides the film’s quality that it’s last so long, it’s its continual relevance to every time it has existed in.

Another entry wouldn’t spoil the original, per say, but it might take away a little bit of its power. If someone sees the feature and then goes to check out Blade Runner then they might see past everything and I’m not already predicting that Ridley will choose to use CGI at every possible opportunity. Blade Runner was the last patchwork effects movie, and it was a certain note to end on.

The idea of a remake doesn’t repulse me per say, neither does any idea of ‘another entry’, but I do feel slightly weird about the idea. Maybe it’s because Blade Runner is personal or maybe it’s just the general ‘Hollywood’ vibe that I’m getting about the whole issue. I’ve heard it said that Christopher Nolan[2] is the man wanted by Hollywood to helm any potential Blade Runner flavoured film, though that’s out of the question now Ridley Scott has said he is coming back,

Nolan would certainly bring a certain flavour to Blade Runner, a film which clearly influenced his work on Batman Begins. Perhaps a fresh director would be what a Blade Runner film would need, rather than Scott coming back, it obviously isn’t selfish of him to do so and if anyone knows the film then it’s him. However, this is Blade Runner and any sequel/prequel etc. would probably have to be unrelated to the story that’s created; rather just set within the universe.

Then there’s the question of Harrison Ford’s role, a man who recently demonstrated in both Cowboys and Aliens and Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull that he’s still ready to be thrown about like a wrecking ball. I’m not sure how involved he could be though, given his age, and Deckard’s mortality would be thrown up in the air with the idea of a sequel. Maybe Deckard was a Nexus-7 or the absolute “more human than human” that Tyrell was pushing, one that had the lifespan of a human being and had all the flaws of a human being.

Harrison Ford would probably be on board, if the price and script is right of course, but then that puts more questions in the air. I really doubt any of the other cast returning unless they try and flesh out the Replicants backstories although Rutgur Hauer is aging a bit. With a bit of CGI they could make him young and you don’t have to look past Hobo With A Shotgun to see he’s still, well, Rutgur Hauer.

I don’t have a problem with Ridley Scott, I think that Deckard is indeed a Replicant but also human. He accepts his humanity in the end either way you take the human/Replicant debate.

Scott specifically inserted the unicorn dream sequence along with the ‘eye glint’ in Deckard’s eyes when he tells Rachael that he wouldn’t hunt her but “Someone will.” and this generally means Scott’s interpretation is that of him being a Replicant. I too believe in him to be a Replicant but, to be honest, the question of his humanity shouldn’t be limited to him as a product of a lab but rather what separates him from actual human beings. To put it bluntly, it should be a question of what it means to be human.

I side with Scott on Deckard as a Replicant because of the argument against it that the audience deserved an “emotional connection” and a “human” character. I didn’t get the “human” vibe from Deckard until the end, he was a cold and calculated individual... programmed if you will. He was devoid of any emotion and quite cruel, perverse even in the way he throws himself after Rachael and grins at Zhora when she asks him to dry her back.
Nevertheless I think an “emotional connection” to someone “human” is still achieved by the end, it’s just that the word ‘human’ takes on entire new meanings by the end of Blade Runner. The audience got what they wanted; does it matter how we’re made so as long as we’re human?

So, if Scott came back to Blade Runner we would most definitely, if Deckard was involved, a stronger confirmation that he is a Replicant. Would the ambiguity be crushed? Well, the Workprint and Theatrical Cuts exist along with many of fan edits. Blade Runner is the only film that changes across multiple versions, that nod of acceptance at the end is both of Deckard’s humanity and Gaff’s brotherhood. In some versions however, it leans towards plain old brotherhood.

The question of ‘coming back’ to Blade Runner has also led to the question of how on Earth we could revisit this universe. The story feels contained within this Orwellian nightmare of dizzying neon heights and corporatism abound, it shows off everything it needs to and still relates to today. Eastern expansion, the collapse of Western culture, genetic ethics and so on and so forth; Blade Runner has never been so relevant so why the rush to suddenly make another entry in the universe?

It could be for the money, it probably is actually, Blade Runner was never a Commercial success at its release but through home video it found its popularity and then the Workprint being found boosted its popularity even more. Across the decades it’s gathered steam and has managed to make its way as a ghost, touching and affecting every science-fiction or futuristic landscape that occurred afterwards. The Final Cut generated a whole new buzz and brought on a whole new audience into the realm of Scott’s visionary masterpiece.

I think something else that’s interesting to consider is how Scott would approach actually bringing Blade Runner into more contemporary messages. What would Scott exactly do to push his universe further? After all, it’s set in 2019 and there’s not exactly any leeway when it comes to a prequel otherwise you verge on a twisted modern day setting.

Would that work in Blade Runner’s favour though? Showing how the world deteriorated into a dystopian corporate hellhole, pushing it deeper into a modern day setting? I’m not so sure. The triumph of Blade Runner is not in its relation to modern day socio-political problems but in its delivery of those messages.

I mentioned the Hamlet comparison earlier and perhaps Ridley himself moved in the way that Shakespeare did. He wanted to make an excellent film, not an art film, rather an art film with all of the characteristics of a neo-noir thriller that could satisfy every adult and leave no-one behind. There were themes and ideas but there were also the fact that Blade Runner was the last great analogue special effects film. It really is beyond its time, behind its time and of its time all at the same time.

Blade Runner is so powerful and eternal given it’s captured within a science fiction setting yet revels within contemporary themes and messages. It’s even more powerful given its noir influence infused with the neon-sciences and other mise-en-scene collections that create Blade Runner. In short, the film and universe is only powerful because it is a collection of the old and new with messages relevant to the present. Moving the universe to a prequel setting and stripping away the technological flesh would open up all kinds of cans of worms. You’d let the noir overbalance, maybe
even saturate the film’s visual complexion, and it’s downright not *Blade Runner* once that happens.

Do I trust Scott to make a good film? Absolutely. Do I trust him to make a *Blade Runner*? No because that’s impossible. He probably would make another ‘*Prometheus*’, I’m in a hefty minority in seriously liking the film. Further still, very recently I realized that *Ghostbusters 2* is not a terrible movie, but has the misfortune of being compared to one of the greatest comedies that has ever been produced. No matter how good *Ghostbusters 2* is, no matter how underrated *The Godfather Part 2* is and no matter how ‘dazzling’ the *Blade Runner* follow-up is, it’s not going to be any part of the original. A sidequel might do the job, but it depends whether or not you believe the themes and ideas are what separates *Blade Runner* or its retrofitted visual dichotomy or just its story. It’s so rich in itself that it lends some sort of doubt over whether or not any kind of homage or follow-up can do it justice.

I would be completely fine with a re-make, honest, because it would never *hurt* *Blade Runner*. A prequel however is an entirely different story, and I don’t even want to mention the *Star Wars* prequels. You know, because they never happened.

NOTES

A very controversial opinion that I hold is of 1982 being the greatest year for film in the history of the entire medium. I generally say this and then begin to list *The Thing, Blade Runner, Ghandi, Annie, E.T, Star Trek II, Poltergeist, Tron* and go on and on about how the year defined the eighties.

1982 was barely a scratch away from Reagan’s first year as President, Thatcher was now knee deep in the pool of government here in the United Kingdom and the world was now about to pop the Murdoch media in the oven to cook over the decades. This was a new ‘American’ world that was full of the prospects of Reaganomics, a technological revolution and a bright future lay as the road ahead.

Instead the eighties was home to the Chernobyl disaster, the Berlin Wall collapsing, the formation of the Murdoch media empire, the fear over Eastern market dominance in the worldwide economic scale as new powerhouse corporations like Sony and Honda rose from the East and began leaping up the league tables. The eighties heralded a space shuttle named *Columbia*, meant to signify America leaping into a new age, and this was a time the USA was only just smoothing over the Cold War tension.

People were undecided on how to think. Brave smiles might have been the best way to describe it, even as the economy crashed and unemployment sky rocketed, they always wanted to look ahead. They saw a bright shiny, neon future full of delights and sounds and happiness for everyone. The American dream was being revolutionized, and they were fine with that, which is why a sudden cultural crack appeared on the surface of America everywhere. Suddenly, there was a rift and two groups appeared. Believers and sceptics.

I don’t want to bring religion into this; this is a book about *Blade Runner* and I don’t want to waste your time, but if one thing defined the eighties then it was belief. It was belief in the American dream and in apple pie and in the future. Everyone was wiping the worry off their foreheads and marching towards a brighter tomorrow, an American tomorrow.

Except it wasn’t an American tomorrow. That tomorrow wasn’t set in stone, in fact, it became twisted and demented over time. Suddenly one old man was about to own the world’s largest media empire, suddenly the Asian market started exploding across the American economic plateau and suddenly Reaganomics failed. 1982 was barely a whisker away from the *Columbia* launch, Columbia being the word that was used to describe (poetically) a feminized version of the United States. America was literally taking to the stars, as its Earth-cursed self was doomed to a not so bright future. Can I blame people for being happy? How do I know they were putting on brave faces?

Their films of course.

The biggest grossing film of 1982 happened to be *E.T*; Spielberg’s heart-warming sci-fi film that was about aliens from outer space being lovely and cuddly while man is all evil and stuff. It was a flip from the usual ‘alien invasion’ ordeal that films constantly churned out and Spielberg’s flip of the genre proved to be quite a big deal for Hollywood. More importantly, it was quite a big deal for the Eighties as a whole.

See, people didn’t want to be reminded that their world was crumbling and the whole bright future that Reagan had promised was all one giant white lie. So, when they
escaped into fiction they wanted some firm ground to stabilize their reality, it’s why E.T and Rocky 3 and even Annie did so well. It’s also why the likes of Blade Runner and John Carpenter’s The Thing turned out to be massive box office bombs, the latter being a true bruise on the cheek.

Tron fared well, Star Trek II did fairly well but Spielberg’s fuzzy wuzzy sci-fi toppled them all. It’s one of the many reasons Blade Runner bombed, along with being released on the same day as The Thing and in the general ‘Summer blockbuster’ season. It was swallowed up and spat out. Watchmen, the ground-breaking graphic novel by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, appeared in 1986 when America had cooled down from its warm optimism of the opening decade years. Watchmen did very well in the market because it chose to wait out the American people’s blind optimism, it was waiting for them to boil up those doubts and then it would pour them into something solid. Fear.

You don’t have to look far to see that 1982 is both the best year in film and, in many ways, the absolute worst. The Thing, Tron and Blade Runner all happened but only one of those got a 21st Century sequel thanks to a massive cult following. Blade Runner’s cult following still continues to grow and with Ridley proclaiming he is driving back to Los Angeles, and then who knows what will happen in the next few years.

1982 is the best year in film considering the quality of releases but also the worst considering the quality of audience, though you can’t exactly blame them. The Western World had been on the precipice of nuclear destruction and they didn’t exactly want something that told them how scary it all was. It was a time to celebrate, a time to be happy and to be optimistic about the future.

The special effects Renaissance that Lucas had ignited was now burning up, Blade Runner was the last great analogue effects science-fiction film. It released in the same year of Tron, a film which transformed exactly what it mean to even be a film. All this was going on as Pixar was barely a decade away and the whole ‘sci-fi’ genre looked like a great way to smile. Back to the Future, Tron, E.T and many more all introduced Eighties audiences to an exciting world full of laughs, eye-candy and heart-warming stories. The future was a nice place to be, since it felt so... present.

E.T is not a terrible movie. It is far from it in fact, it’s another spin of the science-fiction genre dice and that’s all more welcome in the world of human culture. In the 21st Century we’ve kind of gone off special effects and into a 3D fad ignited by James Cameron’s lackluster Avatar. Don’t get me wrong, it looks nice, but it’s not a good film at all, and the film came from the guy who made the greatest action sequel of all time (Terminator 2).

E.T is a more universally friendly film than Blade Runner, I hate the term ‘family friendly’ because it demeans any of the messages it tries to put across. Whereas E.T said that the Cold War was over and it was time to hug all the foreigners, Blade Runner was a film that said the Cold War was coming to an end but there are still monsters in the cupboard to deal with. E.T ignored the Murdoch media, Asian economic dominance rising and the failure of Reaganomics; instead focusing on a heart-warming tale of a boy and his alien pal.

I love E.T. It’s a symbol of my childhood, it still makes me all warm inside but in a way that trips me into feeling guilty. It’s a film about the heart, not about the mind, think the battle of The King’s Speech and The Social Network. Both films incredibly enjoyable
but only one made me think, specifically about the nature of power and privacy in the 21st Century, only one I can recount and remember. I can do the same for E.T but only when clenching my nostalgia-goggled.

E.T compared to Blade Runner is impossible. Both films accomplish great things except neither is superior nor inferior for ignoring certain things. Is Blade Runner an emotionally devoid film? I don’t think so, but it’s not one that makes you feel warm inside. It’s the type of emotions that I assort to any Kubrick film. It feels less chemical and more electric, a heavy sense of the cerebral and perhaps the previously unknown. Discovery instead of re-discovery, emotions found in E.T are already in my palette but those found in Blade Runner are unexplored. That sort of thing.

I think that expect of exploring the human psyche in a different way is what separates Blade Runner, but in a sense, also separates E.T. It was the first ‘happy’ film to show aliens in the good guy’s chair instead of the typical anal-probing martians that want to destroy humanity. I hold E.T as one of the main tipping points that led to the rise of such modern films as District 9, and it’s certainly an important film, but nowhere near as important as Blade Runner.

1982 was a year of diverse films and that is exactly why it holds the most quality films. It’s an experimental year peppered with an observation on reality, humanity and all that good stuff that we think we’re ‘safe’ in knowing. We’re safe in thinking humans are only flesh and blood, we’re safe in knowing we’re all human, we’re safe in knowing there’s no bad Murdoch to leash the right-wing media and we’re safe knowing America will rise from the Cold War ash through the Phoenix wings of Reaganomics and cultural prosperity. As already described, that wasn’t the case, and 1982 didn’t always agree with Reagan.

Case in point: Blade Runner obviously. The box office numbers don’t reflect that but, well, we’ll get to that soon. 1982 wasn’t kind to the film that dared to say the opposite to what E.T said, but the actual Eighties was defined by films like Blade Runner that all asked questions instead of frolicking with the answers that were already given. 1982 was one of ‘those’ years in which the whole of the Eighties would ‘start’ so to speak, where it would be a decade of post-Cold War fear or optimism. It looked like the world had chosen, it wanted optimism, and it was like that for a short while until a certain technology threw the box office aside. We’ll get to that later.

Blade Runner was not alone on Orwell’s birthday; it was accompanied by another unconventional film by the name of The Thing. It was a horror film directed by John Carpenter that didn’t fit the typical template of its genre either. The Thing was a layered and deep film that concentrated its fear on much different elements and changed its messages. Ridley and John were certainly pushing some commentary into their respective films, and I think a certain twist within The Thing certainly gives it some of the same commentary on the decade.

I do prefer Blade Runner, not because it’s the better made film but because it feels more timeless and more brave in its pushes of Eighties commentary. It chooses to replicate a future society instead of an isolated one, both films actually detailing a group of people who feel isolated (Deckard and the Replicants). Blade Runner chooses to display corporations, Asian economic effects, an industrial soaked environment along with many urban-centric explorations. The Thing is an even more isolated and lonely experience, choosing to portray a world away from the present altogether.
_Blade Runner_ takes the present world kicking and screaming into a fearful tomorrow, _The Thing_ takes the present kicking and screaming into a fearful today. One set in 2019, the other in the Winter of 1982. I feel that _The Thing_ tries to pull off more fear by being in the present day, choosing to play it close to home, _Blade Runner_ instead playing into a more uncanny display of ‘home’. A deformed version of ‘home’, one set in the future but with features of the present (namely 1982) in the same way of _Hamlet_ of being set in Denmark but still having all that good commentary to it.

I love _The Thing_. In fact it feels weird in a way just how relevant of a time it’s becoming to talk about _Blade Runner_ in deeper detail. Not only are we entering an economic, political, societal and cultural hotspot in the history of our civilization; we’re also warming around to our history. _The Thing_ has a remake coming out in 2011 and _Blade Runner_ has hit the headlines with Scott coming back to remake and Daryl Hannah being arrested literally as I was writing this. It’s as if it’s never been a better time to talk about _Blade Runner_, and that doesn’t mean just the film but as an expression of the Eighties and beyond. It’s a film that encapsulates hopes, dreams, nightmares, fears, homages and all sorts of density. One safe word to call _Blade Runner_ is layered. _The Thing_ is also layered, but differently, I tend not to enjoy it as much as _Blade Runner_ and I don’t have the urge to watch it twenty times over. I’ve seen _Blade Runner_ around twenty times now myself and still want to go back.

_Star Trek II_ and _Blade Runner_ don’t mix well together and there’s a running theme of ‘grounded versus exploratory’ in this chapter. _Star Trek II_ takes a sci-fi into space, _Blade Runner_ takes it into Earth, I’m not the biggest Trekkie and I can’t really appreciate all of the metaphysical ideas that _Wrath of Khan_ puts across. It’s an excellent film, probably the strongest, but it isn’t my cup of science-fiction tea.

Science-fiction seems to also be a running theme throughout this chapter, probably because 1982 was the first year the doors blew open and there was a sense of ‘the nerd has inherited the Earth’ given the success of _Star Wars_. With the likes of _E.T._ we saw a sharp rise in more family friendly, happy smiles science-fiction where the aliens were all nice and friendly. _Star Trek II_ feels somewhat similar to _E.T._ in that it’s certainly lighter than _Blade Runner_, obviously by not that much given the _Wrath of Khan_ sub-title, though that’s a little unfair considering _Empire Strikes Back_.

Science-fiction, in my opinion, is a genre about the extreme. It’s about taking the ideas of the human condition and pushing them into areas that human beings wouldn’t normally find themselves in. It’s the _Hamlet_ sort of take on things, except without the Bard, though that would be kind of cool if Shakespeare ever wrote a science-fiction. Though, in some sense, he kind of echoed some ideas of science-fiction... _to be or not to be?_ Replicant or human?

_Star Trek II_ is a film of ideas, but it’s not ideas that feel more grounded in the economics or the more contemporary fashion. It feels like a post-modern science-fiction: if _Blade Runner_ is _Hamlet_ set in Denmark then _Star Trek II_ is _Hamlet_ set on the Moon. It feels too far away to feel relevant, but still feels observational in some sense. I enjoy it tremendously, but once again, I don’t get the sense that I want to watch it for the twentieth time and still want to watch it.

_Tron_, another 1982 feature is altogether a very different story. It’s a popcorn movie, a very weak film in the story department but makes up for it with its heavy visuals and new digital effects flair. _Blade Runner_ came out in the same year as _Tron_, a
fact which still astounds me to this day. *Tron* is an exploration of some ideas of artificial intelligence, the nature of reality, the extension of consciousness and some pretty heavy science-fiction stuff. Again it’s *Hamlet* on the Moon and while it takes place (technically) on Earth, it’s still a rather irrelevant affair. Not that I despise or think much lower of any film which is ‘irrelevant’, it’s just there’s films I remember and there’s films I simply enjoy. There’s nothing wrong with either of them.

There’s a reason I’m talking about *Blade Runner* today and it’s quite hard to consider as to what got me into *Blade Runner* in the first place. It was a heavily seminal film and as such largely celebrated. I am of the ‘nerdom’ variety: I like my television as *Who* or *Firefly*, I love my comic-books to be Moore or Gaiman, I want my films to be comic-book or science-fiction. Probably more personally: I want my video-games to be congregated, I want them full to the brim with centuries worth of culture and ideas. They are after all the ‘newborn’ medium, and *Blade Runner* has seeped into so many video-games that was an inevitability I catch into this. It’s quite tragic considering 1982 was the start of the infamous ‘1983 video-game crash’, but *Blade Runner* and video-games somehow lived on. They were saved by something. Technology.

Video-games were also saved by something *Blade Runner* actually covered: the rise of the Asian economic powerhouse. The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) was one of the many factors that saved video-games from falling into the dead heap of mediums. Investment over here in Old Blighty into the BBC Micro and the Sinclair Spectrum propelled ‘homebrewing’ into the dictionary (though Microsoft Word doesn’t seem to think so and it’s been three decades). *Blade Runner* however was saved by a different technology altogether, one that helped to linger on past the Eighties and define some aspects of our modern world.

VHS.

This new technology allowed ordinary folk to watch films and television at home. They were liberated from the cinema and allowed to sift through ages and ages and ages of film and television, never miss a film again. The upper classes had their film reels but the VHS was universal, suddenly everyone could watch films. Suddenly no-one was left behind, you didn’t have to rely on your friends to not miss a film and throw away a whole few minutes of conversation, VHS was truly liberating for its time.

Whispers of *Blade Runner* boiled and frothed over throughout the Eighties. There was two words on the film critic scene, it was something you said to make you sound smart and suddenly everyone was saying it. Cult classic.

Nevertheless, word travelled fast and soon *Blade Runner* was suddenly one of the most successful VHS releases of all time. The only reason I have managed to even see or even know about *Blade Runner* is thanks to this format, without it, you and I wouldn’t be here right now. When film literally came home, that’s when the likes of *The Thing* and *Blade Runner* found their element. People started to see the scary relevance, the Orwellian tones and all manner of scary stuff that people didn’t want to see. *E.T.* was a successful full, timeless, but not in the same right as *Blade Runner*. Throughout the Eighties, people started to warm around to the idea that the decade wasn’t so nice and perhaps Reagan had lied. Perhaps the future wasn’t bright at all, and that sharp optimism sharply turned into pessimism with the likes of *Watchmen* finding commercial success.

Unfortunately, after that, we got the nineties.
They sucked.

1982 is the finest year that film has ever experienced. It defined a decade, perhaps even a medium to some extent. It had the finest analogue effects film, political commentary everywhere, the first stunning digital effects film, a switch of science-fiction among many other innovations and expansions. It was a beautiful year, one that *Blade Runner* became a part of. The eighties would hold good stuff like VHS and other handsome technologies, but for a short while, it wasn’t about the technology: it was about the story. It was the story of a few men and their vision of an Orwellian dystopia, it was the story of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons wanting to make the first proper ‘graphic novel’, it was the story of Christopher Lloyd proclaiming “Where we’re going, we don’t need roads.” before travelling in time and it was the story of the eighties. That decade where the modern world was born with all its hopes, fears and collective contemporary elements were forged in this cosmic-scale furnace.
Blade Runner was a film that changed lives. Ridley Scott was propelled into the timelessnessphere, Harrison Ford had some meaty acting under his belt, Rutgur Hauer became a cult icon and everyone who says “I worked on Blade Runner.” becomes the coolest person ever in the room. Sadly, I was born in 1994 and missed out on the cinema experience and on the re-releases so that’s fun.

The aftermath of Blade Runner is what’s interesting, and what’s more interesting is how these people are suddenly drifting back together. Harrison Ford, Ridley and Rutgur are all old men now but suddenly it seems something is coming back. A silent force working throughout Hollywood, pulling the strings to bring them all back for one last Blade Runner job. It’s romantic in some ways.

What do I mean? I mean that Ridley already said he’s down for a Blade Runner thing, Harrison Ford isn’t shy when it comes to science-fiction and Rutgur is now king of the cult. Even some of the other Blade Runner cast seem to have risen from their career coffins and into the spotlight. Blade Runner was not a successful film, its aftermath was a plagued and scary one, for a while it was thought Ridley would never work in Hollywood again and Harrison Ford would have a blight on his career. In actual fact they somehow both helped to create one of the most timeless science-fiction films in the history of filmmaking.

The eighties weren’t kind to Blade Runner, at least not for a while, as already explained 1982 was the best year and the worst year in film history. It had the highest number of quality releases but the lowest quality of audiences who weren’t willing to see something that might knock on their doors with a leaflet about the dangers of Reaganomics.

The nineties were the best thing to happen to Blade Runner. Albeit being the worst decade in the history of human culture (birth of Michael Bay’s career, the demise of many musical genres so on and so forth) and with the Director’s Cut (not really a Director’s Cut) suddenly there was a popularity boom. Rutgur was propelled further into the popularitiesphere, appearing in the likes of Buffy and... Armageddon. Huh.

Harrison Ford didn’t really need any more popularity considering he was in Star Wars and Indiana Jones. I think in some sense he finally grew some proper acting chops in Blade Runner, not that he wasn’t a great actor before, but it felt more of a personal role. Still, the decade treated him quite well. Ridley however probably did the best out of the trio with Hannibal and Gladiator coming straight out of the nineties and into the 21st Century.

The beginning of this humble decade has treated all three men quite kindly actually. Harrison is still on his acting boom with the likes of Air Force One, Indiana Jones and the Temple of the Crystal Skull (which is seriously underrated) along with 2011’s summer filler in the form of Cowboys & Aliens. A lot of science-fiction and hard-boiled action on his plate, kind of reminds you of a certain futuristic noir. I can’t remember really...

Ridley is currently traversing back into his beloved Aliens series with Prometheus; once a prequel and now only part of the ‘DNA’. It’s his first science-fiction
film in decades and it'll be interesting in how *Prometheus* might define this decade of filmmaking.

Wait what did I just say?

Because *Prometheus* is Ridley testing the science-fiction waters again, Harrison Ford is more than fit and ready for another *Indiana Jones* so why not another *Blade Runner*, Rutgur has enjoyed a very successful thirty years since *Blade Runner* with *Batman Begins*, *Sin City*, *Hobo With A Shotgun*, *Armageddon* and many more under his belt. There’s a sense of divergence in the air, I’ve said that whatever *Blade Runner* thing that Ridley is coming back to do may feel quite limp if he re-uses the characters or setting or story. But... why not? Why not show Harrison Ford dealing with his humanity, Rutgur on the run: a prequel as details finally align and somehow the stories meet. Somehow Roy found his humanity and Deckard lost his, I’ve always thought his cold and calculated emotionally incapable state was thanks to him being of a newborn Replicant state but... why not eh? How the Blade Runner became a Blade Runner, how the machine became a man, a role reversal of *Blade Runner*.

Define a decade? What?

*Blade Runner* has helped to seep into the collective consciousness of the entire populace, anyone who has ever seen the film has had at least some profound effect put on them regardless whether they liked it or not. *Blade Runner* is the type of film that happens oh so rarely, but it can happen again. The stars literally align, yay wordplay, and suddenly you have a prequel on your hands. I’ve said a prequel might not exactly be a good thing nor bad thing, but a thing, I don’t expect another *Blade Runner* because *Blade Runner* but why not? Why not give it a shot?

Whatever Ridley decides to do, whether Harrison or Rutgur come back to play (even as perfectly as it may seem) there’s a certain feel to it all. If Ridley does this, if he does indeed create *Blade Runner*’s genie in the bottle magic yet again. If he does the impossible, then what is even impossible anymore? I’ve been on the opposing side of the whole 3D fad, and one film that might save us just might be another visually hypnotic masterpiece in the same template of *Blade Runner*. A film which is beautiful because it's not beautiful, and not engaging simply because of some flimsy graphics and dying technology.

*Blade Runner* is already a seminal film and has touched generations, its served as a cornerstone in their lives as a film to come back to and a cult to live in. It will live forever, and why can't it happen again? I'm a cynical, pessimistic sort of person who believes if you go in disappointed and come out surprised then you'll be a happy bunny. If not then nothing lost.

But there's a chance, a slight chance, that this could be possible. A whole generation gets their *Blade Runner*, many more get that chance to hold hands with their loved ones and dive back into Los Angeles 2019 or 2023 or wherever Ridley wants to take us. This is *Blade Runner*, and the aftermath of *Blade Runner* has been a long, torturous ride. If it weren’t for VHS, the Director's Cut and luck then I wouldn’t be writing this today, there wouldn’t be any point. The aftermath of *Blade Runner* includes the ‘here we go again’ and it’s fun to think how that alignment is already happening.

Daryl Hannah has been arrested literally as I’m writing this book, Rutgur just got off a very fun grindhouse feature called *Hobo With A Shotgun*, Ridley is tidying up *Prometheus* and Harrison is more than in shape. It sounds right, doesn’t it? It becomes
scarily right when you consider the current Philip K. Dick Book Club that Hollywood has set up.

*The Adjustment Bureau* with Matt Damon and other equally attractive and well-paid actors/actresses all went at it to create a very competent blockbuster. It’s loosely based on *Adjustment Team*, one of my favourite K. Dick short stories, but then there’s many other films based on Phil’s legacy.

There’s *Blade Runner (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?)*, *Screamers (Second Variety)*, *Total Recall* with Arnold Schwarzenegger (*We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*), *Imposter (Imposter)*, *Minority Report* with shinyface Tom Cruise (*The Minority Report*), *Paycheck (Paycheck)* *A Scanner Darkly (A Scanner Darkly)*, *Next* with crazyface Nicolas Cage (*The Golden Cage*), *The Adjustment Bureau (Adjustment Team)* and many more actually.

In fact, *Total Recall* is getting a remake with Colin Farell and the short story *King of the Elves* is being made into a feature film. That’s not counting the *Blade Runner* version releases too.

So Philip K. Dick is in the air. Hollywood has fallen in love with this author again, and that’s from the last thirty years of films. I can’t think of any other author with that many adapted stories, at least not science-fiction wise. It’s proven his work can be commercially viable, and suddenly the stars align some more. *Blade Runner*’s universe is more bankable than ever, the aftermath is ready to turn into something different. An added legacy, another chip on the shoulder.

*Blade Runner* has become such a conscious image of pop culture it’s fed into generations of filmmakers. Christopher Nolan, Quentin Tarantino, Guillermo Del Toro, Zack Snyder (ugh) among so many filmmakers have discovered this film and fed it into their careers as filmmakers. *Blade Runner* is a film that exist amongst infinite possibilities and realities and versions and interpretations, it’s endless, you don’t have to look far to see some Philip K. Dick in *Inception* or the *Blade Runner* look in *Batman Begins*. There’s even some pacing of Ridley’s world injected into the likes of *Inglourious Basterds*, and that dark stuffy atmosphere persists throughout all of Del Toro’s work.

*Blade Runner* has become as much about the future as it has about the present. With this comes an interesting thought about the aftermath of *Blade Runner*: did it scare people enough to change? Well... why is it that *Blade Runner* is still relevant in every single way today? Why is more relevant than ever before?

*Blade Runner*’s metaphysical ideas and all that good stuff have carried over... in *Blade Runner*. It’s an interesting thought actually, did filmmakers need to keep the same messages and show them to new generations and teach them about the world around them? Or was *Blade Runner*’s role already filled by *Blade Runner*? The look and feel of Ridley Scott’s world has already infected science-fiction cinema for decades, so why not take the next step and take those ideas?

Maybe we live in a time that considers such things as too thoughtful for modern audiences; maybe we just don’t need it. The aftermath of *Blade Runner* may be in fact more interesting than *Blade Runner* itself because it teaches us that generations of filmmakers have used the same visual flavour but... the same ideas? Nolan sets his epics in parallel realities with dream machines, Tarantino is goddamn Tarantino and Del Toro loves the fantasy genre. But then again, the *Hamlet* example, Nolan actually managed to inject some post-9/11 commentary into his superhero masterpiece of *The
Dark Knight, Tarantino certainly played with some stuff in Pulp Fiction and Del Toro might follow an extreme Hamlet route.

I don’t get the Blade Runner feel about modern films. I do get incredibly excited by the above director’s work and many others, but I don’t get that raw proposition of metaphysical ideas. I wonder if it’s because of the influence of technology and other media all turning films into this strictly ‘escapist’ medium. They’re not exactly ‘expressionist’ given they’re not interactive, that of course doesn’t make them inferior, but once in a while a film does come out of its screen. Once in a while it knocks you on the head and makes you think. I haven’t had a good think in a long while.

The years after Blade Runner belong to the political stirring and the true wrath of Reaganomics and Conservatism bearing their fruits in the Western World’s political spectrum. Maybe that’s why more challenging media was finding commercial success, but here’s an interesting thought, was Blade Runner responsible for that commercial success? Were those media reacting to the times or were they pushing out the content they had wanted to release for a long while?

I’m not sure.

If one thing is for sure, it’s that Blade Runner’s aftermath was commercially jittery at first and then a real success and this might tell us more about the Eighties than we think. People were indeed less keen to embrace scary science-fiction but they warmed more to it throughout the decade as those prophecies came true. It’s quite disheartening really how it took the actual events to unfold to actually sell the ideas affiliated with those events. Blade Runner is undoubtedly a critique on economic, political and societal ideas that people actually supported. Reagan wouldn’t be in the White House for so long if people didn’t believe in him.

Blade Runner’s aftermath should have been like any other film, quickly dissolve into a small fan group who re-watch and argue about it. Instead, however, it became a cult classic and became forever relevant. Groups around the film don’t just argue about Blade Runner but have turned their arguments into debates based around its metaphysical ideas, in a sense, making them better and more thoughtful people. This coupled with the eccentric visual panache about the film makes for that word called ‘timeless’.

‘Timeless’ not just in film but in the wider spectrum of culture. Blade Runner can be seen in any medium from film to books to possibly the most heavily influenced of all; video-games. See, video-game designers and creators of today are usually from the generation that grew up throughout the eighties Blade Runner then must have hit a chord because now every science-fiction video-game from Half-Life 2 to BioShock to Fallout: New Vegas has been touched by Ridley’s vision.

Timeless.

Because if Blade Runner managed to carry on its legacy through the designers and creatives of today, then there’s perhaps something interesting to consider, what about the creators of tomorrow? What about the directors and creators who are slowly growing in this age, devouring media and churning it out decades from now. It’s weird coming back to the sentiment of “Write about what you know”, blending your own experience to create something for an audience. I do it all the time in my creative writing work and decades of refining media must lead us to the conclusion that so does everyone in any creative industry.
If people are growing up with the media today made by the *Blade Runner* fans of yesteryear then perhaps *Blade Runner* is different. Maybe it’s more than timeless, maybe it’s more than a simple aftermath. The people growing up with *Blade Runner* created media heavily influence by *Blade Runner*, and now millions are growing up with the same ideas. That sounds great.

*Blade Runner* might just last forever.

I doubt that every single person watching all of the influenced works, playing the video-games and reading novels won’t even link it to *Blade Runner* unless they actually see the film. Furthermore, it doesn’t matter, because *Blade Runner* isn’t about *Blade Runner*, it’s about ideas. It’s about philosophies, politics and all that good grown-up stuff.

Stuff that might just last forever.

*Blade Runner* will live on, in a different format obviously, but its aftermath isn’t just contained within its ideas living on, nor just its visual complexion but also its very soul. The future noir feel of the film has extended its life beyond the epic and into its own pool. What am I talking about? I’m talking about a whole genre built on to the side of *Blade Runner*, one that has especially affected video-games like *BioShock*, *Epic Mickey*, *Torchlight* and the *Thief* series. Films like *Wild, Wild West, 9, Sherlock Holmes* and *Howl’s Moving Castle* also stem from this genre. It’s one that is only just coming to fruition: steampunk.

Even the new TARDIS design on the hit reboot of the sci-fi show *Doctor Who* has a steampunk look. This whole new genre spawned from the early 1980s, powered by the novel works of Tim Powers and fresh media led predominantly by *Blade Runner*. *Blade Runner* was a film of the neo-noir, trapped between worlds, as if holding the very life of Rick Deckard in its hands. Future and past, Victorian technology and science fiction design, Replicant and human.

*Blade Runner* started its visual trends through a simple word: retrofitting. Taking old technology and giving it new purpose. The blimp used to hold LED screens advertising off-world colonies, parking meters also serving as traffic guides (capitalism wins?) and even Rick Deckard’s Esper Photo analysis. This is a film packed with the old flavoured with the new: steampunk in the making.

*Blade Runner*’s aftermath doesn’t belong to *Blade Runner* but to culture itself. It has become such a broad stroke of pop culture and of our collective consciousness that it really isn’t Ridley’s film anymore, nor is it really a film anymore but a thing in our minds. A collection of ideas or images or symbols to guide us throughout life. If a sequel happens, maybe it won’t belong in this world, maybe it won’t belong to any of us. *Blade Runner* however will always be our film, our thoughts and our choices. Perhaps *Blade Runner* managed to create the most important irony of all: making us human.
Memories.
Is that what makes us human? Our very lives? Images, little anecdotes and some sprinkles of enrichment? What are memories anyway? What are we anyway?

Symbols.
Memories are what guide us through life, we are a collection of our memories, it's what makes us human. As such, we're all perhaps great big walking guidebooks to life. Our interpretation of philosophies, of the afterlife, of God and what makes us human: those are all simple symbols that can be boiled down to words. Pacifist, atheist, agnostic-theist, vegan so on and so forth. Our moral compass doesn’t have north or south on it, but symbols, symbols of our very definition or rather our own interpretation of humanity.

In this section I will be investigating *Blade Runner*’s parallels to mythology, history and genre surfing throughout its own symbols. I will look throughout the piece for visual clues which give background depth to the characters, setting and story. Perhaps I’ll unravel all of the sub-conscious talk that *Blade Runner* ruthlessly engages in, these symbols all speak to your brain while you're being fed the information of the plot, and they could be something so simple as a visual sign to an actual use of cinematography.

(3.1) **EYE:** A typically Orwellian note of *Blade Runner* that perhaps transforms itself throughout the film. The parallels to Greek Mythology are everywhere from the legend of Oedipus to the reflections of the ‘Hades landscape’ in the opening shot. I shall tackle all of them and give you my own... perception of things.

(3.2) **NO GODS, NO MASTERS:** Religion is somewhat devoid in *Blade Runner*. We see monks and passing Jews in the background crowds, but no real meat to show it is still prominent. The powers of Tyrell extend into the manipulation of the Sun, is this what a 21st Century God is? Is *Blade Runner* and atheistic film?

(3.3) **TRAGEDY:** My interpretation of *Blade Runner* as a Greek tragedy and how it matches up to the Aristotelian rules or whether it verges into Shakespearean tragedy. Why does any of this matter? Because Deckard is trapped between texts... but genres?

(3.4) **INNOCENCE:** Children don’t show up in *Blade Runner* a lot, and this isn’t the most ‘family friendly’ feature either. Perhaps innocence can be found elsewhere. [animals/moments of children]

(3.5) **GAFF:** Who does Gaff represent? Good, evil? Machine, human? Man... God?
This section will be very philosophy and abstract heavy, and as such, I thought starting off with a very broad subject would help compliment you into a more natural read of this section. With this in mind, let’s consider one of the most important and dominant symbols of *Blade Runner*. I have dealt with it linking in to its most powerful theme, perception, but I haven’t dealt with what it could possibly symbolize. This is all hypothesis, none of it is fact or fiction, the ‘notes’ section before will particularly be devoid in this chapter but for chapters to come I doubt it will show up at all.

*Blade Runner* opens with an opening crawl, a definition of Replicant and then a sudden look into an anonymous eye that looks upon an industrial landscape. This has been coined as the ‘Hades landscape’ given the almost belching fire that comes from the pipes and industrial scenery. It seems to hit at some environmental issues, of humankind not looking at its own destruction, but I want to take a step further beyond what the eye is seeing. The very symbol of the eye appears throughout *Blade Runner* even guiding Roy Batty to Tyrell through Chew’s workplace, the Voight-Kampff and detection of Replicants relying completely on eye movements and many other instances. What I would like to consider then is the almost omnipresence of the eyes links into various ideas, so let’s consider one specific idea.

Oedipus is the fabled Greek king of Thebes who killed his father and married his mother, before tearing his eyes out. He fulfilled a prophecy, one that actually crops up in *Blade Runner*, if in an abstract sense. The Oedipus complex, a Freudian idea, is one that has been used to describe many psychological studies across the past century and has infected literature and the arts itself. As such, it’s not hard to see just how easily applied the legend of Oedipus and other Greek mythology can be applied to *Blade Runner*.

Tyrell, the overlord of this corporate apocalypse, create Roy Batty. Roy Batty is not Oedipus in this respect, but perhaps someone else in this relationship is. What Tyrell does is he defies his father; he kills his creator (perhaps God or perhaps just ‘natural creation’ personified is slain. He defies these biological rules to create Batty, his son, and in a way actually marries his mother. Yes, this is heavily abstract, but perhaps in a sense he has killed God and snatched the hand of creation from him.

Roy Batty spends the film tracking down Tyrell, led by eye geneticists and more artificial creators. In the final steps of his life, he slays Tyrell, but not by a neck snap or some quick; but through crushing his eyes.

In a way, Tyrell has become God, he has slain his father and married his mother. Through this realization of absolute destruction of the self, he has taken it upon himself to commit suicide. Except, *Blade Runner* doesn’t offer this choice to Tyrell, rather Roy Batty takes this upon himself to rid the world of Tyrell. In a weird sort of way Roy Batty is the hand of Tyrell, the hand of God, crushing his own eyes in disgust of his own life.

There are many links to the Oedipus legend what with Tyrell’s last moments spent in a kiss with his ‘Prodigal son’ and thus indulges in an incestuous act, just like Oedipus with his mother, except Tyrell did not do this by conscious choice. Rather, his sub-conscious acted in a way to make him accept this sign of love, though he is
separate from Oedipus in having knowledge of the act he is committing of being actually incestuous.

What was the very prophecy that crops up in Blade Runner then? The one in Oedipus was built on a more mythical background, but in Blade Runner, it is created by another mythical being. Tyrell.

“More human than human, that’s our motto.”

Roy Batty fulfilled his destiny of ridding the world of human, or rather what the human had become in the 21st Century. Tyrell could not ‘unsee’ what he had seen, the same way Oedipus couldn’t either, and so Batty took his life away. Tyrell doesn’t actively see the destruction he has caused and rejects death, but Batty acts as an agent of the God that Tyrell has slain, he creates normality. The human has overthrown the inhuman, the God has been slain once more and another has taken his place.

Batty, in a weird sort of way, through destroy his father’s eyes becomes Oedipus actually. He is given control over life, the life of Deckard precisely, but chooses not to allow his powers to pass on but rather his acceptance of his humanity to pass on through saving the life of Deckard. In a weird way, Batty chooses to become Oedipus but does not conform to the prophecy. He does not become “More human than human.” but rather chooses to restore humanity on to the world. Perhaps Roy Batty is the true hero of Blade Runner and not Deckard.

This link to the Oedipus legend puts Blade Runner in a weird position of being so abstract and centred around its metaphysical ideals that perhaps its very nature can be linked to quite a lot of myths and legends. With that in mind, let’s move on to another Greek mythology trip, the Hades landscape exactly.

The opening shot is of the eye looking at this Hades landscape, surveying it, Ridley himself states that this is Orwellian[1] but there may be more meaning. I could prod and poke at the environmentalist messages, of the surveying eye showing how humanity is blind to its destruction. Though I would much rather talk about something more abstract: about what Hades represents.

Hades is the Greek underworld, their version of Hell, and as such if the eye is indeed scanning the ‘Hades landscape’ then when does this landscape end? This is a world devoid of humanity; of twisted sin and cold, calculated emotionless husks milling about their lives. Aren’t we already in Hell? Perhaps the opening shot of the eye isn’t just of physicality, but of mentality, of the perception of life as we know it.

The eye is scanning the ‘Hade’ landscape; a typical place for the damned and dead. Isn’t it quite easy to say that this is an eye observing death itself, or rather, the changed fate of death? This is a living Hell, and maybe some political commentary is inserted via the environmentalist themes on top of this. Perhaps our twisted perception of life and death has led us astray, choosing us to instead live our docile lives or rather soon live these docile lives in 2019.

Blade Runner’s perception of death isn’t just rooted in its symbols of eyes (the opening shot, the crushing of Tyrell’s, the frozen eyes of Chew’s workplace) but in its actual language. The death of Replicants isn’t called a ‘death’ or ‘killing’ but ‘retirement’, as if built for a job and nothing more, and this perversion of death leads to Tyrell’s, or rather humanity’s, downfall. Hades isn’t raised up to our world simply because of our environmental habits, nor is it because of our mass consumption, but rather because of our perception and thus perversion of death and, in turn, life itself.
The eyes are what we use to decide Replicant and Human, man and non-man. Through the Voight-Kampff machine and the bronze glint in Replicant’s eyes, even the audience is a part of this stereotyping. Perhaps this is linking in with societal pressures of face values and racial profiling, or maybe stemming into our treatment of life through a corporate wasteland. Our perception of life has been deformed by our mistreatment of it, allowing mass consumption to rule king in the court of man.

If the eye symbolizes one thing then it is indeed perception. In a deeper sense it is the perception of death, life and of us. Its links to Greek mythology leads us to believe in many other things about the nature of Blade Runner. It is perhaps a tale of a future that is redeemed, or perhaps one that is damned? Deckard is the only one changed by the end who actually survives, he is humanity’s last hope, but still this depends on perception. Whether or not you see the Unicorn as an alarm bell compelling Deckard to accept his flaws and thus humanity or as a simple sign of brotherhood from Gaff.

Humanity.

Perhaps this further extends itself into an acceptance of... death. The Hades landscape is a place built solely for the purpose of holding the damned and sinful, but perhaps only those who escape are the ones who defy their damnation by the corporate hellhole. Deckard chooses to be human and, in turn, goes on the run from the pursuit of the authorities who wish to take his choice, freedom, love, emotion, memories and flaws away from him.

If you wanted to be smart, you could call Blade Runner a literal observation on the evolution of the human condition across the span of our entire species’ history. How we evolved from the oppression of nature into an intelligent, flawed species throughout our inventions, technology and cultural tipping points. We are the dominant species of the planet, but it took us a while to get there, and we’re always on the run. Why? Because that’s... well that’s the oldest trick in the book.

Adapt to survive.

Coming away from the more abstract, philosophical interpretations of the symbol of the eye we delve into more political, societal complications surrounding this symbology. It feels somewhat easy to divulge into this talk, but Ridley Scott himself said the symbol was based around such classical ideas. With this in mind, let's discuss Orwellian ideas put across through the use of the eye symbol.

For starters this symbol is, already described, omnipresent throughout Blade Runner. The eye crops up from the absolute very beginning, overlooking Hell itself, before turning into the very thing that is used to separate man and machine in the Voight-Kampff test. Tyrell’s trifocal glasses almost separate the people around him from seeing into his eyes. As described by many philosophers, the eyes are the window to the soul, and the window to our humanity. Tyrell seems to obstruct people from seeing into his eyes, symbolizing both the separation of class divides (corporate fiend vs. everybody else) and also of his supercilious nature perhaps intrinsic given his deity-like characterization. He can control light, create life and calls Roy his “Prodigal son.”

Orwell’s observations are actually similar to what I have just described. It is of capitalism gone mad, corporatism ruling supreme of government, the death of privacy and of freedom. Blade Runner’s world is a Big Brother world, the docile populace being fed their daily media sludge by the blimps and billboards and newspapers. It sort of reminds me of a certain Big Brother corporation that exists to this day and actually grew
to a superpower back in the Eighties. Though, let’s not mention that Murdoch fella again until the politics section.

The eye of *Blade Runner* is watching throughout the film and there seems to be an overbearing feeling that Deckard himself is being watched. Especially by a certain Gaff, who we’ll discuss later, who appears right after Batty dies and hands him back his pistol. Gaff has been following him throughout this story but is he an agent of Tyrell or of someone else? It’s hard to tell, let’s save all that for later.

*Blade Runner* is certainly an Orwellian type of film and the literal eyes serve as a proper symbol of such ideas. The world is being watched, but by whom?

Whose eye is that, at the beginning?

For a while I thought it was Holden’s or perhaps Leon’s, gazing upon the destruction and the separation of humanity, as if contemplating the nature of their respective lives. Each of them are a product of the perverted perception of life (and death) but neither of them are really ‘Orwellian monsters’. Holden is certainly part of the system but doesn’t have the ‘watchful’ quality; neither does Leon who in turn is perhaps against this system. You could suppose the eye belongs to Gaff, who is observing the destruction and death of what it means to be human. Further evidence of the eye belonging to Gaff include: the contact lenses that Edward James Olmos wore throughout the film (added emphasis), the fact he appears right as Deckard finishes his job and also his cityspeak. A language which Deckard understands but annoys him, perhaps a lingual barrier of sorts. Gaff’s observation of Deckard actually powers the film because it’s the very reason he places the Unicorn at the end. He drives Deckard along a path and watches him change: disapproving when he murders Zhora, approving when he becomes human - “You’ve done a man’s job...” - and then delivering the final keynote in the form of the origami.

When Roy Batty is hunting down Tyrell he comes to Chew’s genetics lab, a frozen hive in which he conduct experiments and house the eyes he creates. Leon and Roy intimidate Chew so much that he gives up the way to Tyrell (through J.F) but this scene stands out in memory given the irony of what Roy actually says.

“If only you could see I’ve seen with your eyes.”

It’s ironic given that, technically, they are Chew’s eyes or at least of his creation. This leads me on to another point about the nature of the eye in *Blade Runner*. As a symbol it is of perception and observation, so what happens when such a thing is fabricated? Roy Batty’s eyes are as fabricated as the rest of his synthetic body, it just so happens he has an independent mind and consciousness. There really isn’t that much that separates Roy away from a lab grown human, other than his longevity date obviously, I imagine this was done by Scott to bring up political issues and be his usual liberal self.

In *Blade Runner*, the eye is used to determine Replicant and human; to judge life itself. If the eye is indeed a reflection of Orwellian ideology, of overwatch and Big Brother, then there’s a real twist to the philosophy that *Blade Runner* implies. It is a film about perception, of human and non-human, of the very nature of life and death. If you’re a Replicant you’re only ‘retired’ and not ‘killed’ and this is all judged by the eye.

Does the eye belong to the corporations and the ‘godlike’ figures of the world or does it belong to the actual God. Isn’t he the judge and jury and executioner of all living things? If God is the judge of us all then perhaps *Blade Runner’s* main moral message
is to not be a Replicant, to be a human, to accept your flaws and live your life. Perhaps God has condemned the populace to Hell as they are no longer human anyway, yet sparks of humanity flutter and suddenly Deckard is on the run away from the bureaucrats who will hunt him down and slay his synthetic flesh.

The eye can belong to anyone, really, and that’s the beauty of something like the symbol of the eye being a dominant figure in *Blade Runner*: it’s universal. It can mean anything from the Oedipus comparison to the Hades damnation to the eyes of God to the eye of Orwell’s nightmares. *Blade Runner* works on multiple levels using the same symbology and that’s the beauty of it all; it’s very perception is about *perception*. How you perceive your per-view of the world all hinges on your self-value. It’s something that *Blade Runner* champions effortless.

If it’s one thing that *Blade Runner* does well then it’s the absolute depth. This is just the beginning of many investigations into symbolism and power and over the next few chapters we’ll be investigating many of the other symbols of *Blade Runner*. I may cross-reference certain symbols investigations with that of the *Eye* chapter, as it will give more evidence and integrity to my points. I didn’t intend to be all abstract and far-out philosophical with my interpretations, but rather serve as a foundation to your own discussions and perception on *Blade Runner*’s symbolism.

**NOTES:**

1. In the *Final Cut* Director’s Commentary, during the opening shot.
(3.2) NO GODS, NO MASTERS

God.

Not in the 'Oh God' kind of way while I'm writing this, but in a considerate way. How does the world work exactly? Where did we come from, who are we? Questions what is impossible but unavoidable. All that good stuff.

This is the 21st Century and a revolution is brewing: the revolution of scepticism. More and more people are warming around to the idea that a faith isn't for them, and I hate to stereotype but a large majority of sceptics have taken to abusing those of faith. If you look on any message board, comments section or even YouTube video then you'll eventually find an argument of faith. More than likely you'll find one specific example when it comes to faith and non-faith: that some people believe that a belief in God makes you a less intelligent individual.

I'm not here to consider philosophies, argue my own beliefs nor am I here to consider the very nature of God but what I am here to suggest is that our society is crippled. It's been crippled for a very long time, but the cracks began to show throughout the 20th Century with philosophies and scientists and many intelligent folk warming around to the idea of scepticism. Why is this relevant? Because the 1980s heralded the cracking of a treasure trove of technology. This was the age of technological revolution when technology was attributed to the evolution of mankind. The Columbia launch symbolizes this, the inventions of the time symbolize this along with the politics and proposals of the era.

This giant melting pot of politics, perhaps the 20th Century itself was a melting pot, this all led to a rise in atheism and agnosticism throughout the Western world. Combined with the neo-liberal economic policies that brewed throughout the world and all the technological innovation: this was the decade the modern world truly leaped to life. With this came a very important idea.

What is a 21st Century God?

Our concept of power stems into politics, economics and social power none of which has to do with the power of a deity or superpowered being. In this consideration, Tyrell is perhaps a God in all senses. In the meeting with Rachael he shows his manipulation of the sun and his demeanour suggests he thinks highly of himself (and for good reason too).

If one thing stands out amongst all of Tyrell’s powers then it is the ability to play God, to create life, and at the end of the day what exactly separates him from the geneticists of today? Stories like Frankenstein show that tampering with the natural creation of life will always backfire and Blade Runner is no different. Tyrell attempts to become a God through other means: political control, economic control and scientific control. He’s a smart man, no doubt about that, he did create Roy Batty’s brain after all.

Tyrell is then rewarded by having his eyes and skull crushed to a pulp. Lovely. In Tyrell’s attempt to become a God he has been reminded of his finite existence, of his humanity, and perhaps becoming a 21st Century God is impossible. Perhaps it doesn’t exist and such a pursuit is fruitless. A very deep and interesting idea to consider is which perception on spirituality does Blade Runner take?
Is it an atheistic film? An agnostic film? Is it of theist territory or of cold straight faith?

The citizens of *Blade Runner*’s Los Angeles seem devoid of faith or at least hide their religion until the Zhora chase actually when we see Monks and Jews in the background. Faith is alive in *Blade Runner*’s time, but they seem part of the docile population. Is *Blade Runner* taking the atheistic approach then, to reject God means to be human? I’m not sure, given so many of the populace aren’t characterized with faith there isn’t any straight answer.

What I think is actually a straight answer is the consideration that perhaps *Blade Runner* is indeed an agnostic or at least universal film. The architecture of 2019 Los Angeles breathes of Asian, Mayan and Egyptian influences along with various Christian influences in the actual cinematography. The showing of Tyrell’s manipulation of the Son, of the very environment, a Godlike power. We even see Tyrell atop the Mayan structure and adorning himself amongst a gold-crusted room all the while looking down at mankind.

Tyrell seems far removed from the world and, when he dies, it seems that chaos almost spills out. There’s a moment of peace, of clarity, in which Deckard can truly be set free by Roy Batty. The angry tyrant is dead, or rather, the God is dead. Without a God, Deckard is free to pursue and accept his humanity. With this comes a clear message: is *Blade Runner* in fact an atheistic film?

I personally don’t think so because it’s all based around that common theme; perception. The symbolism of the overwatching eye could be an Orwellian note or it could be the eye of God. The symbol of the dove could derive from the tale of Noah’s ark or reincarnation or simply be a sign of release from life. *Blade Runner* does not speak of a world with no gods, no masters but considers instead a universal approach to spirituality. In essence it creates a world so dense with symbols that could be interpreted on many different levels that it becomes a bilingual film. No interpretation or perception of the film is inherently ‘right’ because there’s no such thing as ‘right’ in this world.

Coming back to the note of 21st Century God is the thought of man trying to become such a being. Tyrell tried and failed, reminded of his mortality, but mankind itself in this very period of its history is in fact in pursuit of such an antidote. We human beings have a finite life but for centuries we have pondered a world with infinite life through our philosophy, literature and arts. *Blade Runner* is a film about Roy Batty’s pursuit of immortality and Rick Deckard’s eventual acceptance of mortality through also Batty’s acceptance of his finite existence.

If our mortality is what keeps us human then Tyrell is mostly non-human. He pursues a means of immortality through his very company, the ‘Tyrell Corporation’ carrying his legacy when he departs from this world. He has continued a trend of boxing in the elite and preserving the docile populace whereas someone else in the pursuit of immortality, Roy Batty, chooses to do it by more human means. By sparring the life of Deckard he then lives on in his memories, as a symbol, humanizing him and bringing him down to a mortal being’s level.

Tyrell and Batty are on the pursuit to become Gods and through their pursuit comes a trial of their omnipotent characteristics: Tyrell’s economic and environmental bending skills and Batty’s intellect, wit and strength. Power isn’t that strong of a theme
in *Blade Runner*, though it’s a classical theme itself and does show up, and as such it’s hard to describe power in this world. If anything there’s a giant gap between the corporate powers that be, the lowly Replicants with strength and impossible memories, the docile populace and then Rick Deckard spun about the whole of time and space. He belongs to no group, but by the end, he knows he is human inside.

Power in *Blade Runner* can be divided into various symbols of power: strength, social, omnipresence and images. Strength is in the display of a character’s will or physicality, Tyrell being a man of will and Batty perhaps being of both. Social is how acquainted and easily charming the character is, Tyrell’s pompous stature twists him into a man who clearly thinks highly of himself and does not want to be associated with the Voight-Kampff test at the beginning of the film. His “I want to see it work on a person.” line and then refusal to be tested both cements his superiority through his power over Rachael and his separation from humanity; all to create Deckard’s eventual surprise. Roy Batty however is more a mixed bag: murdering Chew but then charming his way into Sebastian’s life (the character of Pris showing sexual power here).

Omnipresence is how much screen time each character gets, regardless of showing their faces, and for a second it might seem that Deckard must be the person in the *Blade Runner* who overshadows everyone. I don’t think that is the case given Deckard’s character and also the fact he is rather a blank slate up until that end. If one person dominates the *Blade Runner* universe then it is Tyrell: genetic engineering, environmentalism and all manner of political commentary stem from him. He seems to inhabit the film beyond his symbol Mayan influenced residence, extending himself across both the film universe and into the film story itself. He is the reason we are all here.

Yet Roy Batty is the different kind of omnipresence. Yes, he exists as an extension of Tyrell and thus embodies his hopes, dreams and political identity. However he becomes a character in his own right and takes his independence and free will into complicated areas that eventually lead him to murder his creator. He is no longer tied to a family, now he is only Roy Batty. He is human again; not a product or embodiment of Tyrell. As soon as he was off the leash he already began his descent into humanity.

*Blade Runner* isn’t a Religious heavy film but it’s no doubt its symbolgy is influenced deeply by religious iconography. The Mayan temples, the emphasis on the Sun, the snake “that once tempted man” which is a Christian symbol. In fact, *Blade Runner* is touched mostly, in its symbolism, by Christianity or other affiliated symbols. Some of these symbols appear right at the end of Roy Batty’s life.

There’s the obvious one being the dove which was seen in the story of Noah’s Ark, there’s Tyrell calling him the “Prodigal son.” and talking about how special he is the advancement of the human race and more full on is the self-crucifixion that Batty goes through. It’s slightly weird how Deckard also suffers hand injuries but doesn’t need to stab his own hand in order to survive.

So, with all of these symbols of Jesus Christ... did Roy Batty die for our sins?

Is the world of *Blade Runner* even a sinful world? It is rich in genetic development (rebelling against the ‘Creator’), the rich classes dot themselves around adulterous activities such as the Snake Pit place and the various advertisements of the Geisha girls popping the pills. Immediately we have a strong link to the world of today, in fact, given different contexts then the worlds are almost identical. Our world is a sinful
world and Jesus Christ hasn’t died twice, but he was the “Prodigal son” of the creator...

Roy Batty happens to be the “Prodigal son” of another creator.

If Roy did indeed die for our sins then perhaps Deckard feels absolved of his cold, calculated an inhuman state to the point where he achieves catharsis. Perhaps the rain baptizes him and serves as a true welcoming into the world, while the sinners rage on it’s at least nice to know there’s one human being still alive.

Perhaps there’s a message in Blade Runner about the nature of our world today. Our thirst for sinning has yet to be quenched and I doubt it will any time soon. This is a world that is full of blasphemy and while a lot have turned to atheism for enlightenment, each to his or her own, a great big deal of people still believe in Religion. All of them really have strong numbers and perhaps Blade Runner somehow deals with them all; even through the same symbols.

The dove could be seen taken from Noah’s Ark but it wouldn’t be surprise me if some reincarnation interpretation could be found there. Right there you’ve nailed down a damn lot of religions in one symbol and the trick is that there is no right answer. There’s no ‘Noah’s Ark’ speech or otherwise defined interpretation of the bird, rather a symbolic gesture to the sky by Batty left behind as he was dying.

Deckard himself may in fact be one of the most sinful characters of Blade Runner, in fact, he may be the absolute biggest sinner of all time. He drinks, he grins at the sight of naked strangers who happen to be women, he kills Zhora and Pris, he somewhat steals from Taffey Lewis (abusing his position of power), he displays anger and discontent at Bryant and envy towards the higher classes. What is perhaps worst of all however is his search for love, or rather, inhuman love. He chooses love with a Replicant and not with a human being.

His lust drives him to pursue a relationship that puts him into the dominating position. He almost forces Rachael against her will in a sexual act and indulges in masochistic attitudes towards her. Calling her up, finding himself saved by her yet still fighting for domination. Their relationship is interesting to me because this should be a sin yet it is Deckard realizing his humanity, his love, which soothes away his coldness. As he slowly falls in love he lets go of his domination, his attitudes and starts to act more protective and loving towards her. She accepts this at the end, just as Deckard accepts his humanity. The unicorn.

This inhuman love is what humanizes him, a revolt against the gods. That tired “We are made in his image” is spun out into a liberal message of evolution, that love is love no matter how abnormal. Dr Seuss said himself “A person’s a person, no matter how small!”[1] now transformed into an idiom now militarized and abused by pro-life groups. Except, what Seuss was grasping at was something else. The ‘small’ doesn’t refer to simple dwarfism or personality or stupidity or any other element of mankind but something else, “no matter how small” no matter how different. Love is the exact same thing. Although it’s weird to poke a Seuss quote at Blade Runner, it seems to work, but I think it’s important to consider the absolute juxtaposition at play. Inhumanity guides Deckard to humanity, but what is inhuman anyway? His love is as pure towards her as it would be to any other human being.

There’s a rhythm to Blade Runner, a pacing that accelerates itself towards a finale that blows the doors off, philosophically, and one such element of this pacing is the showcase of the ‘antagonists’. Except, the antagonists shown in Blade Runner are
not atypical ‘evil’ or ‘reflections’ of the protagonist. Although Edward Ross, a comic book essayist on film theory, states that “Batty drives a nail - a part of his environment into his hand” “Deckard too must move through his environment subversively: climbing through a hole in the apartment.” “Foreshadowing the revelation that Deckard himself is a Replicant, the film shows him to be an emerging explorer or space. A subverter of urban conventions, an echo of Batty.” that “Replicants blend-in and become a part of their environment."[2]

Where is Deckard during the beginning of the film? As Ross points out in a comic book panel, Deckard is isolated with his back against a window. The populace mills about in front of him while he seems to sink into the environment.

The ‘antagonist’, Batty, is a mirror-image of the ‘protagonist’ bar a few differences. Namely that of super-human strength and a lifetime of memories crushed into his short life-span. But, however, Deckard seems to become closer to Batty as the film shifts on. Indeed, in the climax there seems to be a movement within the environment as their fight escalates. Deckard uses a pipe against Batty, he crawls through the ceiling, hangs off steel and the final speech of Batty takes place with the neon lights glittering in the distance.

I state all of this because I wish to discuss something; power. That old age thematic which still plagues cinema today with the especial likes of *The Social Network* and the works of Christopher Nolan. What is Roy Batty, in the hierarchy of power in *Blade Runner*? I’ve touched on this discussion before, but it’s interesting to consider that his mass of power is exactly what destroys him. He can command no social position because he is a Replicant, an outsider, but he can still remind Deckard of his humanity. His segregation almost a reminder of the Civil Rights movement through the 1960s. Diversity is humanity... right?

Batty is a master, a commander of humanity. He does not realize it until saving Deckard’s life, in fact it’s his triumph. He lives on through Deckard’s memories, through his transfer of humanity, through saving his life. The hunter saves the hunted, just as the tables of ‘hunter and hunted’ actually changed, to remind the blade runner of something. His humanity. That he isn’t a bureaucratic killing machine, but a human being.

This is where Batty’s masterful craft comes into play. His super-human strength, his philosophies and almost ‘Aryan’ presence. He is the master over Deckard, but he dies. Why? Because this world is a world of masters, and Roy realizes he has killed Tyrell, he has killed many who brought him into this world. He has killed those who control it and has perhaps kicked off a chain of events to bring down the Orwellian clouds, to turn Room 101 into rubble, and here he passes the torch to Deckard. In this world of destruction, in this world of Orwell, we have to hang on to our humanity. Our love. Just as Winston Smith does.

I think it’s a statement of either two things. The first, that the nineteen eighties were full of this media-mogulism that practiced the elevation of corporations and maniacal ‘elite’ who grasped the economy in their hands. That when we start to lose our arts, our opinion and our money; we have to remember what keeps us human. Love. Memories. All that good stuff.

Secondly, I believe it to be a warning. The whole film is Orwellian in its gene-juices and it includes that ‘warning’. *1984* was written at the time of Stalin’s sweeping
control, as he destroyed culture and built his palace around a cult of personality and destructive reckoning of any opposition. *Blade Runner* is a warning of the future, it's even set in the future, that we will lose our humanity to these 'masters'. I believe *Blade Runner* has never been more relevant, with 'those responsible' masters now held to their sins. Murdoch on trial, MP’s expenses scandal and all sorts of under-table dealings with the likes of Gaddafi. In the end, humanity triumphs.

Right?

Except we're constantly reminded about what happens when we let them get too far. When the masters can push the buttons. *Blade Runner* was written just out of Cold War paranoias. As we'll investigate soon, the political world of which Ridley was seeping into *Blade Runner* was one still captivated by fears and mistrust. Its leaders, it masters were the ones who were pointed and glared at. Watched. *Blade Runner* was simply a warning about what would happen if the eyes turned the other way.

The leaders, masters... gods?

*Blade Runner*’s 2019 seems to be a world devoid of god. Instead, mankind has replaced the powers that be. Tyrell can manipulate the environment at a flick of a wrist, create life and impart power on any human he wishes. The omnipresent blimp being a symbol of the ‘elite’ and their grasp on the world. Perhaps pursuing Deckard, knowing what he is pursuing.

Do they let it happen, these gods? These powers?

I’m not sure whether *Blade Runner* is a completely atheistic film. It portrays a world without religion as one suffering, devoid of its diversity, a common element of Orwellian infused literature and a very strong feature of Stalin’s dictatorship as he crushed diversity throughout Russia. Atheism is a belief in the absence of a higher power, and *Blade Runner* has some religious connotations to its content. The dove perhaps being from Noah’s ark, Batty’s ‘crucifixion’ as stigmatizes in his hands (perhaps dying for the sins of humanity? To save humanity through Deckard?), and constant showings of the sun and references to Batty as the ‘prodigal son’.

“Fiery the angels fell...” Batty mutters to Chew, just before slaughtering him. This is a deliberate misquote of the famous poet William Blake, who wrote “Fiery the angels rose...”. Interesting to note the title of the poem that this quoting derived from: *America, A Prophecy*. *Blade Runner* centres itself around a critique of American society, philosophy, culture and decaying politics all inside the beating heart of a washed-up neo-noir Los Angeles. What is interesting is how *Blade Runner* sees its antagonists, the Replicants, as ‘fallen angels’. Perhaps my earlier interpretation of the Greek tragedy structure doesn’t exclusively apply to Deckard but to Batty perhaps more truly; redemption in his third act being the primary point of discussion. Though Zhora herself is shot in the shoulder blade, making her look like her wings are torn off. The clothing she adorns also being similar to the wings of an Angel too. She also makes use of the snake that, according to the announcer, “once corrupted man.”

I think this is where *Blade Runner* shines, in its presentation of religion. It seems to take that on within itself, subtly injecting it into its language and its visuals and throughout its entire complexion. The film presents a world devoid of religion, but never truly comments on whether religion would help this world. When Deckard is traversing through the alleyways and crooks of the Chinatown, the languages and world seems foreign to him. He looks nervous and alienated. As 'usual' one might say, but here,
there’s a strange twinge of spirituality. The symbols on every corner, the Chinese markings... the film taking on some symbols relating to the word ‘origin’, a key theme of the film.

*Blade Runner* does not argue with religion, but I am pretty sure that it depicts a world without spirituality as one devoid of humanity. *Blade Runner* is definitely a liberal, anti-corporation film that comments on Capitalism and the world of the eighties. It would not surprise me if this was intentional, to have a world utterly devoid of any Anglo-Saxon type religion. Western culture seems crushed of its spiritual needs, it doesn’t appear necessary for the docile populace to worship a god; they already seem to worship technology and self-destructive celebrity culture. I don’t really need to look for evidence to comment on the fact that the core ‘aspirational’ content, meant to enthuse the human race and make it want to do good, has gone from religion to this loose celebrity-individualistic culture that results in ironically isolationism or destruction of privacy.

*Blade Runner* would be more relevant to the world of today than the eighties, given its comments on religion. With Dawkins/Hitchens and various other specific individuals creating a new “militant atheist” “anti-religion” paradigm, it would be somewhat more of a revolt to see *Blade Runner* as depicting a world without spirituality, without humanity. Pondering the unknown, asking the eternal questions is what separates us from the wild beasts. *Blade Runner* almost seems like a continuation of the fears of the sixties; pollution, corporatism, nuclear war and the unknown. The post-Cold War commentary blending in seamlessly. The paranoia element of this lending itself quite lovingly to the world of today, a world absolutely full of paranoia and the continuing sacrifice of our freedom of speech. ‘Stop Online Piracy Act’, ‘Protect IP Act’ and the emergence of the ‘Pirate Party’ political group throughout the world. We are losing our freedom and slipping in 2019.

Interesting to note how 2019 seems to have lost not only its spirituality but has now utterly absorbed itself in the seven sins. Batty’s pursuit of immortality, an expression of envy, perhaps his pursuit of Deckard at the end changing his sinful ways into his pursuit of mortality, eventually understanding his own humanity by saving Deckard. Deckard’s own lust of Rachael breaks in, as does his eyeing up of Zhora. Leon’s anger and wrath punctuates throughout the film too. Tyrell’s pride in his creation, his greed too, leads to his downfall.

The main characters of *Blade Runner* appear deep into their sinful ways, but the background noise appears just as sacrilegious. The onlookers of Zhora, the excessive indulging into alcohol and drugs, the wrath of the police department, the pride of the shopkeepers and the... capitalists. All of them seem warped into their greed and trap the Replicants, Deckard included, in bittersweet envy. His working class ways making up look up into the gleaming gates of upper-class... heaven.

The Mayan pyramids and marrying of diverse renaissance architecture and other cross-culture fertilization of the architecture all hammers home the nature of *Blade Runner’s* religion; everything. There’s an amalgam of emotion and deep sympathy for all of the characters as they go about their self-pitying ways. All of them seem to have secrets, something inside of them. It’s what makes *Blade Runner* such a good investigation of the human mind; it traps its characters in thought, in ambiguity, leading them to contemplate suicide, mortality, god, the heavens, their own creations and warps.
this thoughtfulness into ignorance. Deckard is oblivious, to begin with, at his emotional coldness, Tyrell too is too high in his chair to even look down.

All of the characters seem to be involved or influenced by this non-religious state of affairs. There’s no emotional sustenance, merely a search for humanity. Goals driven by greed or pursuit of immortality or something else entirely. Their definitions of humanity change, alter and fade. Deckard and Rachael are two of the last main characters alive by the end of the film and the juxtaposition between their ending and beginning is absolutely massive. It isn’t often for a contemporary film to take, with such pride, its exploration into religion and not drill out an archaic version in which to project typical militant atheist attitudes. The attitude towards religion in *Blade Runner* is almost sympathetic at times, never really ridiculing or perhaps commenting on religion. The ‘gods’ in 2019 are the human beings anyway, they are without god, and the fates themselves seem only to be manipulated by... one person perhaps.

Deckard’s entire outlook on the events of the film and himself are completely changed by that unicorn. An apparent ‘sign of brotherhood’, but this book is using *The Final Cut* as a basis. A cut which mostly supports the idea that Deckard is indeed non-human, a Replicant, and the film changes massively when this idea is raised. The idea fits into religion with the ideas of “Made in god’s image” that the Replicants may not be human in God’s eyes but... God seems dead in this world anyway? Who knows. The best way to investigate *Blade Runner’s* explorations of humanity is not to consider it as the... story, Deckard as a Replicant or not, but the barriers between human and non-human. What is human? Is the question asked, and *Blade Runner’s* world devoid of religion and spirituality seems to hammer home another question.

If ‘what is human’ is no longer ‘human’, and the barriers have been shifted completely, then what does it mean to be a God?

**NOTES**

1. *Horton Hears A Who!* by Dr Seuss
2. *Filmish - Sets and Architecture* by Edward Ross
(3.3) TRAGEDY

"When one man dies it is a tragedy, when thousands die it's statistics." That's what Joseph Stalin said to Harry S. Truman[1]. What is tragedy? It’s an emotional, heartbreaking event that shows humanity in the most adverse of conditions. But, as a genre, tragedy is something else. It’s humanity itself. It’s where the best and bravest of literature works have been forged. Shakespeare. Sophocles. Racine. Miller. Steinbeck... Scott? Did Ridley Scott create a tragedy?

To find out we’ll have to unravel Blade Runner, we’ll have to take it apart bit by bit by bit. Why does this matter? Why does anything matter? Interesting to consider how Deckard is trapped across texts, that we too are now trapped between worlds with him. We have no concrete definition, nothing to latch on to, he is trapped just as much as we are. Tragedy or not? Genre-surfing seems to be another notch of trapped ambiguity.

I’ll be considering two main theories or set rules of tragedy; Aristotelian and Shakespearean. I may cover, briefly, some American tragedy, which is probably heavily influential on Blade Runner's Los Angeles 2019, but otherwise these two ‘schools’ of tragedy will serve as the main basis of my argument.

Aristotle believed in several key features of ‘tragedy’, considering Oedipus The King’s story to be the ‘perfect’ tragedy. Without delving into feature spotting, Blade Runner is pretty good at holding some of the key principles of Aristotelian tragedy tradition.

For starters, and lets skim over some Greek tragedy here, there exists three acts. The intro, the problem, the redemption. Blade Runner is characterized by the fundamental theme of a man reclaiming his humanity, or perhaps finding it for the first time, that’s all up for debate. In that first act, there’s an Aristotle tradition (or there should be) of hubris. Pride before the fall.

Deckard simply cannot understand Rachael. He offers her a drink and tries to flirt, just after telling her she’s a Replicant like it’s small talk. So proud in his working class flow of conversation and ignorance, he just rolls his eyes off when she runs away. Earlier on he’s cocky during the Bryant conversation, he plays straight into the ‘chicken’ origami that Gaff sets up. Sees himself as something big, the best blade runner, and tries to prove that he isn’t a coward. Act Two arguably starts as Deckard murders Zhora and his entire problem is unravelled, that he is losing his humanity to his job. Before this he gloats in his masculinity, in his perversion, and tries again to flirt with Rachael “I've had people walk out on me before, but not when I was being so charming.”

Pride before the fall.

And as Deckard looks down his gun barrel and on to the corpse of Zhora, he does indeed have that look of disbelief. A change inside of him. That this mission will unravel him, destroy him, and it does. It turns him violent in his approach to sex with Rachael, it turns him weak against Leon, Gaff begins his control over him and suddenly he is spun into this world kicking and screaming. His pride calling off in the distance, his emotional coldness and arrogance now off in the distance as he is tortured and the full Deckard can form. He can rediscover who he is. Interesting how he only ever deliberately kills the females of the Replicant group, stereotypically females tend to represent ‘innocence’ more than males. Maybe the guilt-trap is made all the more
stronger by this. He certainly doesn’t show that much remorse for the deaths of Leon, which is left to an absolute chance encounter with Rachael at the same time.

Shakespearean tragedy does skim these ideas of hubris, though perhaps more blatant with his works. King Lear is a play that combines hubris with another Aristotelian tradition, somewhat, for massive effect. Hamartia. The tragic flaw, again we’ll apply this to Blade Runner, except in Shakespeare’s works there is usually more than one ‘tragic flaw’. In Macbeth it’s Macbeth’s ambition and arrogance, in King Lear it’s Lear’s pride, gullibility and anger and in Hamlet it’s his inability to act on impulse and (again) pride. Shakespeare turns ‘hubris’ itself into a tragic flaw that leads to a character’s downfall, rather than merely an ‘aspect’ of tragedy.

Deckard’s tragic flaws then are worth delving into. His ‘downfall’ is not completely explicit, but he is certainly tested by the Replicants and the job at hand. If anything his ‘redemption’ is what truly creates him as a human being. That third act is where he rises to the challenge, to a certain extent he completely fails though it depends whether we’re discussing his humanity or the actual job. Except, Deckard’s tragic flaws are quite... tricky to dissolve, tricky to work out. His working class manners seem to have something to do with it, he is certainly arrogant. That first act he seems incapable of passion, an emotional coldness, quite contradictory to the archetype protagonist. A protagonist is someone for the audience to see the film through, someone who asks questions, except Blade Runner isn’t a film of answers but rather interrogations of the audience. It possesses no answers, but implied meanings.

Deckard’s hamartia then is his emotional coldness, his incapability of humanity. He resorts to pride, to boasting and to outright perversion while making his way through the world of Los Angeles 2019. Except, perhaps it isn’t one straight Aristotelian flaw... perhaps it’s more Shakespearean? Pride? Definitely. It’s why he takes the job in the first place. My Oedipus readings[2] link in with my next point too, that Deckard may also possess the tragic flaw of... fate. Oedipus had no knowledge of the prophecy that would tear him apart, so too does Deckard have no knowledge of the fact that he is a Replicant. It’s perfectly fitting too that both characters achieve ‘redemption’ when they find out this fact about themselves.

But there’s something to Blade Runner and its presentation of these flaws that throws out some quandaries about its protagonist. A protagonist that isn’t strictly human in the traditional sense. Harrison Ford himself said “I thought the audience deserved one human being on screen that they could establish an emotional relationship with. I thought I had won Ridley’s agreement to that, but in fact I think he had a little reservation about that. I think he really wanted to have it both ways.”[3] but there’s some kind of... misunderstanding. That ‘human being’ means flesh and blood, but Blade Runner’s ambiguity about its protagonist’s final fate (spread across multiple versions) is what truly creates its ‘tragic protagonist’. A protagonist utterly trapped across realities, bound by Replicant and human nature at the same time. Blade Runner’s implied discussion is, no doubt, what does it mean to be human? The meaning there, gathered from the story, is that it doesn’t really matter that much.

Our tragic protagonist is not one of nobility, a typical feature of ‘epic tragedy’ which Aristotle was more geared towards. ‘Domestic tragedy’ doesn’t quite fit the bill either. We do have an anti-hero of sorts as our main protagonist (Ridley Scott even calls Deckard an ‘anti-hero’[4]), it does centre around ‘normal’ people, more working class in
its story but it doesn’t centre around family or community. There is some background ‘Roy Batty is Deckard’s brother’ stuff sort of implied, but Deckard’s story is one of isolationism and loneliness. The whole theme of ‘rehumanization’ requires this isolated feeling to be pungent throughout the film. It would not make sense for Blade Runner, a film weaved in Orwellian fibres, to be about ‘community’ or ‘movements’ or ‘uprising’ or sorts. It’s an individualistic film, its politics the direct opposite (we’ll cover that soon).

I think it’s the evolution of society that has ruptured the genre of ‘tragedy’, not killed it off, but transformed it. Science fiction tragedy, maybe, elements still carried from the old Aristotelian ways and Shakespeare’s fingers dabbled across its papers. ‘American tragedy’ might be more apt, though I’m not sure if Blade Runner is a critique of the ‘American Dream’. It certainly criticizes parts of American society, commercialism, corporations and extreme capitalism, certainly, but it never openly investigates the ‘American culture’ with its content. I feel it’s more of a critique on the entirety of Western culture, how rudimentary and self-destructive it actually is. As I’ve said ad nauseum, Blade Runner is a warning. It’s a nod to Orwell and a point to a 2019 full of cameras and corporations and class divides skyrocketing.

There’s something weird about how Blade Runner somehow dips its toys inside ‘domestic tragedy’ too. By making its protagonist one of working class backgrounds, full of pride and wit and yet emotional coldness, it seems to already embody some kind of political message. The tragedy that befalls Deckard only amplifies the message, lets it be heard further. Deckard is the ‘everyman’, an ear for the audience. He doesn’t ask the questions, because he won’t find answers in a film as interrogative as Blade Runner. Perhaps he is the audience, and so too the audience is trapped in ambiguity. Skirting across the edges, running across a knife’s edge... a blade runner.

Aristotle believed in a paradigm of tragedy that went beyond elements of ‘hubris’, ‘hamartia’, ‘tragic protagonist’. I’m skimming over some of these features because I want to centre around Blade Runner. The other school of thought, Shakespeare, could be quite rightly applied in my next discussion. Farce. Aristotle believed the perfect tragedy is devoid of comedy, that it is completely serious and adult in its content. Shakespeare’s works had tonal shifts that could be seen from outer space. In some performances of King Lear, the character of the ‘Fool’ (written for a popular comedian back in Shakespeare’s time) is played very comical. The play also features eye-gouging and social commentary on class division and poverty. Messages like these do not lose their power, however, even when the play is punctuated by moments of strong comedy. Blade Runner, however, is a little bit weird with its humour. The bits of “not when I was being so charming” from Deckard might be a little bit funny, but his story is mostly utterly... pathetic... tragic. There is a scene with Batty and some eyes that is played for some degree of childishness.

Blade Runner’s farcical bits do not hinder the main ‘serious’ and depressing mood of the movie. The juxtaposition isn’t gigantic, the tonal shifts not unexpected or ridiculous. While not Aristotelian, times have changed, it isn’t Shakespearean either. It meets in a middle-ground, never truly developing itself in either place. Yet, still, these farcical moments may be seen as both farce and depression, seconds of pessimism, for in this tortured world there is only tortured humour... or maybe it truly is humour. It seems trapped... in something.

An ambiguity.
Tragedy isn’t strictly structured in this way, but Aristotle was certainly more inclined about this. Greek tragedy embodied this too, Shakespeare revolting against this principle, of a three-act structure.

Act One is the setup, Act Two is the problem, Act Three is the redemption. The best way to explain this is to take a look at The Empire Strikes Back, a fun little link back to my previous chapter on Star Wars in relation to Blade Runner.

Act One is set on Hoth where we’re introduced to a scattered Rebellion and strong Empire. An iron fist clouds over the base as we are reintroduced to our main characters. Problems are setup, sub-plots of Han/Leia’s relationship and Leia’s Jedi training emerge too, but the main plot and problem is well-established in the first few minutes. Luke will have to face the Empire. There’s an obvious arc here.

Act Two is where we meet Lando and unearth some history behind Han. Lando’s moves on Leia draw over Han’s own advances, but he keeps trying. Luke is on Dagobah, training, and confronting his potential ‘Sith’ self. Vader invites Han to a dinner, Boba freezes Solo and Luke is given the ultimate dilemma.

Act Three chronicles the failed rescue attempt of Han Solo, and Luke marching to his confrontation of Vader. Failure is abundant here, yet all the characters are quick to crush whatever problems lay inside themselves. Solo’s arrogance fades away, Luke’s sincerity and care for his friends seems to take a backseat afterwards and Leia’s love for Han both blossoms and preserves itself.

Except the original Star Wars trilogy itself might be a better example of the three-act structure. Empire Strikes Back is billed as the ‘problem’ part of the piece, but this conventional plot structure is probably more evident when you compare the entire trilogy. A New Hope establishes the rules, characters and plots of this world. Empire Strikes Back crushes their hopes, dreams and ends on one of the darkest sci-fi moments. Return of the Jedi is Leia’s redemption of Han Solo, Solo’s redemption of his bravery on Endor and Vader’s final redemption in throwing the Emperor into oblivion.

Greek tragedy functioned strongly along these lines, and we should finally draw this back to Blade Runner. We don’t have an ensemble gang of fun folk to cling on to. Rachael is barely a deuteragonist, and Batty is clearly billed as the antagonist. What we do, however, to draw from my Star Wars comparison is that it borrows both from the original trilogy’s structural moments and Empire Strikes Back in some other ways. What do I mean by this?

Empire Strikes Back is strictly the ‘darkest chapter’, the problem, the second act of this trilogy. Yet it contains something very, very strong and pungent throughout Blade Runner. Perpetual pessimism. A deep mood and atmosphere stretching from head to toe. Brisk moments of optimism that evaporate, and ending on a note of ambiguity about the future.

Blade Runner borrows from the entire trilogy’s ‘three-act’ structure in the most important way possible: redemption. The third act of any Greek tragedy is considered, and I’d agree with this, to be the absolute most important. It’s where the hero redeems himself, notes his flaws and swears off the ills he has brought to this world. Sometimes it involves an almost sacrificial or otherwise self-destructive, sometimes suicidal, beat of the story. Oedipus tears his eyes out. Vader throws the Emperor to his death. Deckard realizes his humanity and destroys his security, turning his back on society.
Redemption of humanity. This is where the giant, highlighted link is drawn between *Jedi* and *Blade Runner*. A realization. In the wording of Aristotle, the ‘anagorisis’, when a character discovers something critically important about themselves. *Blade Runner* is definitely, in my opinion, a film absolutely rich in this tragic feature. Shakespeare himself had this with *Hamlet* and a wide number of his plays, though not as explicit.

*Blade Runner* as a Greek tragedy too?

The first act we are introduced to this world via a long zoom-in shot and the pumping of Vangelis’ orchestra. Leon’s reckoning shows this world as violent and paranoid. Deckard is shown as isolated and emotionally cold, distant, prideful. Hubris. Rachael is revealed to be a Replicant, the opening scrolling text describing the fragility of her life. Tyrell’s sweeping arm is shown off too along with the powers of Batty and company concluding the Act with a visit to the eyeshop.

Act Two is built around Deckard’s investigation as he dives deeper into both his own depression, searching his memories and photos, and the case at hand. He shoots Zhora and immediately we are thrown into the main theme of the film. He has a realization of his lack of humanity, that the job has destroyed him. Batty and Pris take on Sebastian and begin their plans while Leon is caught up in a chance meeting with Rachael. Deckard and her make love and begin their sinful relationship. His humanity is at stake as Batty begins his rise.

The third act involves Batty destroying his father and beginning a reign of terror. Killing Sebastian too. Deckard arrives at the Bradbury Building and kills Pris, almost accidentally, and awaits Batty’s return. The hunter/hunted dynamic is reversed as Deckard fights for his life, before almost losing it to the environment, saved by Batty. The ‘tears in rain’ speech and saving of his life reminds Deckard of his humanity, rehumanizes him, and carries the life of Batty. Deckard goes home to face a potentially dead Rachael, but finds her alive and refuses the totalitarian society. He picks up the unicorn. It all cements as he and Rachael travel down into uncertainty.

Greek tragedy.

The falling of a man. A tragic hero.

A key debate of tragedy is whether or not the ‘powers that be’ are in control over the heroes fate or human folly itself is the driving force of the blame. In *Blade Runner* there is this weird merging of ‘powers that be’ and humanity, to the extent of which the entire ‘deity’ definition is completely rewritten. Tyrell is, in all technical sense, a God. A supernatural, omnipresent (blimps and lights) being who seeps throughout the landscape, creates life, chooses who dies and when, controls the weather and light among other deity traits. Gaff could be seen as this ‘hand of god’ too, though we’ll cover his character later.

The ‘powers that be’ could somewhat of a touch of breaking the fourth wall, a little post-modern, in which the author themselves is the ‘power that be’, driving the hero forth through a pre-determined destiny. The whole idea of ‘humanity’ being at play could become quite literal and not simply inside the diegesis. In *Blade Runner*, this would mean that Ridley Scott and not Tyrell is in charge of the picture. Or Hampton Fancher and David Peoples if you want to actual writers behind the piece.
They want to tell a story, they want to make something special. The prophecy that destroys Oedipus that is what happens in *Blade Runner*. Powers conspire and drive Deckard towards his endgame, his humanity.

In the end, the two schools of tragedy (that we’ve skimmed over) do not do justice to interpret *Blade Runner* as a tragedy; rather they instead allow us to feature-spot and somewhat place *Blade Runner* in either of these collections of ideas. I believe, instead, that *Blade Runner* is a new type of tragedy. It’s one that defies human beings, uses farce as a projector of tragedy and not comedy and one that explicitly raises the metaphysical issues of our time. Aristotle believed in another element that I haven’t touched upon, ‘catharsis’ in which the audience’s emotions are purged through fear and pity. Emotional climax. A true bond where the tragic hero becomes a character within the extreme of sympathy. Reduced, emasculated. Isn’t this *Blade Runner*? But in a new age. We fear for Deckard’s future, certainly, and we pity his situation but there’s something about the ending that leaves me thinking to myself that... *Blade Runner* is not pessimistic. It’s a warning, blatantly, of a future that could be... but it’s a reflection of our own humanity. That, in the end, it triumphs.

And that is catharsis truly evolved.

NOTES
1. *Truman* by David McCullough.
2. *3.1 - Eye*
4. Director’s Commentary on *The Final Cut*
(3.4) INNOCENCE

There’s a weird moment in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* It’s one that took me back a little, a tiny bit of shock. A prod, if you will, and it’s definitely one of the moments (many of them) in the book that made me truly ponder something. Innocence itself. The moment was in one of Deckard’s descriptions of Rachael, and I remember the quote off by heart.

“A figure like a child’s.”

Deckard eventually falls in love with Rachael. The line hung throughout the book and I came back to it when Deckard finished up his affair with Rachael. Not to be hysterical or otherwise absolutely wrong but, with Deckard’s description, is he indulging in paedophilia? He happily calls her a ‘child’, and actually, the Replicants are in some sense ‘children’. Short-life spans, four years old as a Nexus Six, implanted memories as ‘emotional cushions’ only go so far. They are children trapped in mechanical bodies of adults that are probably the best way to put it.

Innocence, then, seems like a precious commodity in the Replicant world. Yet, looking at the ‘human’ world we already see the geishas of *Blade Runner* all hyper-sexualized young women, the rich folk indulge themselves in looking at naked women and there’s a true ‘honesty’ to the place. The grime just froths over in the cities, I’m not sure there are any children in the film. I’ve looked it over tens of times, and they might be on bikes during Roy’s first appearance. This world, regardless, seems devoid of ‘childhood’. It’s the boroughs and urban filth from wall to wall, no place for a child, but who knows.

These ‘childhoods’ of the Replicants are fabricated but... does that make them adults? Memories are what matter here; they’re what makes us human. Tyrell goes beyond that, “More human than human”. If our own childhood is fabricated, if we cannot preserve our own past self then what are we? Shells, husks even. The Replicants are only (at most) four years old but still smoke and drink and *kill*. They act like angsty-teenagers or the middle-aged or, quite frankly, the depressed milling sheep of *Blade Runner’s* world. Even Deckard turns himself to alcoholism, an addiction mirrored with Rachael and Pris’ smoking. Indulging them in adult activity, trying to keep them ‘adult’ and ‘human’, but utterly falling back on that ‘missing something’. In either case, Deckard or Replicant, it’s ‘life’.

And it’s that drive for ‘life’, that underlying goal that punctuates *Blade Runner’s* moral underbelly. Is Deckard’s quest one for innocence? Are the Replicants asking for life so they can be children again? Without a childhood, there is usually life-crushing trauma. Orphans are, thanks to this lovely ‘caring’ world, the most at risk of falling into depression in Uganda[1] and without generalizing that’s probably true for the Western world too.

That’s what they are then, the Replicants, ‘Orphans’. The only separation between them and Deckard, a Replicant in my view but it’s not necessary to view it this way, is a purpose. A drive, a motivation; his job. Even then, he finds himself corrupted by his killing. His first on-screen taken life, Zhora, takes him back. It’s like it’s his first time *ever*, something doesn’t feel right. He’s shaken as he steps out of the little snow display. The ‘cold-blooded killer’ becoming physical, tangible, he has lost his innocence to the Replicants. He knows what he is becoming, and he is losing his humanity to being the ‘Replicant’ owned by Bryant and Gaff.

In reference to my earlier discussion about interpreting *Blade Runner* as a tragedy, it’s interesting to observe the characteristic of innocence permeate throughout several characters of the film and also consider their respective fates. The character of Sebastian himself, in his first few lines of introduction, states to Pris that “My friends are toys”. He build them all, with toy soldiers and bears and all kinds of childlike bits
mashed together to create the ‘friends’ of Sebastian. Interesting to see this innocence within J.F then become all the more universal when J.F states “There’s some of me in you.”

It’s probably a wink at their mortality, that they have an aging disorder akin to J.F’s Methuselah syndrome (note the biblical references). I however would perceive it as, yes mortality, but being stuck within those youngest years of human life. The impulsive kissing of Roy and Pris, the emotion crippling death of Leon, Leon’s revolt and horror at seeing Zhora die... and Deckard... trapping himself in his drinking. Rachael too with her smoking all epitomises the fact that the Replicants are all children trying to trap themselves in older bodies, minds and desires. Memories. Yet they’re young. They’re innocent just as J.F is innocent.

Deckard’s own innocence may or may not be related to the Replicants, it depends on your interpretation, but it’s hard to ignore Rick’s childish charms. The naivety with his conversations with Rachael, his lack of emotional understanding and the boyish working class swagger he carries himself about Bryant’s office. There’s a pattern of innocence within Deckard’s movements and actions but, more importantly, within his own mind. Look no further than the Unicorn dream.

An image of the mystical, a marriage of the natural and the unnatural. An utter reflection of the Replicants themselves. For some reason, Deckard dreams of unicorns. The question usually asked by anyone is whether or not Deckard is a Replicant given Gaff eventually leaves the unicorn origami outside his apartment. What I want to ask, however, is unicorns... why unicorns?

This specific section should address symbols and meanings but, yet, the image of the unicorn has always bewildered me. I’m not sure if it’s a motif of the ‘fairytale’, that the Blade Runner story is (in actuality) optimistic in that the hero gets the dame and the villain is vanquished. Except we all know that doesn’t happen as Deckard runs with Rachael into the tundra of uncertainty.

Though this depends which version you look at... or maybe even ‘prefer’. I consider The Final Cut, which has been used as a basis for this entire book, to be the utter ‘perfect’ version of Blade Runner. But, there was a time when there was a happy ending to this film. A better ending? With the running small theme of innocence, it’s hard to say. It would certainly be interesting to see it handled more sensitively, to see just how happy of an ending that Ridley could give the characters.

Except they’re merely puppets, devices for our own entertainment and for Ridley’s philosophical and political means. Hampton Fancher (the main screenwriter) probably had a giant hand in moulding these characters too. They all have a trait of innocence of them, human or not. Gaff with his origami, Bryant with his short stature and quick quip into getting a drink following Zhora’s death. No-one in Blade Runner’s ensemble seems to be missing innocence... even Tyrell.

“Milk and cookies kept you awake?”

This persecution towards Sebastian hammers home something which bubbles across the surface of Blade Runner and perhaps encapsulates it more than anything else. The questioning of innocence puts Sebastian right under the hierarchy of Tyrell, showing innocence to be weak. The Replicants here are thus in the same league as Sebastian, below him, and even more ‘innocent’ and ‘childlike’ than Sebastian. Blade Runner is a film about perception, more clearly however, it’s a film about power through perception. How the characters align and fight their way to be perceived differently. Deckard’s inner battle to find his humanity again, Gaff to prove his worth to Bryant, Tyrell to be seen as the tyrannical overlord of this new world, Roy to be seen as the
absolute alpha of the Replicant league and all of the rest. Roy, however, I feel is the one worth most investigation.

In the final battle he howls like a wolf, counts down to take on Deckard, plays with him using a counting rhyme “Six, seven go to hell, go to heaven!” and dives straight into “You can't play” seeing it as a game. Roy seeing his final few minutes of life as a game completely sums up his character up until the point of ‘Tears In Rain’. When that speech occurs, everything makes sense. He realizes his own memories, his own humanity through saving Deckard’s life. In essence, he grows up.

The absence of children in *Blade Runner*, as far as I’ve studied, makes me wonder whether or not this is a film about innocent people lost in a world without innocence. The geisha girl advertisement, according to David Dryer[2], is apparently advertising birth control. *Blade Runner* depicts a 2019 Los Angeles where even birth control is advertised in the same manner as Coca Cola. I’m sorry to say but this doesn’t seem far off from nowadays.

Whether or not it’s a stray away into the sacrilegious area of humanity or some kind of moral betrayal is up for debate. Personally, I see the film as a diehard liberal and quite antagonistically anti-capitalist (as we’ll cover next section) affair that sort of has to show this world as this twisted. There is no innocence in 2019 Los Angeles, only the scraps left for the Replicants and the little bits we see in the characters. The glints in their eyes.

NOTES
(3.5) GAFF

Who or what is Gaff? As a character he is incredibly enigmatic yet the part he plays in the film could not be straighter forward: a messenger. Perhaps a more apt way of description would be a ‘torch bearer’. Gaff himself doesn’t appear as an Olympian figure, but his presence is certainly bigger than his physical being. His power seems lightly bureaucratic, not spiritual in the least.

Except, maybe it is.

The driving force of Deckard’s journey is Gaff himself. He’s there from the very beginning, challenging Deckard’s pride. There’s a strong sense that he is attached to Deckard, yet does not let him understand him. The language barrier of streetspeak helps to create Gaff as this isolated being, similar to Deckard, someone just trying to get by. Except his power over Deckard seems to be giving him some pleasure. The origami he shapes already a symbol of child-like obsession. Though the matchstick man with an erection spins various connotations out into the wild.

Who does Gaff follow? Tyrell? Bryant? God? In the end he gives Deckard the sign. The true sign of brotherhood, an affirmation of his humanity. Gaff knows. Gaff is aware of his mind, memories and dreams and so it seems Gaff is truly in control of Deckard. Deckard’s mind being incredibly fragile, loose and human whereas Gaff takes on the robotic role of directing him. In the end, he rewards the “man’s job” with giving him his manhood.

It’s never clear whether or not Bryant is in on the plan. He talks to Deckard like an old pal, though the smirks and some body language indicate he is enjoying his play with the Replicant. Maybe the film’s final note is of Gaff letting Deckard off of the bureaucratic leash and into the human wild?

Tyrell doesn’t seem to be the one in charge. He has no need to be involved in any of the business. But, if we look at his role more closely, we see that he... probably created Deckard. Of course, so many Replicants are produced that he can’t inspect them all individually but it looks like Deckard is of the ‘next-generation’ or at least highly intelligent version of Nexus. He would be then heavily expensive to Tyrell... so surely he must have (in some capacity) overseen production of Deckard?

Gaff’s point, in letting Deckard find his humanity, isn’t to answer ‘what does it mean to be human?’ but to, instead, show up Tyrell perhaps? That Gaff acquired control over the Replicant and has allowed him to become human, allow him to experience the endgame of Batty and live out the rest of Batty’s life. That the Replicants are just as human as everybody else. But to whom is Gaff making this point to? Tyrell is dead. Is it the elite? Is it the human beings?

I think it’s us.

Gaff scolds Deckard after killings. He goads him to take the challenge in the first place. He is the man holding the carrot on the stick, and Deckard is merely the donkey. Eventually, however, Deckard realizes something. Led by Gaff, he realizes his mortality. The most profound moment in the film in which Deckard is full of acceptance. The unicorn scrunching in his hand as he realizes everything. Closing his eyes, a little moment of pain before the acceptance.

Except Gaff’s words spring throughout Deckard’s head, perhaps literally showing Gaff as inside Deckard’s mind. Possibly too, one could see Deckard instead reading Gaff’s thoughts and hammering the point of ‘brotherhood’ home beyond simple binary separation of man and Replicant. Will Brooker (Editor of The Blade Runner Experience) notes himself that “Gaff, within this interpretation, also dreams of unicorns.”[1]
The brotherhood bond between Deckard and Gaff could easily be seen, although I don't believe it, as instead a ‘taunt’. The origami unicorn at the end signifying Deckard’s regression into a dull, limited existence. More confined than human, yet “The light that shines twice, burns half as long.” Tyrell seemed to have it figured out. Is Gaff, instead of ‘taunting’ then either signifying brotherhood with Deckard (Deckard too nods towards the unicorn) or jealousy? The unicorn, the mystic. Horse and horn. The line between beast and the magical; a mirror image of the ‘blade’ that Deckard runs across. Gaff then is the reflection in the waters below him; the antithesis.

Gaff is the human to Deckard’s not-so-human form, yet by the resolution we’re handed a man and not a Replicant. I firmly believe Deckard’s nod of acceptance is towards his humanity and not a nod of futility. A nod of change, evolution even. Gaff is the catalyst, accelerating Deckard’s life towards this understanding of himself. Deckard mirrors ourselves, the audience, and Gaff shows him a world of wonder into himself. He changes him and Blade Runner’s world itself is enough to scare us and wake up to the face of Orwell. Gaff is then the avatar of Ridley Scott, a background figure yet the ‘director’ behind Deckard.

Is Gaff a God? Is he ‘the’ God? His Mexican-American roots, the ubiquitous languages, clothing, styles, morals and talents all mix towards the thinking that Gaff is more than a ‘director’ but a God. He manages to pursue and watch Deckard on all levels, an omnipresent being himself. Gaff throws Deckard his weapon at the end, and Deckard counts himself “Finished” with the paranoia fading into the distance. Rachael is the last flag to be conquered and soon that ending comes too. Not before, however, Gaff’s last words resonate inside Deckard’s head.

“It’s too bad she won’t live, but then again, who does?”

Deckard is, supposedly, a vessel for our own understanding. As I’ve said, Blade Runner is a film of questions and not answers. It has meanings, certainly, and layers of them too but it is not a film about answering the questions it asks of us to ask ourselves. That is for us to decide. So too are we, again, trapped in ambiguity. Gaff is the master, the interviewer, the judge, jury, executioner, prosecutor, defence etc.

He is the one who completes Deckard’s long, arduous ritual of finding his humanity. He is showing us, the audience, that Deckard was human all along. That, we are human. That, even in this world of Orwellian nightmares and fumes and the death of common culture there is some humanity to be found. Love. Choice. Memories. Whatever we define as human is eventually found in Deckard.

Perhaps Gaff was playing with a ‘Grow Your Own Human’ set? He wanted to show us that robots can feel like us, that the definition of human might need changing a little bit. In this sense, then, he is a god. A creator, definer, of life. He defies Tyrell, the ‘God’ of this world, and creates humanity. He defies Bryant, his boss, and allows Deckard to be cut off from red tape. The job is still waiting to be completed.

Ridley is Gaff. The auteur. He is Mexican-American, the surveyor and the man trapped on the edge peering down into Deckard and into the line itself. We are the line, trapped in the liminality between fiction and reality. Blade Runner’s storytelling blends speak of a reflection of the both the future and the now, trespassing ‘science-fiction’ altogether. We are on the edge, just as Deckard skirts it too, and Ridley plays us to a tee. What the tour de force of his create world is, however, is how he transforms his world to display his politics to us all.
NOTES

1. *The Blade Runner Experience* - page 9
SECTION IV: POLITICS

Politics nowadays isn’t regarded so rightly. As I type this, the US congress holds (barely) a 5% approval rating and, all across the globe, there are ‘Occupy’ movements. Revolts against old-age systems, traditionalists and (in general) disgusting new age capitalism. The period of change we’re going through is more pivotal than ever before. While the old folks had to deal with the social change following World War II, now following the Cold War we now have to deal with substantial change. The Information Age is radicalizing the youth, transforming intellects and finally blowing wide-open all the dirty dealings of the political system.

A trip back to the nineteen eighties is needed then. For Blade Runner is more relevant today than it was back then... or was it? It was weaved out of those times, not ours, so perhaps we need to truly see just what fabrics and materials its politics were made out of.

(4.1) EAST AND WEST: Blade Runner’s America is a fallen angel. Now overtaken by Asian expansionism, the American dream is now in tatters. How does it handle eighties fears and still manage to hold relevance today?

(4.2) THE CAPITALIST MACHINE: I am confident in saying Blade Runner is a left-wing film made by a left-wing director and left-wing writers. How, then, is capitalism both vindicated and victimized? How does the world of Blade Runner deal with the idea of ‘money’?

(4.3) THATCHER AND REAGAN: A Cowboy in the White House and a Conservative in 10 Downing Street. Throughout the 21st Century, this would repeat itself almost identically. But, back then, there was this little thing called ‘Reaganomics’ too...

(4.4) TODAY: Why does it truly hold political relevance today? Is it the issues raised or the execution in presenting the issues? I evaluate the section and come to a conclusion to just how universally powerful the politics of Blade Runner are.
I write this at a time when a worker in China, specifically Apple’s Foxconn manufacturers, are lucky to get sixty-five pence an hour.[1] To call that inequality would be a large understatement. *Blade Runner*’s world seems to display the Eastern culture as the dominant form, completely taking over American cities and lifestyles. Except this was weaved in the Eighties, a time when the increasing industrial and commercial output of the Japanese and Chinese industries was rapidly increasing. To call it a culture takeover would be a little hysterical, even today it’s hard to see Japanese/Chinese culture completely overriding that of American. Most of the films we watch are American, most plays written by American writers; Hollywood runs the world.

So why did Ridley have a world in which the Eastern takes over the Western? Playing on the paranoia of the industrial expansionism or something more deeply rooted? To find out, let’s take a deeper ride into the film itself.

Chew, the eye geneticist, is Asian and I’ve already shown ‘the eye’ as a prominent symbolic hook eminent throughout the film.[2] If Chew is designing the eyes of the Replicants, if Tyrell is designing their brains then Sebastian (the only ‘American’, also notice his physical depreciation too) is regulated to the pettiest of jobs. Body or otherwise ‘organ’ work, would be quite intriguing to see if he worked on their heart or something. Except we do know there’s “Some of me in you.” and that’s probably, metaphorically, the ‘incept date’ fate of the Replicants. A confined and reduced mortality akin to Sebastian’s ‘Methuselah syndrome’.

The eyes and brain are Eastern and the body and (possibly) other parts are Western. The Replicants are then a fusion of these cultures, true equality perhaps. More importantly to consider, however, is the metaphorical standpoint of Chew being in charge of the eyes and Tyrell in charge of the brains. Sebastian is regulated to, it’s not totally clear, but ‘the brawn’. American imperialism foreshadowed perhaps? I’ll let you be the judge.

Except Ridley is showing here, or perhaps Hampton or Peoples or all of the gang, that the Eastern culture is seeing the way. It is literally seeing the future, 2019 Los Angeles, and remembering it. Tyrell’s designed brain is a holder of the memories that are so integral to the thematic impulses of the film, and more importantly, to us as an audience. When we can’t trust our own memories as our own then we can’t assure ourselves to be ‘ourselves’. This extends then, too, to Deckard himself. The nod at the end of the film might be of the Eastern cultures willing his brain differently, that he may in fact not be completely ‘American’ but an amalgam himself. The brass, Americanized working class swagger and any antagonism, specifically towards Gaff (neatly tied with the unicorn ‘brotherhood’ symbol) all evaporated when Deckard realizes himself unsure, or perhaps sure, of his own life being of American design.

“Helping America into the new world!” Belches the blimps overhead as Deckard burrows his nose into a newspaper but looks up into the lost world. Behind him a Chinese lettering which apparently symbolizes ‘origin’ [3] which itself is a key theme of the entire film. Interpreted via an Eastern symbol and not an American idea, seeing Deckard as internally American but expressively Eastern perhaps? In his industrial way of seeing things, of constantly diluting people to his ‘charm’ and perversion. It’s entirely
up to interpretation, my own resting on the fact that if Deckard is indeed Replicant then
his origins are mainly Eastern within Tyrell and Chew’s creation. The Mayan pyramid in
which the corporation lies too also of Eastern design.

“Helping America into the new world.”

America is then part of the old world? A relic of the past, just like Deckard then.
Deckard’s humanity is changed from a destroyed cold and calculated emotional state
into a caring, loving and ultimately accepting individual. The blimp’s “America"
synonymous with “Deckard” and the “new world” being of emotion and humanity. The
actual “new world” portrayed doesn’t seem as brightly “new” with a docile populace and
a largely disillusioned peoples. The scraps of humanity here and there have no
consistency, perhaps the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures have alienated that
consistency. Furthering this point is the amalgam of cultures throughout Blade Runner
blending into the depressing neo-noir pulp hell. Jews, monks and many other sects of
society fill the background crowds yet none of them feel ‘represented’ but just
bystanders to this depressing “new world”. Deckard instead chooses a different “new
world” and brings America’s heartless Reaganism (which we’ll discuss very soon) into a
more heartfelt world of acceptance, brotherhood and compassion.

My thoughts of Gaff, from the last section, are somewhat made all the more
potent when you consider the character’s ethnicity. A Mexican-American, cityspeaking
blade runner... a blending of typically ‘foreign’ and ‘American’ cultures. Deckard’s
refusal to take part in this ‘new world’ makes him a relic of a bygone time, looking at it
with aged and calculated (cynical would be the better word) eyes. Not realizing that his
literal perception of the world may be of Eastern design.

The “cityspeak” of Gaff itself points towards a more ‘universal’ language
especially for the slums and urban places of the world, Deckard refuses to understand
him (the narration says otherwise) and even refuses to go with Gaff. A disrespect of
authority or of his ethnicity? The patronising “Sorry pal” in tune with Bryant’s own “pal”.
The way Bryant describes the Replicants as “skin-jobs” too heightens his discrimination
and if any other character in the film, other than Deckard, is ‘American’ then it’s Bryant.

Deckard himself states, in narration[4], that Bryant was the “kind of cop that used
to call Black men, niggers”

The bigotry of Bryant seems futile though, as the Eastern culture now dominates
the very skies and heights of 2019 Los Angeles. No longer is racism seemingly a feeling
of fear, of ‘insecurity’, but actual ‘security’ of one’s past. Deckard seems to carry no
racist or other discriminatory attitudes, although his speaking of Replicants either being
a “benefit or a hazard” denotes them to object status. His early treatment of Rachael too
being brutish combined with his alcoholism and cynicism might punctuate him being
working class America, yet devoid of the racist attitudes that are usually stereotypical of
the class and of Bryant.

The film itself takes a journey of the East and West. We open with an opening
scroll then a weeping image of an apocalyptic-industrial gas spewing wasteland of
factories and the Tyrell mayan pyramid. The whole opening shot just breathes of
oriental. The shaking, foreign feeling as we into this unfamiliar world. I imagine Eastern
viewers of the film will be just as settled as we are. The film then ends with an elevator,
perhaps an image of capitalism or of Western civilisation (consumerist).

Deckard’s journey mirrors this structure too, scarily in fact. He chows down on
noodles, after walking over from the ‘origin’ neon Chinese typography. Deckard’s journey then ends with the elevator too, giving it double meanings. That he is now between worlds, able to go up and down. A journeyer. A blade runner. Skirting the edge of the line between human and Replicant but ultimately accepting his humanity inside this slither between worlds.

Deckard’s journey then is one that the political scene has been taking for some time. The Japanese and Chinese industries are, as I type this, clambering right up the economic pecking order. In our modern world it’s getting increasingly harder to find an item that doesn’t have ‘MADE IN CHINA’ somewhere on it. The eighties themselves is where this breed of fear came from with America recoiling from the Cold War to find a new superpower lurking on the horizon. That Chinese superpower is still lurking on the horizon now, with a GDP of $5.93 Trillion compared to the USA’s $14.59 trillion.[5]

The barrier between these Eastern and Western cultures, the fusion of 2019 Los Angeles, seems based on a light touch of economic circumstances. “Chinese good, Americans bad” graffiti is seen around Chew’s workshop. If the Chinese working class resent the Americans then surely Americans are better off? The ethereal “Helping America into the new world” along with the omnipresent blimp all speak of Chinese dominance, surely? Except perhaps in this “new world”, the Americans have left the Chinese to the whole of Planet Earth and skirted into the skies.

With Taffey’s bar crammed full of the rich folks and the ‘American faces’ of the picture all seemingly more better off than the working class, better than the Chinatown residents yet worse off than Tyrell, there’s something quite abnormal going on. The relationship between the barriers seems skirted with resentment. Yet here we have Deckard, a trouble working class American who seems trapped in an omnipresent oriental dominated world. The film’s politics evokes that of the Orwellian tone that I discussed much earlier in the book [6], paranoia of the totalitarian takeover.

The Chinese are not to blame for this takeover, but probably socio-economic circumstances. While China currently employs a loose “Communist” government, more isolated dictatorship (Stalinist in a way), the takeover of American soil will not be down to war or evasion or destruction but economic circumstances. The “new world” that Blade Runner is built inside has assimilated bits of American culture and consumerism. The billboards and neon-advertisements of Coca Cola; they seem the exact same of the Geisha girl birth bill advertisement. While the culture is certainly a fusion of Eastern and Western powers, it seems the Eastern culture has won this war. Eastern lexicography dominates the neon scenes and the last remnants of America seem trapped in the same paranoid ideology. Specifically, Deckard’s world is crammed full of the Orwellian fears and nightmares.

Deckard is working class America, as already covered, and he is the Western force that drives the narrative to its peak. He is our protagonist, and I feel a Western audience would act more favourably to Deckard than an Eastern one for the quality alone that he is Western orientated. He is independent, he is cold and emotionless. The very space he occupies, his apartment, littered with alcohol and Polaroids of a time gone by. While, from my own studies, I see the Eastern cultures as thriving in their own traditions and pushing the boundaries of technology; I do not see them having high alcoholism rates or lacking emotion. Indeed, the massive cultural output of Japan alone speaks of a people rich in emotion and communal breadth.
If Deckard is indeed the universal ‘working class America’, then Tyrell is surely the elite Asian? Sebastian is below him, with a dingy apartment, but Tyrell’s room is goldly lit and made of gold and holds that golden atmosphere. Yet he is built out of some Western appetites; the capitalist and consumerist ideal of an entrepreneur, a tycoon or a tyrant. Tyrell.

Tyrell being weaved in the ‘elite Asian’ cloth puts us at a nice juxtaposition then, it’s no surprise that Deckard submits so willingly to his orders during the first encounter with Rachael. It’s also no surprise to see him taunt Sebastian with “milk and cookies” not because he’s a bad person, he kind of is a loose secondary antagonist, but because it’s the natural hierarchy of this fusion society.

If Tyrell is elite Asian, Deckard is working class America then the Replicants are... well, actually, they aren’t really anything. Their body and organs American, their eyes and brains Chinese. They are utterly symbolic of this world, built out of both nationalities and yet holding no nationality. They have no home - Pris herself stating “I don’t have one” - and their non-existent racial resentments and phobias and ability to be emotional in a world so cold of emotion paints them, quite brilliantly orchestrated by Scott and company, as truly “more human than human.” They have no nationality, they are within and without this culture of Eastern and Western.

Are these Replicants then the ‘utopian human’?

Suddenly I spring myself the question of whether this is truly a ‘dystopian’ future if they have indeed constructed the utopian human being. Yes, they are incredibly mortal but they are incredibly immortal too. Batty’s speech rests its words almost physically into Deckard, to carry on into forever. His words are more than any human being could ever see, the epitome of science-fiction. Does Ridley Scott then foresee the Eastern/Western bond as an ultimately, and inevitable, optimistic event?

Scott himself says “The populace that inherit the universe will probably be the Chinese.” [7]

This outpouring of the ‘utopian human’ is then ultimately positive, and at the very least inevitable too. Although we may fear this 2019 Los Angeles and its totalitarianism, its Orwellian nightmares and other parts that fill us with hysteria... there’s still a part of us absolutely enchanted by this world. We can’t tear our eyes away; we can’t help but look, because this is so much of the future. A big mess of self-destruction and paranoia, but ultimately human. Deckard’s own acceptance of his love. Batty’s acceptance of his mortality. In the end, humanity wins and so too does the Utopian ideal. Deckard’s own acceptance; Blade Runner being a metaphor for itself.

We’ll discuss just how ‘Utopian’ the Replicants are, along with some Platonic interpretation next section, but for now let me comment that the evidence given by the film paints the Replicants as indeed more human than these future human beings. It’s then rightful that we actually question the nature of Deckard’s residence in either the camp of ‘human’ or ‘Replicant’. Philosophically, it is much more satisfying to paint Deckard as a true blade runner, between the edges, to be one who ultimately accepts his humanity but not necessarily giving away either his biological/synthetic make-up (I do believe him to be Replicant in his very body). Except, really, the Replicants are only Utopian because they are an evolution of the Western and Eastern cultures. The dependence and independence. The industrial and the invisible. The human and the robot. Synthesis.
Scott then paints the Chinese as better leads of the universe than the Americans. Because, at the end of it all, they do what the Americans cannot; create life with meaning. The yuppy culture of the eighties was one absolutely frothing with decadent chills and all manner of hyper-materialistic value. The world of *Blade Runner* shows the dystopia created from the laziness of American culture and the ultimate triumph of Eastern culture in the pursuit of the societal ideal.

The Eastern and Western cultural fusion of *Blade Runner*’s world hits home the underlying political message of Scott. As I’ve mentioned, I believe the film’s creators and writers and its director to be definitely left-wing and the message itself is quite left-wing in tone. The tonal consistency then hits it with greater impact and precision. I would not be surprised to see if this film was released during the fifties’ McCarthyism scare, hypothetically of course, that Scott and company would be called to the stand.

There’s no real message but the message I’ve found is indeed communal. That putting aside our differences leads to a brighter tomorrow and an eventual utopian human being. Whether or not the film portrays the Eastern slice as ultimately dominating and antagonistic is up for interpretation but, personally, I think the true antagonist of *Blade Runner* not to be the Eastern or Western fronts but that totalitarianism. That feeling of paranoia; the omnipresent blimp and the ‘police state’ that is on every street corner. This is indeed an Orwellian piece.

Politically, I feel this message more driven towards the Reagan administration of the United States and (loosely) the Thatcherite government of the United Kingdom of the early eighties. Mostly because it was made by Western residents but, also, because it’s very political content is a stab of criticism, I feel, at these two governments.

We’ll get to that very soon.

NOTES

2. 3.1 The Eye
3. Briefly mentioned in *Dangerous Days*.
4. *Theatrical Version*
5. Source: World Bank
6. Mostly Section One
7. *Final Cut* - Director’s Commentary
THE CAPITALIST MACHINE

Blade Runner’s 2019 Los Angeles is a place where not everything has been abandoned. The film’s ‘retrofitted’ visual pastiche melds itself to a new science-fiction wonderland of neon laced streets and the Chinese stamping their foot across the cultural landscape. What still seems to survive, especially in this newly decadent age, is the capitalist machine. Even as mass poverty, class divides and hopelessness is portrayed and reflected against the machine... it thrives. No greater is the machine’s power found than in the Replicants themselves.

Experiments with genetics, robotics and all kinds of ‘lifecreating’ scientific pursuits all nowadays seem fairly noble. Aside from a few who caught the Skynet scare or those who, on religious grounds, reject the advancement of science, there are still hefty amounts of research and iteration done into such ‘lifecreating’ projects. What is increasingly scary, however, is that these developments are (at some pace) done moreso by private companies than government bodies. This means that they can be sold.

The Tyrell Corporation is the epitome of the ‘lifecreating’ business. Rachael herself questions Deckard on his mission, saying that the issue lies in him not believing the Replicants to be a “Benefit to the public”. This is a statement that both locks the Replicants in as a mere object, item and not an actual life to live. What surprises me even more is the use of the word “public” rather than ‘people’. The “public” in Blade Runner seem, for the most part, docile and ignorant of the gleaming capitalist heights above them. They just want to get by; flooded by giant neon billboards and advertisements doesn’t make for a nice life to ‘get by’ though.

What gets to me, more than anything else, is just how the ‘machine of capitalism’ is absolutely omnipresent. I am talking about the blimp of course. From beginning until the end of Deckard’s journey, its lights and sounds can be heard in the background. I’m not sure if there’s some interpretation about it being the ‘Hindenberg’ or something, but I’m more inclined to call it the very symbol of capitalism. It shouts out the self-same lines of “golden opportunity” “in a golden land of opportunity and adventure” “new world” it just breathes of that eternal literary theme of ‘American dream’. A dream that seems only available to the top of society, the upper class. Once again, capitalism reigns supreme.

The American Dream has been seen from Fitzgerald, Steinbeck to Miller, Morrison and has now taken on new life forms entirely. In the form of video-games, it can be seen weaved throughout the likes of Rockstar Games’ magnum opus Grand Theft Auto IV, with comic books it’s a background theme to Alan Moore’s richly philosophical Watchmen and has been seen strongest in countless films.

Blade Runner’s political stance around the ‘American dream’ is not drenched in the same ‘American’ red, white and blue. It’s instead built around a cultural amalgam that seems to put America on both the bottom and the top. The ‘American dream’ that, for instance, Taffey Lewis has chased for so long now ends his happiness. He simply doesn’t care, there’s no sense of enthusiasm or real enjoyment from his character. He has his bar, he has his piece of Eden already and has lost all purpose. For the likes of
Taffey, with no hope to flee the world, the middle-class dream of property and prosperity (once achieved) seems meaningless in the face of Blade Runner’s world.

The omnipresent blimp’s “Opportunity and adventure.” spits out a great point about this new ‘American dream’. It means escaping America. The ‘American dream’ is now off-world, for America has failed to support itself and instead collapsed into the hands of the Chinese. Indeed, it seems the ‘American dream’ is now dead and a new interstellar dream has now filled the void. Perhaps similar to the dream that Luke Skywalker sees at night, and the daydream he has as he looks out from Tatooine and into the suns in the distance. If there is indeed some truth to the Star Wars ‘dream’ interpretation then Blade Runner, in a sense, is showing that dream as unattainable. For the likes of Luke Skywalker, heroic and strong and young, it is fine but for the likes of Bryant and Taffey and (especially) Sebastian - there is no hope whatsoever - the ‘American dream’ is not for them. They cannot buy themselves to Heaven. Better yet, they were not born into the upper-class and gifted with such social mobility.

Blade Runner takes an almost satirical quip straight at the jaws of the modern day ‘capitalist machine’. One that does indeed speak of “opportunity” and “adventure” but instead results in this overbearing consumerism that doesn’t really give any meaning or value to the human experience, merely just turning our lives into materialist riffs on a blue planet orbiting a giant mass of hydrogen. Life seems meaningless. Blade Runner takes that materialism to another level, satirizing it, and showing birth control advertisements as identical to that of Coca Cola. It’s interesting given the advertisement sponsors of the likes of Cola weave themselves straight into this film but, actually, the film actually calls them out on their actions in the real world as a destructive force of humanity. The advertising, blimps and so on and so forth all build towards building the ‘American dream’ as impossible, but the trinkets and little consumer goods keep the docile populace docile. Deckard, however, seems to float about the classes. His job gives him social mobility he otherwise has, and for this reason he perhaps resents a part of himself. The part of himself to take this job, to question Tyrell and to surf amongst Taffey’s bar (where he indulges in his alcoholism)... to get a whisper, a little snowflake of the ‘American dream’ right on the tip of his tongue.

It’s why he’s so coldly emotional, why he just wants to get out but Bryant throws that “little people” comment at him and he sails back in. Because he knows that, without his blade runner title, he is nothing. He is docile just as the rest of them. He is in some sense content in knowing he can never be within these worlds of upper-class riches and parties but that he can watch them. That he can skirt on the edge and drink a little. Both within and without.

“I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.”

That’s from Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, a book which itself completely revolutionizes the idea of the ‘American dream’ and ties it straight into the human experience. A book which shows its protagonists as rubbing elbows with the ‘capitalist machine’ but yet not a true part of it, both a character and a narrator. Deckard is a lot like the protagonist of The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, especially more so in some of the Theatrical Versions. He narrates the film yet is a character of it, giving the audience some grounds to question his narration and the possible bias behind his words. We
know his opinion of people, but thankfully this isn’t a story being told straight from Deckard’s lips but from Ridley Scott’s eye.

And Scott shows the full face of this ‘capitalist machine’ as, ultimately, destroying. That eventually capitalism will completely erode away mankind’s individualism, that our skies and cities will be populated both by gas but by the neon flurries and that we (ourselves) as human beings will fail to show compassion for when we create life. That we will simply boil it down to whether or not it’s of “benefit to the public.” Our ‘consumerist’ appetites always clouding our vision.

So who is responsible for this ‘capitalist machine’ gone wild?

There are no real political systems or governments or presidents or even dictators in Blade Runner’s world but instead just a conglomerate of corporations and a police state affair. The Tyrell Corporation being the dominating force, it seems, as it produces life itself and bases its very existence around the sole idea of ‘commerce’.

If we come back to Deckard and Rachael’s first meeting, Deckard eventually says that Replicants are either “Benefit of a hazard.” Is there some irony in that? Is Deckard a benefit to humanity? Are blade runners?

Deckard, if he is a Replicant as I well believe, in his saying of this is ultimately ironic. The ‘capitalist machine’ that created his very job clouds his vision to his statement. He doesn’t see humanity in these machines, until the end of the film - when he possibly sees it himself too - with this then he is a ‘benefit’. He does ultimately show to humanity that humans can evolve and be compassionate to the Replicants, that we can change our ways. Isn’t that what we should do? Feel for one another and join hands and sing and dance into the socialist nights?

To the ‘system’, however, Deckard is not a benefit. He is a hazard. Killing Zhora and Pris, letting Leon die and with Batty swallowed up by his longevity he has completed a good portion of his job. He just can’t bring himself to pursue Rachael, instead falling in love with her. This ‘capitalist machine’ would then pursue Deckard soon after he turns his back on them, truly showing just how the ‘capitalist machine’ values love... humanity.

Although the idea of ‘love’ between man and Replicant is explored in a different way throughout the film. As I’ve covered countless times before Deckard only ever directly kills female Replicants in the film. It’s an interesting little tick towards perhaps this either rupturing Deckard’s guilt more than killing the males, or perhaps a different tick altogether. A tick in the direction of the ‘capitalist machine’.

Sean Redmond herself comments that “Deckard kills Zhora as she runs through a crowded shopping mall, the inner Cathedral of Capitalism.”[1] And it’s almost perfect for her to death to take place in such a barbaric and perhaps blasphemous place. Blasphemous to the human condition of course, where materialism takes place over life itself.

Life as an object is explored further throughout the dialogue exchange between Deckard and Rachael in their first meeting. Deckard comments on the owl, with glinting eyes, that it “Must be expensive.” with Rachael replying “Very.” Perhaps as an establishment of power? Money here seems to be worth a lot more than just the paper it’s printed on but an establishment of power and who exactly holds it over whom.

Further still is life exacerbated as an object of worth, with the conversation about Rachael’s fate following Leon’s death. Deckard merely says “It’s part of the business.”
and she replies "I am the business." business. It reminds me of the ‘businesslike’ depiction of John Proctor’s death in The Crucible. Life and death are handled like business exchanges, like facts fed into a ‘capitalist machine’. Money is the price of life, and the Replicants seem disposable like a fridge or something.

Tyrell himself says “Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell.” Not the actual technology. He isn’t building towards a brighter future for the populace but rather an iron grip through economic imperialism. A truly ‘fat cat’ motivate as it were. Nowhere is this more relevant than in today’s political sphere. A world where the ‘Wall Street Government’ has become a newly political term, alongside that of ‘Underclass’. The ‘capitalist machine’ of today seems not that different from the machine of tomorrow, of 2019.

Beyond the monetary value of human life is the issue of weighing up both genders. While I commented earlier about Deckard killing only female Replicants, it’s interesting to notice just how sexism is portrayed in the feature. Deckard uses the disguise of a weirdly flamboyant inspector trying to see if Zhrora is being “Exploited” and Bryant himself comments on her as a “Pleasure model.” I’m not one to argue that this is probably a touch on the wider ‘feminist’ themes of the picture but it seems rather dehumanizing for both parties, doesn’t it? That the men who ‘use’ Zhora aren’t really acting in love but just in primitive love, it’s rather regressive in that way. Zhora herself carries a price-tag too, one absolutely advertised by Taffey Lewis’ bar. The snake around her neck being the “Serpent that once corrupted man.” Perhaps the snake has taken on a new form in the ‘capitalist machine’?

Deckard recognizes this, eventually. After ‘using’ Rachael he becomes entangled with her and eventually shows his back to the system that will now chase him forever. The females of Blade Runner seem, still, however much more exploited than any sector of this society. It’d be worth a look, too, to see if other ‘minorities’ of society are represented in the same light of being chewed by the ‘capitalist machine’. There’s already vague racist undertones, as I’ve previously explored, with Deckard describing Bryant as a cop who is the “kind of cop that used to call Black men, niggers”.

Hearkening back to my chapter on Innocence is this rather interesting little diversion into children being gobbled up by this ‘capitalist machine’. There seems to be no real children in the film, as far as I’ve seen, and birth control seems to have been utterly monetized. It is monetized today, and perhaps Scott is commentng on the absolute extremes, but not to the extent of Blade Runner. Sebastian comments once, however, that his “Friends are toys.” And it really makes me wonder if the ‘toy’, a symbol of the child’s capitalistic desires, have been merged with the Replicant (commercial) desires of the Tyrell Corporation in the form of Sebastian’s toys.

To conclude with: the ‘capitalist machine’ of Blade Runner truly is a politically nasty beast. I can’t think of any instance where money is seen as ‘good’ other than in the very creation of the Replicants themselves, and even then it’s with ulterior motives. The minorities of Blade Runner, especially the females, seem cast away from true representation and regress to an awkward, Victorian state of representation. It seems as if history both folds back in on itself (attitudes) and forward (with technology) truly expressing the ‘future noir’, ‘retrofitted’ art style pastiche that Syd Mead and folks strove to accomplish with the film. The ‘capitalist machine’ destroys humanity and the lack of a political system makes me wonder if one has existed but has been destroyed. The rich
who escape this world find their gold, their 'American dream'... perhaps more 'neo-American dream'? The poor, however, they lose their humanity and become docile and fine with the pervasive nature of society. To finish with, then, a quote from *The Great Gatsby* which perfectly expresses the film.

“One thing’s sure and one thing’s surer, the rich get richer and the poor get-”
Interesting how the ‘final word’ isn’t even needed.

NOTES
1. Sean Redmond, *The Blade Runner Experience*, pg 180
THATCHER AND REAGAN

There’s a special relationship between the USA and the UK. Ever since the 20th Century came out of its cavern, there’s been some kind of love-in between the two nations. I’m a Brit myself so it’s fun seeing our leaders constantly keep up with the American figureheads. I’ve seen Blair with Clinton and Bush, taking British soldiers into war. I’ve seen Brown and Cameron reppin’ it with Obama, but there’s a history to this relationship. It’s been well documented, dissected and written about for many decades. I’m not one to start divulging into some long historical piece myself, although I am a History student, but Blade Runner is probably one of the bravest films of the modern era. It challenges that relationships, shows it rotten right to its fangs. Ridley Scott was a plucky Brit out of his comfort zone, spaced out into a sea of American crew members and working with an American script. It was thankfully a match made in Heaven.

For Scott’s lefty tendencies would be perfectly brought out by a certain Hampton Fancher. The main screenwriter behind the film. They were making political magic in a time when that magic was restricted. At a time when a cowboy was in the White House. Hampton Fancher himself said once “Blade Runner was always meant to be cautionary. For instance, Blade Runner was shot during the dawn of Reaganism. And I was flabbergasted by Ronald Reagan and everything he stood for. So the cruel politics portrayed in the film were my rebuttal, of Reaganism, in a sense.”[1]

It delights me to think just how perfect of a relationship came about this film. A lefty director and a lefty writer, both of whom were placed in the perfect political circumstances. Scott, back home in Ol’ Blighty, now had a Conservative government which prided itself in washing away the ‘stains’ of industrial action, purging the working class, utterly responsible for the ‘yuppie culture’, getting Britain back into economic rampancy through tough shock therapy and trouncing the welfare state into submission. There was a far right political massacre going on back in his own home, and Scott had something personal happen to him. The director has commented many times that Blade Runner is his ‘most personal film’[2]

Scott almost didn’t make Blade Runner. I don’t wish to go into details, the books in the bibliography and Dangerous Days and so many other people have covered it in greater detail than I. Scott’s brother died, just before Scott’s Dune was put on to lift off, and so he wanted to swim straight into directing a film. He came back to this little project that had eyed him for some time. Blade Runner was made and I imagine Ridley Scott shaking hands with Hampton Fancher and finding something remarkable. Himself.

For Hampton too seemed massively alienated by the government of America, now a new man named Ronald Reagan wanted to take everyone straight back into the glory days of almost 1920s ‘rugged individualism’. Right off the heels of the Cold War there was a President wanting to squash industrial action, crush the welfare state and let the masses run wild with the golden idea of the new American dream. Sound familiar? The relationship between Thatcher and Reagan itself has been covered extensively, and in my own studies I haven’t found a Prime Minister/President more compatible than Reagan and Thatcher.
I think a good angle of study to take with Blade Runner is to see just to what extent the film really is political. In my view, it’s intensely political but it could just be so easily argued that it’s hysterical in its politics to the point where it simply can’t be realistically commenting on right-wing Reaganism and Thatcherite politics. Except Ridley and Hampton seemed to have a political fire in their words and there’s a sense of true warning behind the film, that it’s signifying a disastrous result with massive thanks to Reaganism’s ‘individualism’ policies

Judith B Kerman (Editor of Retrofitting Blade Runner) herself argues that “The only government we see consists of cops, advertising and garbage trucks. None of this, in the age of Ronald Reagan, seems improbable.”[3] And it makes me wonder whether or not Kerman is suggesting that Blade Runner is only a product of its time. While I’ll leave the debate about how it relates to a modern context to the next chapter, it’s fun to comment that (here in the UK especially) in a wave of mass public expenditure cuts there is a decrease in the amount of government we are physically seeing. Blade Runner’s world is more akin to a police state than any real government, there’s a real sense of alienation and fear amongst the masses. They’re docile out of fear, not because they choose to be. Although the ‘indoctrination of the masses’ in believing in individualism is definitely furthered by the mass advertising that goes on.

Perhaps Blade Runner’s ‘small government’ commentary is a direct hit at the Reagan administration, intended by Fancher perhaps. Except it seems too obvious a point, showing the extremities of Reaganism and their effects, in the longer-term, on the USA’s position. There’s no fascist dictatorship or puppet government, although that might be implied by the Asian dominance, but there is a sense of fear. Perhaps propagated by the omnipresence of corporate owned blimps and lights, spouting slogans and advertising into the cityscape. The city itself feels under the gloves of some tyrannical corporate machine, now the world doesn’t have a government but it does have order. Privatised, police order. The parking meters, the street lights all built around “DON’T WALK!” and high prices. There’s a real sense of brutality to the film, there’s (ironically) no sense of individualism or it now all belongs to the corporations. Reaganomics seems to be built around rewarding the wealthy, letting the rich get richer and... well it’s actually still well debated by historians just to what extent it damaged the American economy. In short, rich people didn’t exactly suffer under Reagan. Likewise with Thatcher really.

But the well-off, they prospered and the corporate achievement punctuates throughout the film. Advertising, lights, people and tyrants. They own the skies, they own the food and they own the people. There is no government, because a government is meant to govern. There’s just claws of a police state in everyone’s pie and, scarcely, with no children to be seen and the emphasis on birth control... it’s all looking like something out of 1984 without the totalitarian government. In fact, big business is the government here in Blade Runner.

Sean Redmond also says “The autocrat/tyrant Tyrell is not that far removed from Thatcher/Reagan in terms of a desire to control and indoctrinate the masses, and the working classes are not that far removed from those who bought into this ideology.”[4]

Control. Whether or not the film could be seen as an Orwellian parable is a quite interesting discussion point, it warrants some investigation. But the accusation that Thatcher/Reagan wanted control? I think that’s somewhat right. Thatcher, arguably,
only won the Conservative Party leadership out of her husband’s wealth and connections. Tyrell, it seems, has been used to the ‘golden life’ for a long, long time. He still seems quite mystical with his proverbs, presence and his appearance. There is something weirdly deific about Tyrell, a man who can make brains and has a corporation that creates life. He who creates life surely rules it?

The politics of Blade Runner then are not entangled within the Orwellian totalitarian government interpretation, but instead more of a commentary on the extremities of capitalism and the volatile eruption of corporations in large thanks to Reaganomic practices. The monetary philosophy of ‘individualism’ in fact means only for those who could afford it, and eventually those who couldn’t afford it would eventually be put under control by that very pursuit. The pursuit of happiness, something which America was literally founded upon. The politics of Blade Runner are thus scary in every single respect. More to American audiences who take note on just how this dystopia has enveloped, it might as well have a ‘special thanks’ to Ronald himself.

Tyrell and Thatcher/Reagan are both entangled in their resentment of the working class. Tyrell wants nice workers, Thatcher wants to avenge her predecessors and Reagan wants to loosen up his wealthy partners. Their reasoning cross across persons too, but they all seem to have a hatred of industrial action. Any challenge to Tyrell is squashed; even when a detective comes in (Deckard) he simply makes them “indulge” him. Blade Runner then takes the approach that industrial action is impossible in this new world, and that Reaganistic politics has crushed all unions and labour forces and political opposition. What little government we feel is constructed around order and order only.

Blade Runner’s place in the political space is a swift kick to the Reagan and Thatcher governments, displaying their control over the industrial action and wider America as (ultimately) destroying democracy itself. In their bid to preserve democracy, they fundamentally destroy it and leave politics in a state of corporate totalitarianism. Or something like that. Whether or not it’s a swift kick at the ‘capitalist machine’, as raised earlier, is up for interpretation. I do definitely see it as a political film.

Deckard’s place in the film is arguably where we'll find the best point of political discussion. He seems to be a fingertip of the law itself, a blade runner and thus an agent of order, when in reality he ends up betraying the law and escaping into the distance with Rachael by his side. Deckard, in the end, listens to Scott’s chants (and eventually our chants) to betray the totalitarian system and the dystopian future government. The politics have betrayed mankind so we too desire to betray the politics.

Bryant himself says that Deckard is “little people” without the blade runner title, and that badge on his jacket is all that keeps him one foot out of the working class domain. He is definitely working class from his social attitudes, drinking tendencies, work ethic (he seems to get a ‘hard-on’ for cases, according to Gaff’s matchstick origami) and the swagger around his character. He is working class, yet his job makes him rub elbows and question the wider elite. He even comes face to face with one of the rulers of this techno-retro domain, Tyrell himself, and he submits without will towards the “indulge” to which he desires. For Deckard, there is no trade union to represent his rights nor any kind of industrial action he could place himself behind. He is utterly alone.
against the totalitarian finger that pushes him into place, and the distinct theme of loneliness throughout the film absolutely permeates Deckard’s political position.

I don’t see any politics present so Deckard would be without a vote, he would be without a ‘Labour Party’ (here in the United Kingdom) and all political opposition has been washed away. When Thatcher tightened her grip around the industrial action, there were newspapers that (in some, arguably, hysterical fashion) thought they she wouldn’t stop. Indeed, for a good while it seemed the power of a trade union seemed only to supply people with badges and a false sense of being. This has been drastically improved to the situation we have nowadays but, at the time of the eighties, this accusation was thrown at both Thatcher and Reagan. That they were heralding the end of the trade union.

*Blade Runner* is a paranoid depiction of a world without the trade union, without the industrial action and showcases the very heart of one lone individual - Rick Deckard - caught sacrificing his humanity to a glorious regime. The final line of *1984* seems to haunt me right here, but the totalitarianism definition of the Orwellian kind doesn’t fit into the eighties themselves. Ironic that the eighties, a period that Orwell depicted in his book, would actually be hold to pieces of government ‘control’ and ‘order’, and the extremes characterized by a little 1982 film called *Blade Runner*.

Deckard is a relic of the old world, there’s just a feel about his jacket and his memories and his photographs and his apartment that he is old. That he wants out of the blade runner scheme, only coming back in to usurp his pride and unveil his own humanity perhaps as an entire masquerade. To discover true humanity, something which the non-existent political system doesn’t pride.

The advertisements for the ‘order’ of outer space colonies, the “golden land” that the blimp speaks of, seems to be read in the same rhetoric as the corporate ones. In fact, Kerman also says that “Advertisements for the off-world colonies are identical in tone and delivery method to ads for Coca-Cola and drugs.” There is no government then? No real ‘order’ but corporate order. There are no colonies for the greater good of mankind, but greater profit. Thatcher and Reagan are long gone by the time the corporations have taken over the world.

*Blade Runner’s* politics seem magical. For such a troubled production, a tortured director and a script that was made over years and years... the political commentary is still there. There’s still a sting directed straight at the eighties’ political right that want to rewrite the class divides and reinstate the false sense of being. The false ‘American dream’ ripped straight from the twenties, that in pursuit of ‘individualism’ we don’t find it and instead find ourselves purposeless. The revived American dream was something that Thatcher herself attempted to replicate here in Ol’ Blighty, and it mostly backfired. The tackling of industrial action, the control of economics (also orchestrated in America by the Reaganomics actions and plans) all funnelled a political situation that made the masses of the USA and UK just... a little bit... out of democracy. The rising tide of corporate involvement in government, we now have a truly ‘Wall St. Government’ and that title was born in the yuppie culture of the eighties, is scary. It’s still scary to historians to this day and I think what Ridley Scott found when he came over here with a suitcase of talent and clothes and shook the hand of Hampton Fancher... he found magic.
NOTES

1. Hampton Fancher, interviewed in *Future Noir*


3. *Retrofitting Blade Runner* – pg 18

4. *The Blade Runner Experience* – pg185
Today. As I type this, there’s a wealth of surveillance technology and pin-point tracking software currently buzzing outside my house. As I type this, there’s probably someone watching. We have to assume the worst, right? Someone is probably fingerling through my files right now, making sure I’m being a good little citizen. This may sound like anarchist talk but I have faith in the political system, I just don’t have faith in today’s politics.

*Blade Runner*’s world of destructive, rampant capitalism causing a gigantic rift between rich and poor just sounds too close to home. Even further, it looks like no-one is truly happy. Tyrell is a lonely god, Taffey Lewis seems unfulfilled and the middle-class that elbow through his bars all seem, for the moment, complete. I have a feeling, however, that they’re not happy. The poor are not happy either. We see stark poverty in the Chinatown slums, and the omnipresent rain creates a techno-gothic depiction of a near-future Los Angeles. The police spinners, watching overhead, with their brutal powers and omnipresence themselves evokes the sense of a police state. Orwell would be proud.

But, today, we have had probably one of the biggest damages to civil liberty stem from the centrepiece of freedom itself[1]. We have had assaults against freedom from the apparent fighters for freedom, the very halls of politics itself.[2] The scary thing is: they’re winning. Eventually, they’ll win. Bills are springing up everywhere, legislation is slowly being unfolded throughout the world and suddenly I’m sounding like an anti-government, anarchist boy aren’t I? The trouble is, however, is that *Blade Runner* is pretty much the most relevant film for us right now. While *Minority Report* and other modern greats have managed to depict a contemporary stance on the issues that currently face our society. Increased surveillance, increased ‘terrorism protection’ among other issues. Freedom is being rationed out. Suddenly, you can be put in jail for telling a poor joke on Twitter.[3]

*Blade Runner* depicts a stage beyond. When freedom is completely relinquished and we become consumer husks milling about our sterile, neon-blazed lifestyles. The corporations already have a handle on what drives congress and the government should be a government for all the people, not for some of the people. I live in the United Kingdom, so I’m not sure exactly what to expect of my government given they weren’t founded on a constitution literally about ‘independence’ and ‘liberty’. *Blade Runner* does not reference this constitution, it doesn’t even depict a government or public service beyond garbage trucks and police presence. There’s no social care, no healthcare (in the deleted scenes, Deckard does visit Holden in hospital), no unemployment but there’s transport services, there’s police and there’s soul-crushing poverty. The technology wizards of the Tyrell corporation seem to be leading the way in Los Angeles, a city that seems continuously drenched in rain perhaps due to climate change or pollution or just a measure of pathetic fallacy. There is a reason why Ridley chooses to open with the hellish vista of the industrial smoke-spewing landscape.

More importantly, and I do keep repeating this, there is a reason why I chose to write *Tears In Rain*. Not because it’s the most relevant film to our current political, social and economic issues but it’s perhaps even more relevant to myself. Personally, along with everyone else on the planet (I hope), there’s been times of identity crisis and my niche finding (particularly with my writing) has been aided by the raw philosophical power behind *Blade Runner*. I think it’s why it continues to be such a celebrated film to today, because it’s such a massive web of ideas and interpretations and versions all spread out. It’s very protagonist is ambiguous beyond his own story, for there are many versions of this story that involve unicorns and narrations and even fan-edits and fiction.
takes the ambiguity of Deckard’s fate into the realm of the real world. It fringes on reality itself, and I guess it’s something that speaks to everyone.

Furthermore, I believe the celebration of Blade Runner is now about to get a whole lot more heavier. Ridley Scott’s rumblings of a sequel have now changed the entire Blade Runner community landscape and, in fact, I’ve had to rewrite many chapters in light of recent changes. The release of Prometheus has heralded Scott’s return to the science-fiction genre, and while the film has divided audiences (I for one believe it to be the bravest and most honest sci-fi endeavour in years) it has a lasting effect. The watershed moment that was Blade Runner practically created a new generation of filmmakers and cinematic pioneers. The sci-fi genre was now partially reclaimed in the same territory as Metropolis, a science-fiction which displayed Orwellian tastes and textures before the man had even began to ponder his philosophy.

Ridley Scott is not alone, obviously, is pioneering the new genre explosion that lasts to this day but I do believe him to be probably one of the leading men. With Alien and Blade Runner there was now no longer a truly ‘perfect’ vision of the future. The continuity that it projected, from the age of Reaganism, was scary and brutal. It was perhaps a truth that many Americans simply didn’t want to hear. That might explain his critical mess, its box office failure and its bitter release... but it also explains its resurgence. Today, Blade Runner thrives and is now over thirty years old with communities abound and its influences ebbing into the heart of modern filmmaking. Blade Runner’s political, social commentary was ahead of its time and yet of its time. In our post-9/11 world we’re noticing a heightened tension towards terrorism and an increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. George Carlin himself said that the great game of life is “rigged”, and Blade Runner shows the next step. 2019 really isn’t that long away, and I don’t mean 2019 as in the date but I mean the 2019 that Blade Runner depicts. The age of replication, decadence, filth and Asian dominance. China and other Asian economies were brutally hurt by the recession, but compared to the likes of America and the crumbling European Union; Asian dominance is no longer an irrational idea.

It was a fear in the eighties when the Asian market was skyrocketing and companies like Sony and TDK (the logo of which lights the background of Roy Batty’s seminal ‘Tears In Rain’ speech to which this book was spawned from) were establishing a corporate stranglehold over Silicon Valley. Today, even the education systems within Asia are outperforming Western systems[4]. The long, long great status quo of the Western powers and the centralized view of the world built by these powers might be on the tipping edge. With the Presidential election now teetering on the horizon, with the Romney menace now tackling a vulnerable Presidency, there’s now never been more of a time when Blade Runner has been relevant.

Blade Runner shows a government with limited powers, with a police state atmosphere and a tension of a ‘big brother’ system. Blade Runner shows a dying culture, one in which consumer culture has now being barbarized by cannibalistic capitalism. The docile populace seems completely fine with giant advertisements for birth control and to see a world without children, one that appears devoid of the basics of innocence (children, colours and preservation of education), it’s just not pleasant is it? But is it really that far away from our world today? I’ve already highlighted issues of privacy invasion [1][2][3] and Ridley Scott has always been one to showcase people oppressed by a gargantuan, corrupt government. He did choose to do the likes of Gladiator and Robin Hood himself, and with Prometheus revolving around some of the same flavoured ideas (returning to the sci-fi mixture too) it’s worth noting just how Ridley Scott might be making the same political texture over and over. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing because it keeps his messages completely and utterly relevant. I do however believe that Blade Runner is a watershed moment in science-fiction cinema and, furthermore, the absolute pinnacle of Scott’s talent.
Scott has always wanted his films to be, in the purest and simplest way, relevant. *Blade Runner* was a reaction to capitalistic criminality that was emerging of the eighties 'yuppie' culture, *Black Hawk Down* was written as a reaction to the Bush administration and *Prometheus* has tied in to rising fears of corporate control and the pursuit of spirituality. Some of the later messages could all be tied back to *Blade Runner* with it being both a reaction to the Reagan administration and representing fears of corporate control and some mild references to spirituality. Ridley has always wanted to deliver something scary, whether by explicitly showing us monsters with *Alien*, or depicting the near-future as a grim Orwellian grotto with *Blade Runner* or in fact a sterile, corporate controlled expedition to find humanity's origins with *Prometheus*. Whether we like it or not, Scott is there to scare us in one way or another and his films may relate to the modern audience more so than most modern filmmakers' efforts.

In 2012 we also have Baz Luhrmann releasing his new feature; an adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*. Baz isn’t releasing it for kicks, although the advent of 3D technology apparently played into some want to make the film. What I think’s more important is to realize that it’s releasing into the grim stages of the recession that is now five years old. *Gatsby* showcases the upper-class, in fact it only dips its toes below only for a few seconds. It shows a decadent place of people all milling about and its eponymous hero Gatsby is characterised both within the extreme capitalist vein but also with some more humanity than the rest of the characters. There’s some irony in reading some descriptions of the film talking about how “morally bankrupt” the characters are, when in fact bankruptcy is usually a term for when you have nothing. Why did I bring up *Gatsby*? *Blade Runner* is currently being shipped around, as I covered earlier, with Hampton Fancher as a possible writer for a sequel or prequel or something that Scott wants to do. Critics are divided on his return to *Alien*, *Prometheus*, and I’m not sure if anyone would really want to see another film in the universe. Scott already made a watershed film, but to make another one wouldn’t really take away any of that credibility. I’m more than thrilled to see any kind of investment into the universe anyway, whether it be sequel or prequel or sidequel or whatever-quel.

And I think that’s purely the best thing about *Blade Runner*, it’s worth revisiting. It’s worth debating and it’s worth celebrating. It is one of the most powerful pieces of science-fiction cinema and, for a lot of us, some of its moments have touched us and shaped us to who we are today. Its politics are incredibly relevant to today’s issues and events, but I think that an even deeper exploration is needed of *Blade Runner*’s heart. Not just its place in history, but its place in exploring everything. In what sense does *Blade Runner* investigate the philosophical, societal and moral evolution of mankind?

**SOURCES:**

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/jan/02/ndaa-historic-assault-american-liberty
SECTION V: EVOLUTION

*Blade Runner* explores a wide variety of issues that are constantly shifting today. It looks into philosophical considerations of our place in the universe, it looks at our connection to spirituality and to each other and it also particularly explores the value of life. Replicant and human. It’s the very life of the film, and the source of continuous debate for decades.

In this section we’ll look at how *Blade Runner* addresses the evolution of societal problems, moral issues, scientific debate and wider philosophical understanding. This will probably be the heaviest ‘abstract’ section, hence why it will close with a full on investigation of what started this project in the first place.

The society depicted in *Blade Runner* is a confusing mesh between Eastern and Western practices, and in fact some of its more interesting moments are built around exploring the space between spaces. Whether or not Scott wants to explore our difference, or our similarities, is part of his own desire to perhaps explore humanity’s cultural evolution. That itself, I believe, is at the core of *Blade Runner*’s themes and ideas. The evolution of mankind itself.

(5.1) **FEMINISM:** A little investigation into the issues raised around feminism, because so many other critics have covered it better than I have. Is Rachael an empowered individual? Is there such a thing as ‘feminism’ in such a decadent world?

(5.2) **THE NEXT STEP:** The Replicants aren’t exactly depicted as ‘human’ by our standards, but what Scott exploits is a scientific trope of fear: the uncanny. This chapter looks into ‘the next step’ of human evolution, both biological and social. The results may surprise you.

(5.3) **THE MOVEMENT OF BEAUTY:** Is the society of *Blade Runner* obsessed with material wealth or by the very object of beauty? Does it see the superficial ‘beautiful’ as life’s true purpose? Are the Replicants even physically attractive if they’re just machinery?
5.1 FEMINISM

A lot of people have covered this far better than I have. A feminist analysis of *Blade Runner* is quite beyond my writing. Not that I’m not a feminist, I just don’t have the experience nor the wealth of research (and indeed time) to unmask *Blade Runner* under a feminist light. I will however attempt to bring to light some issues of feminism in *Blade Runner*, even if it’s just surface stuff.

From the beginning stirs of the film plot we’re introduced to Bryant as a stereotype of the noir genre. The superior: male, balding and obese. His attitudes should be rich in tradition and his clothes and language tropes all speak literally of the working class. It’s no surprise to find hints of disgust under his voice. He chooses to say “Three male, three female” when describing the Replicants, having the order of precedence alike ‘husband and wife’. Maybe he’s ordering them in terms of power? I’m not sure.

His disgusting moments come in his descriptions of some of the women. He details Zhora as “Beauty and the beast”, that “She’s both.” It seems slightly sexist to consider a woman only by her superficial qualities and her animal qualities together. Isn’t that dehumanising them? That is the basic point of Bryant’s character, someone who doesn’t see the Replicants as human at all. His attitude to extremely dehumanise, however, doesn’t apply itself to richly to men. He even describes Leon as being able “load 400 atomic loads” and Batty as the “leader”. If anything he reinforces the brutal sexism, the biological determinism attitudes. Man is man, he is strong. Woman is woman, she is beautiful. “Beast” is an odd choice of word then. It makes vague reference to a wider, fairytale like scope of the picture but it doesn’t really set camp up at something so abstract. This is not a story for children, although the purpose and protection of innocence is pretty crucial to understanding the female. What is more crucial to understanding the film is the way it deals with prejudice.

Bryant goes on to simply describe Pris as a “Basic pleasure model” and at this point I wonder whether or not he’s simply reading from a Tyrell Corporation directory or using his own language. Is the world he is reading from fundamentally sexist? There are many elements of the society which bill women as lower-class human beings, and it’s almost fitting to find them in the same film as the Replicants. A group of lower-class... human beings? There are issues of equality and prejudice throughout *Blade Runner* and it seems purely intentional. Ridley Scott is a director who popularized the likes of Ripley with *Alien*; a strong heroine. Joss Whedon has recently tried to take the torch with *Firefly* and *Buffy* beefing up the science-fiction/fantasy genres some more. It’s almost delightful to say that, as a sci-fi/fantasy and general nerdery person, these genres are certainly leading the way socially. Action films like *Mission Impossible* and even the Bond movies show the females still as femme fatales. Seductive, hypnotic females who use their pure sexuality as a form of... well the main lead ends up using her anyway.

Does *Blade Runner* have a femme fatale? Rachael has been argued to be simply a leftover of the noir influence, a genre that popularized the 20th Century vision of the femme fatale. Rachael is certainly one of the victims of the picture, with her bleak tragic cry that “I am the business”, in regards to Deckard saying that he won’t hunt her down
but someone will. She still sees herself as part of Tyrell’s circle, referring to the Replicants as “our work” at the start of the film but Tyrell treats her as some kind of experiment “nothing more”. She is valued as a “person” by him at first, but this is merely to play with Deckard’s perception of humanity. Tyrell may, in this interpretation, be laying the seeds for Deckard’s own climactic self-search for humanity. Heading towards tears in rain.

It’s interesting to ponder whether or not the Los Angeles of 2019 is indeed sexist as Deckard is at some points. A brutish, physical hulk who does eventually find love and solace in a Replicant companion. I’ve read many interpretations that Rachael is in fact more empowered than Deckard, she actually kills a male Replicant whereas he never accomplishes this fact. She is also the one to frighten him at the beginning of his journey, and further still she can claim to be somewhat dexterous and hold quite some perspective. Her questioning of “Did you ever take that test yourself?” In regards to the Voight-Kampff test, goes both into questioning Deckard’s humanity and his emotional state; this is straight after his brutal treatment of her.

Speaking of the Voight-Kampff test, this is a test that exists in a larger state of police affairs. I never witness any female police officers or patrollers, and the Voight-Kampff test may lead some inferences to what the wider world’s attitude towards women is. The test towards a woman involves a “Nude photo of a girl” and how “You show it to your human” in order to gain a response. One of the strongest notes of humour comes about Rachael’s retort: “Is this testing whether I’m a Replicant or a lesbian?” But it is a serious question, is it testing whether she’s a robot or a robot? A heterosexual housewife type, an artefact of the noir age, conforming to society’s exact specifications.

Still however, the wider society is surely sexist? There are strippers in the streets in glass tubes, birth control advertisements, nude magazines on display on the streets and I saw no woman in any higher business position. All of the shop owners are male, all the bar owners and male but Rachael is in the upper echelons of Tyrell. Surely that’s a positive thing? Surely that shows that a woman can truly claw her way t- oh wait she’s a Replicant.

Following Rachael’s Voight-Kampff test, Tyrell tells us he’s “impressed”. There’s a sudden urge of female empowerment as Tyrell details that it took more than a “hundred” questions to solve Rachael’s Replicant existence. She is dexterous, emotional too, and indeed the memory implants appear to delay the machine. But these are ‘implants’, and the semantic field of plastic surgery comes to mind. I’ll be exploring superficiality later, but it’s important to see that the use of language such as “upgraded”, “implants” etc. when discussing the Replicants seems to be somewhat of an apt representation of humanity. Constantly engineering and re-engineering itself.

Deckard remarks himself, in absolute irony, “How can it not know what it is?” When referring to Rachael. There are a few meanings behind this. Firstly, the objectification of Rachael is a blatant social step backwards. Secondly, it can’t be a coincidence that Rachael, a woman, appears in a film engineered to show women as second-class citizens. The female Replicants are usually all in the same field of “pleasure model” and the objectification, by Deckard, makes some sense in context. It’s somewhat interesting when you consider that the eighties rage, with Thatcherism on the rise, was still rather traditional in some of its societal heartbeats. Women still did not
earn anywhere near enough what men did, and Ridley Scott (a filmmaker who
popularized the action heroine through Ripley in *Alien*) is certainly making some
decisions when it comes to the women of the picture. I’m not suggesting Ridley is a
feminist, but he certainly appears to have some sympathies.

But my argument does become a lot more interesting when considering another
interpretation. Marleen Barr (writing in *Retrofitting Blade Runner*) writes that “Pris
epitomizes the film’s unconscious sexism. The male filmmaker who creates a city
replete with electric billboards picturing animated sexually enticing female faces, fails to
include male replicant sex partners for the human women in the colonies. And, back on
earth, those electric billboards do not portray sexually enticing men. The male film
maker dreams of electric women, women as manufactured sex objects.”[1] Marleen
Barr’s chapter in *Retrofitting Blade Runner* is the finest piece of sexist deconstruction
I’ve read on the film. What really intrigues me about this interpretation is that it suggests
Ridley, the man who made Ripley, is in fact creating an unconsciously sexist work.
Does this mean Scott is ultimately sexist? Not completely.

I’d actually argue that Ridley is consciously depicting a world full of sexism
mainly towards women, but he doesn’t refuse any insertion of sexism towards the male
either. It could be argued that the pulp noir fiction is a direct satire of the macho-male
culture that was in a dominate position. Deckard is merely a puppet, a template of the
working class to showcase attitudes and actions that revolt us. That really do test our
morality, and when he abuses Rachael it’s not because Scott hates women it’s because
the culture and society has these tendencies to show them as disempowered. The film
using “Basic pleasure model” description for Pris doesn’t make it utterly female
exclusive either. Come to think of it, I scarcely remember any whisper of a gender when
referring to the Replicants anyway? “Three male, three female” is all I can recall.
Perhaps in a bid to dehumanise them further?

I respect Barr’s interpretation, and her chapter is more than worthwhile a read. I
don’t see Scott as sexist, but I do see him as projecting and portraying sexism. The use
of Pris as the main article does spot a blind spot in my own analysis of the film however.

Pris, Zhora, Leon and Batty are all able to harm Deckard. In fact, Deckard’s luck
with Rachael saves him with Leon and the same can be said for Pris. He only ever kills
women, and it could be said that he’s the epitome of misogynist attitudes in some
respect. Pris is able to display her athleticism and try to outmanoeuvre Deckard. She
fails, but Deckard seems to be somewhat saddened. Following Zhora’s death the song
“One More Kiss, Dear” plays. A forties/fifties jazzy song. It reeks of the noir genre with
its tones and lyrics. The women who fight Deckard are incredibly fit, probably more than
Deckard. The only reason Zhora didn’t kill Deckard was because she was ambushed,
and he was barely lucky with Pris.

Just before entering the Bradbury Building, Pris disguises herself as a
mannequin. She becomes a doll, she objectifies herself and conforms to Deckard’s
statement of “it” but once aggressed by Deckard then she is able to destroy him. It’s
interesting to see how she slowly becomes the doll. Make-up, then posture and then
finally showing off her resistance to pain and also her sexuality with her seduction of
Sebastian. Batty actually uses Pris as a pawn to get into the Tyrell Corporation, using
Sebastian’s crush as a means of entering the domain of his father. The use of her
cascades her as even more objectified.
Deckard’s detective repertoire comes into play at various points throughout the film. He at one point uses the Esper to enhance and analyse an image, he uses a snake scale to track a digital paper trail, he abuses Hassan to get information on Taffey’s, he abuses his position of power to get free drinks, he disguises himself, he hunts down (almost like a machine) Replicants and tracks down leads. The disguise portion however is a lot more interesting, because in his disguise (investigating Zhora) he becomes a caring individual.

The high-pitched voice and moments of awkward create some of the film’s only note of humour, Deckard asks Zhora “Have you felt yourself to be exploited in any way?” And suddenly we’re introduced to the rich hypocrisy of Deckard. A man who pretty much objectifies women, physically abuses them and even elbows his way into their dressing rooms. He is disguising himself as a feminist, and through this disguise we don’t see his true colours but someone else’s. It’s in fact him abusing women further, projecting himself as a man capable of some political power, although it’s ludicrous to suggest Zhora believes him for a second (this is the harsh world of Blade Runner). But Deckard goes on to explain the lengths that men will go “To get a glimpse of a beautiful body.” And even how much they’ll want to “watch a lady undress”. The use of ‘lady’ and ‘beautiful’ both objectifies Zhora, peeling some layers off of Deckard’s disguise, but also forges her into a monarchical figure. ‘Lady’, in the context of the violent Zhora, conjures him some images of the literature heroine Lady Macbeth in Macbeth. A figure both revered and critiqued by feminists alike.

But Deckard does eventually warm towards Rachael and all of my commentary on identity and perception does blend into this chapter here. Is Deckard merely a man of disguises? Are these attitudes and working class mannerisms simply implanted? Is he a Replicant? Which Deckard is the real Deckard? The disguise that Deckard takes on, a caring individual, eventually rubs some of its traits on to Deckard. He cares for Rachael by the end, valuing her love and life. His use of “beautiful body” is an attempt to not lose himself in the identity and he achieves this but at a cost.

In seeking out Zhora, Deckard has to detail with Taffey Lewis. A man surrounded by buxom babes and a man who seems... oddly depressed. He seems like a bygone artefact himself in a room full of all ethnicities milling about in their middle-class ways. The booze comes with hair, the smoke clouds the room in a blanket and the entire club reeks of burlesque or exploitative media. The fact that Scott doesn’t actually show Zhora’s sexual performance seems to make us think that Deckard isn’t actually watching it himself, merely turning thoughts around his heard. I read, however, that there was actually an expensive clay animation sequence that was meant to be performed until the last minute so there had to be concessions. I say that it enhances the film, as we get to see Deckard surrounded by crowds of ogle eyed viewers. The introduction of Zhora contains the line about the Snake “that once corrupted man.” But if I recall correctly, Lucifer (in Serpent form) tempted Eve first? It’s like the announcer has bypassed truth in order to showcase man as the centre of all sin in a world where man is indeed presented as still the most sinful.

Deckard’s lusting attitudes peel off the final layers of his disguise as Zhora asks him to clean her. The smirk on his face, the look in his eyes and the shrewd performance of Harrison Ford (a contested Oscar snub) all builds Deckard as a man who does not care. He maybe even gains pleasure from performing a sexually
suggestive action, and in fact he might see his disguise as finally leading him to something he’s been searching for a long time. When Gaff makes the matchstick man with a hard-on in Leon’s hotel room, there’s a spinning of foreshadowing behind the symbolism. Deckard does indeed get a hard-on for the case, but the case does lead him to get his sexual jollies later on.

The film continues to show some swipes towards women’s rights just through the subtle means. When Tyrell and Sebastian battle, then Tyrell says that “Knight takes Queen” putting the male ‘Knight’ in the agent status. He is the one taking the Queen, just as Deckard is the one taking Rachael. The film’s inter-connectedness speaks volumes of the masterful editing but also the masterful commentary behind Ridley Scott’s wondrous yet dystopic depiction of the future. A future in which women have been negated to objects, and where men themselves may be up for auction. There’s some subtle nods to the history of slavery through some of Bryant and Tyrell’s dialogue, and indeed the placement of women as the basis of the “basic pleasure model” highlights the slavery thematic further. Batty even says, about fear, “That’s what it’s like to be a slave.” To Deckard right at the end of the picture. The use of “basic” just shows even the women’s sexuality, the crux of their objectification, as indeed nothing “special” but just standard, ordinary… manufactured.

Batty manufactures some power over Sebastian using Pris’ sexuality. He says that “Pris hasn’t got long to live.” Instead of putting himself into the equation. He knows Sebastian likes Pris, and so he uses her in his ploy. Even the Replicants, the "More human than human", still succumb to the pressures of society. While not a vulnerable character, Pris is shown to have some weakness. In the very first scene she breaks her arm into a van’s glass window. This was actually a mistake by Daryl Hannah, the actress portraying Pris, who slipped and chipped her elbow six times. She appears timid, scared and needs Sebastian’s home because she doesn’t have one herself. She is a female Replicant.

But another character also uses a female as a means of gaining something. Gaff’s final line, embodying some philosophical soul of the entire film, of “It’s too bad she won’t live, but then again who does?” Rests upon using Rachael as a catalyst to spur Deckard on to finally resting his final pieces of his humanity. Gaff is still using Deckard, even if it is for positive means. Arguably, Batty’s pursuit is for positive means too. He wants to live forever, don’t we all? Maybe that’s a question for another time…

Returning to Rachael, however, it’s important to understand that there’s more than meets the eye. In fact, to all of Blade Runner there is more than just a scientific special effects spectacle with ‘wooden’ characters and thoughtless plot, there is a heart. There is literally more to Blade Runner than the eye’s gaze at the beginning of the film. You have to look at what the eye is looking at, we have to embrace that act of watching the watcher. In a sense, Blade Runner is not about its own messages and ideas but the ideas and themes that it can see brought about the future, and this extends itself to feminism. Rachael’s character is arguably a relic of the noir genre, a ‘femme fatale’, but there are other readings to this. Deborah Jermyn (writing in The Blade Runner Experience) writes that “On discovering that she is unaware of her Replicant status, Deckard asks incredulously, ‘How can it not know what it is?’” But we might say the whole film struggles to ‘place’ Rachael, that the text itself does not know what ‘she is’; a
highly eroticised ‘femme fatale’ who in fact reveals herself to be sexually inexperienced and who saves the life of the hero rather than destroy him.”[2]

Deborah goes on to describe how Rachael’s ‘femme fatale’ appearance is merely a façade that is ebbed away through the Voight-Kampff tests and the trials of the film's plot. There’s a trick played by Scott here, that his ‘femme fatale’ is not a ‘femme fatale’ at all but a weak and vulnerable human being. She is taken advantage of by the brute Deckard, but she was never a strong female character to begin with. She was once a seductress, but now she’s a shaking nancy (especially following Leon’s death). Scott may be undermining the entire idea of the ‘femme fatale’, bringing the noir relic up to date with realism. That, underneath the surface, just like the Replicants all of the ‘femme fatales’ have a life and vulnerabilities. Whether or not it expresses them as weak characters, I’d argue they’re more strong for it, or whether they’re expressed as simply human is up to the audience to decide.

The rain on windows and the spitting filth of the urban decay portray a world in which the rotten mould of the city's cracks has managed to spill its teeth into the society itself. Blade Runner ultimately depicts a doomed world in which modern values that we now hold dear have now decayed into… ‘kipple’. The film’s take on feminist pursuits is rich in the eighties societal fumes, and for this reason I think that while the film is more relevant than ever before it was still evidently born out of that era in history. The Western civilisations on the utter cusp of modernity.

I referred to Joss Whedon as one of the modern filmmakers currently trying out some female empowerment. There’s a certain quote from a speech he made that has stuck with me, and I feel it’s perfect in showing just how ‘far’ filmmaking has come. Maybe, even in regards to feminism, Blade Runner is still more relevant than ever?

“Why do you write these strong female characters?”
“Because you’re still asking me that question.”[2]

NOTES
1. Retrofitting Blade Runner, Judith B. Kerman – pg29
2. The Blade Runner Experience, Will Brooker – pg164
THE NEXT STEP

“THE NEXUS 6 REPLICANTS WERE SUPERIOR IN STRENGTH AND AGILITY, AND AT LEAST EQUAL IN INTELLIGENCE, TO THE GENETIC ENGINEERS WHO CREATED THEM.”

The opening crawl of Blade Runner sets the tone for the film’s philosophical incision into humanity. In fact, it reminds me of something that will always stick with me:


Ellie Sattler: Dinosaurs eat man ... woman inherits the earth.

The next step in evolution has been covered by Frankenstein, Metropolis and even Kubrick has had a gander with 2001 A Space Odyssey. Blade Runner stands on the shoulders of giants in the exact same way I do; I’m merely amalgamating decades of academic material around such a seminal film. Blade Runner was a watershed moment in science-fiction cinema, a truly fresh and original idea exhaled into space. The opening crawl introduces the timeless quandary of our very existence, of our very evolution. I believe that if Blade Runner isn’t about feminism, politics, conservatism, Orwellian commentary, perception, superficiality, tragedy and so on and so on... if it’s not any of those ideas then it’s at least about evolution. It has man creating life, it has a tyrant telling us that his company’s very motto is “More human than human.” The next step in human evolution is the centrepiece of Blade Runner’s thematic house of cards. Without it, Blade Runner would not be Blade Runner.

Human evolution, the true biological steps of natural selection, is not covered in Blade Runner. It instead focuses on man creating the next step, of “Robot evolution”, and the Frankenstein parallels are too explicit to miss. Tyrell creates life and that life eventually rebels against its creator in the same way Tyrell destroyed the true creator of all life: God. Batty is merely following the example followed by his “father”, or his “fucker” depending on which version you watch.

The very fact that the death of a Replicant is called “retirement” should serve as some basis as to judging whether or not Replicant life is valued at all in this world. The “retirement” seeks to dehumanise Replicants, in fact it makes it seem like their very sole purpose in life is for labour. To work. It could be Scott taking a swipe at Communism, but I think it’s instead a reinforcement of some of the film’s later discourse “You’ve done a man’s job!” and the praise that Gaff befalls on to Deckard. The ‘job’, the ‘work’... ‘skin-jobs’ is even what Bryant calls the Replicants. They are below Deckard, and yet he is with them too. Either by his existence as a Replicant or by his own slave like nature. He becomes fearful, and even Batty reminds us that it’s “Painful to live in fear, isn’t it?” and the rhetorical question moves on to saying that “That’s what it’s like to be a slave.” Deckard and Batty, in their final confrontation, role reverse from hunter to hunted. Batty, at one point, looks like the next step in evolution. He even plays with Deckard, having him become a slave. The sexual euphemism of “You’re gonna have to get it up... or I’m
gonna have to kill you!” invites some discussion as to whether or not Batty, in his final moments, may have raped Deckard if Deckard had not fled. Instead, however, Batty chooses to accept his ‘creator’, a human being, and lectures him on “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe.” That in such a short lifespan, Batty has lived more than Deckard ever has. The film, in this light, sees the next step as Batty. A man who has lived a fulfilled life.

But the world of Blade Runner doesn’t particularly address the Replicants as the true next step for mankind. The techno-gabble wonderland spins glitzy advertisements all associated with escape, to almost mystical elevation. Judgement day has arrived, and the sinners are left behind. The gamblers, the drunks and the creators of artificial life. Those who rebel against God are eventually punished, and so is the next step of mankind’s evolution stopped by this barricade? I think Ridley takes Blade Runner in a completely different direction. I feel he may have read Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? With a heavy emphasis on ‘Sheep’. The docile populace wanders throughout the rain-drenched streets as the hard-fact based lifeform Deckard hunts down Replicants and discovers the true formula to life. Creating your own memories. The docile populace are constantly reminded of a “Chance to begin again”, and instead Roy Batty’s “fear” and “slave” speeches echo throughout the entire social circumstances of this world. The police-state, the media’s control of the landscape and the destruction of individuality have all created a populace enslaved and in control. Ridley is then taking the future as a direct backwards step for humanity, a regression, and the use of noir tropes helps highlight this fruitful commentary.

The true next step in human evolution comes in the form of “robot evolution”, that in our pursuit of technology we have sacrificed our humanity. But the robots rage on. They live, they prosper and they create their own “emotional responses”. They truly become “More human than human.” And that is the next step surely? When humankind has become a slave-mass to a few rich individuals then there’s more than something wrong. Batty’s revolutionary idea of taking back the power speaks wider volumes of anarchy parallels and other anti-establishment ideas. I don’t know if Scott is an anarchist, but he has covered a small number of enlightened individuals against an oppressive system in most of his works. Robin Hood, Gladiator, Alien (in some respects) and even Prometheus show control over a populace and that populace rebelling in some respect. Batty, in this interpretation, is the true “prodigal son” of the picture. When he makes stigmata in his hand to keep himself alive, there are obvious references straight to the crucifixion of Jesus. The appearance of the Dove and Batty’s salvation of Deckard also show how he is willing to die now. How he will die for humanity, because humanity won’t. Or maybe because he wants to, even when Deckard spits in his face there’s a moment when Deckard could have fallen to his death. To be gone from his depressive, alcoholic and moody nightmare and instead in the warm, peaceful bosom of death. Roy instead forces Deckard to become something. If Roy is the next step in evolution, and he is to die, then he needs someone to carry the torch. He needs to pass the torch, and finally the film’s suggestive themes ties itself back to the beginning of the fiery, industrial belly belching out its fires and gross pollution blasphemies into the sky. Roy is leading a revolution, and now Deckard has to rebel. Gaff’s acceptance of this brotherhood is a confirmation that Deckard now has to become a real hero, a real human being.
Throughout the entire film, the bureaucracy almost shackles Deckard. It invades his space through the use of lights of the spinners, the police query him on what he is doing, even when he’s finished he keeps being pulled in by Bryant even for the “worst one yet”. Deckard grins when he hears Bryant’s name, that Bryant is utterly dependent on the “old blade runner” to fight the odds and restore order.

But the bureaucratic quilt doesn’t stop there. Deckard is made a slave to it, and the omnipresence of Gaff helps reinforce this idea. Deckard is a slave to the system just as much as everybody else, but he chooses not to admit it under his newspaper reading and alcoholic escapades.

But, eventually, Deckard finds that rebellion is the only true way to salvation. In choosing to love Rachael, in choosing to find love in a Replicant (arguably truly more human than human now, given the dehumanised docile populace), he has become Batty. He has gone above humanity and taken on this torch, the nod to the unicorn at the end may not just be an acknowledgement of brotherhood or his Replicant existence but of his question. We’re told that “If you’re not a cop, you’re little people!” and Batty’s final battle with Deckard includes the taunt of “Proud of yourself little man?” In killing Batty’s brethren.

If you’re not tied to the bureaucracy, then you’re a little person. You’re like the rest. But Batty invites Deckard to consider the fact that, even with the gloves of the police state in his hands, he is still a slave to a wider system. He is still a “little man”.

The next step is further covered through the use of the technology language of the world. Deckard asks what happens “If the machine doesn’t work?” On the Nexus Six. Bryant looks worried. The machine does work, even though “It took more than a hundred for Rachael” suggesting that the Replicants are indeed the next step. They are beginning to outpace humanity, and Rachael further probes Deckard about his own emotions later in the film.

“Replicants are like any other machine; they’re either a benefit or a hazard.”

To Deckard, the Replicants are not the next step. They’re machines. A series of binaries and metal-bits all built towards either humanity’s benefit or to humanity’s destruction. All of it is for humanity but it’s odd seeing Deckard say this. This is a man who reads newspapers and ignores the blimps calling him to the new world. Deckard looks like he’d be able to easily pass the medical tests and his ties to the police state should allow him to escape off the planet to the “golden land”. But instead, Deckard seems troubled. He’s looking for a purpose, and Rachael in combination with Batty’s rhetoric invites him to become a rebel. In a way, Deckard is utterly Ridley Scott. The science-fiction status quo created by George Lucas, a man who himself rebelled against the Hollywood system, was rebelled against by Scott. A man who suggested that science-fiction is much more than lasers and mysticism, but about core metaphysical ideas and about the evolution of mankind itself. Blade Runner is the story of Ridley Scott and Blade Runner, a man thrown into action by the death of his brother and wanted to lose himself in action.

I mentioned earlier that Blade Runner is about evolution, and I’ll stick by that. Not about the strict ‘next step’ or the ‘next phase’, the Replicants are apparently defeated by the end of the film. It doesn’t sink its narrative into humanity either, but I think it’s about the evolution. The liminal space between human and the next step, and the careful waters that need to be traded. Christopher Nolan, director of the modern Batman
pictures, has said that “Blade Runner is an interesting lesson on the technique of exploring and describing a universe that doesn't have boundaries.”

It doesn’t have boundaries, but the blur between spaces is what makes Blade Runner the powerhouse film it is. The way it explores human emotion is fresh and unconventional as hell. It's hypnotic in its visual qualities. Even from the KABOOM of the Vangelis opener, we’re swept out of our comforts and into a world beyond and yet uncannily familiar. Ridley Scott managed the impossible: to create a film that goes beyond its boundaries as a piece to be consumed. It’s not bite-sized or cut or easily viewed like any other fodder. Blade Runner requires dedication, thoughtfulness and – yes this sounds incredibly pretentious- intelligence. I can perfectly understand why people don’t appreciate it for its story qualities, but I truly believe the film to be about this core evolution. Blade Runner predicted the cosmic shift of the internet sphere that invited audiences to the discussion table straight from their keyboards. Hoards of fansites and discussion boards and message pieces and ways to dissect the film, view fan-edits and download, upload, re-upload, re-download and (this is getting hysterical) dive into the film have all been created. I read in some younger works on the film that the home video release that revitalised the film allowed fans to watch it several times over, but the DVD release allowed fans to pick the screen apart piece by piece like Deckard does with the Esper machine. It speaks volumes when a film pricks itself straight into the consciousness, and for this quality not only is the “robot evolution” and other entangled philosophical quandaries indeed revolutionary but also the very film itself. Blade Runner was the last big analogue effects film, but it still continues to evolve through discussion, discourse and debate almost daily. With the film's thirtieth anniversary about to come up, with a special release available in America, I really don’t see it culturally peaking. It was asked whether or not in 2006/2007 in the rage of the Final Cut whether Blade Runner was finished with, that it had peaked, but that question had been asked back with the ‘Director’s Cut’ and even back in the home video days. Blade Runner continues to be heavily relevant, and quite frankly I cannot wait for November 2019. The wealth of articles, pieces and published bits centred on the film may reach its climax but its audience continues to grow.

Even in discussing the film with people, I’ve noted how many of them are waiting for the day to show it to their children. People only do that with Star Wars surely? But now tumbling towards the end of this project, now utterly enraptured in the world of Blade Runner, there’s no hope for me. I have joined the next step. To me, Blade Runner is something special. A watershed moment in my emotional development, in my evolution as a human being and in my very memory… and what is life without memory?

NOTES

1. Future Noir - pg392
(5.3) THE MOVEMENT OF BEAUTY

The idea of superficiality is addressed in the opening industrial sweep. The hellish vista of spewing smoke, oil-slicked factories and radiation refineries all belching their guts out to the world. But the eye flickers into view, the omnipresent Orwellian icon delivers the film’s themes of perception and identity in its opening bits. From these moments there triggers a response, although it may be just exclusive to me, of fear. This eye could be watching the hellish vista for now but it appears mystical and confusing in its very existence. It could be watching anyone. I see it as perhaps the eye of Gaff, with ‘gaffe’ tending to mean mistake and the character of Gaff following Deckard through his story. But it could also be the eye of the police state or of Ridley Scott having a prophetic vision of the future, but it’s only a vision right? There’s no watching of people, no voyeuristic quality.

But it is just watching.

Eyes, vision and all kinds of ‘perception’ elements have already been covered in an earlier section[1] but the idea of appearance is something fresh. Scott Bukatman’s *BFI Modern Classics – Blade Runner* opens with a quote from *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald’s American ‘Roaring Twenties’ swift social tragedy. Superficiality was Gatsby’s thematic foundation, and the description of the city and literature elements of tragedy and social commentary have indeed appeared in *Blade Runner* too. It’s tough to find any examples in which ‘beauty’ is shown to be the goal desired by all of the world’s inhabitants, but there are some key pieces of evidence. The ‘geisha girls’ that advertise the birth control pills, amongst other items, appear beautiful and something straight out of a magazine. Pornography can still be found in the neon lights and the magazines on display, even the strippers in glass tubes showcase the pursuit of sexuality. They are above the teeming masses who all look up and stare in perversion and aspiration. The blimp using “golden” to describe the opportunities that await and some the Replicants description all show that *Blade Runner* has something to say about the superficiality of the modern world. Remember, this film was cooked in the infancy of the yuppie culture infection that prized wealth and materialism above anything else.

Bryant classifies Zhora as “beauty and the beast”, Pris as “a basic pleasure model” and praises Leon for being able to load “400 atomic loads a day”. These people, these Replicants, are being accessed on their contribution to society and their appearance. Even the Replicants, the destined ‘next step’, are still trapped in the bubble of superficiality.

Some of Holden’s questioning reveals something about the film and it’s carried further soon by Pris’ “I don’t have a home.” Holden asks Leon whether his hotel room is a “nice place?” And this seems quite ridiculous of a question; it might even be some trace of sarcasm from Holden. He’s just trying to fish for Replicants, and maybe the Replicants just don’t consider things ‘homely’ or ‘nice’ but more functional.

I’ve covered some religious symbolism before, but I feel it’s supported by Batty’s rip on the timeless *America: A Prophecy* poem by William Blake. “Fiery the angels fell…” and Batty’s riff on the ‘angels’ might in fact highlight his own rebel against the ‘angels’. In the same way Tyrell rebelled against God, Batty is willing to insert his rebellion straight into his language. There are massive *Paradise Lost* references as we
see this fallen angel fight against his creator and try to tempt humanity with a new step. Some might say Roy even wins the end that indeed for as much moody pessimism the film portrays it does eventually leave us with an optimistic conclusion. An ambiguous future for Deckard and Rachael, but both of chosen to rebel against the system.

The use of the unicorn in Deckard’s dreams has confused and divided a lot of folks. Personally, I think it’s a play on “beauty and the beast”. The horse, a symbol of beauty, with a horn of a beast. Deckard is also caught between these two realities, and although there exists no boundaries there are indeed blurred. Deckard’s very job as a ‘blade runner’ is him living life on the edge, and his character is a reflection of this. His entire arc is built out of his realization. Whatever he actually realizes, however, is up to the audience.

I’ve read several times about Ridley Scott forcing lipstick on to Sean Young, wanting her to be more and more beautiful. He wanted a young, beautiful woman to portray Rachael and in fact wanted someone fresh. The youthful, gutsy confidence of a femme fatale that fades into a misery-fuelled husk could be perfectly captured through projecting her against the likes of Harrison Ford. A muscled, experienced actor who infamously avoided Young on set and took an apparent dislike to her. This brutish force towards a beautiful “it” (Deckard’s words, not Harrison’s) created one of the most memorable characters in cinematic history. The movement of ‘beauty’ from strength to vulnerability, in tune with the movement of Rachael from a femme fatale to a vulnerable Replicant, is interesting. It parallels Deckard’s own movement of heroism in that he chooses to use his skills to rebel rather than to conform. In fact, characteristics all seem to appear differently when the actions of the plot take place. Leon’s rapid violence takes form as revenge after Zhora’s death, Sebastian is tricked by his own kindness but more interestingly Pris’ own beauty is the death of her. She becomes a mannequin, a doll, displaying herself as an attractive being. She even stops from killing Deckard to show off her athleticism, allowing the blade runner to get a lucky kill.

There are some heavy religious ties with Zhora’s themes, given her association with the snake. It’s interesting that the film spends the time to show her getting undressed, shying away from Deckard’s own point of view. She sheds her sequin layer in the shower in the same way a Snake shed its skin, and we’re told that “the snake that once corrupted man!” is part of her show. Zhora, in becoming a snake-like figure, tempts Deckard with sensual pleasure. She succeeds too and almost kills him, but again luck aids Deckard and he is ultimately able to ‘retire’ her in capitalism’s cathedral; the mall.

Sebastian says that the Replicants are simply “perfect” and even Tyrell tells Roy that “You’re quite a prize.” There’s a moment of brief incest when creation kisses creator, but again the Replicant rebels against this labelling. He chooses not to accept the superficiality, but again rebel. Whether or not due to some intellectual position or tendency to rebel anyway is up to interpretation. Roy has certainly lived a longer life than the likes of Deckard, even with such a short life span. Some critics even suggest that making Deckard a Replicant takes some credibility away from Roy’s final speech, that he has lived so long in such a short amount of time. Deckard as a human reflected against Roy’s short yet ‘bright’ life span shows us Blade Runner’s ultimate idea. The immortal carpe diem, now popularized by teenagers everywhere by the shortened acronym ‘YOLO’. You only live once. Seize the day.
By the end of the film, Deckard has confirmed the rebellion. Batty’s revolt against the superficial becomes Deckard’s own purpose in life. Now he considers Rachael not in his brutish, sexual primate vein but instead valued as a human being. In short, Batty has allowed Deckard to become human and (by extension) perhaps the audience recognizes this too. *Blade Runner* shows disguises, deception, superficiality and obsession with appearance… even a faint element of voyeurism with the episode involving Zhora. The film is utterly obsessed not just with perception, with ‘the eye’, but also what it sees. The surface level, nothing more.

NOTES

1. [3.1] The Eye
CONCLUSION

When I took on this project nearly two years ago I had an idea of the mammoth task I was taking on. I was sixteen years old. A dumb, pseudo-intellectual, ambitious writer and well not much has changed. I still remember my first viewing of *Blade Runner*. I watched it on an online catch-up TV service, the BBC iPlayer to be exact, and it seems almost blasphemous in retrospect. The beauty of the film was all dispensed by a 2MB connection to a fuzzy computer screen, and for a moment I realize that I may have felt some cosmic relation to cinema-goers back in 1982. That I was there in the velvet seats watching Nolan, Fincher, Del Toro and the legions of fans who would pile in several times that week. For decades, this film has been a floating mass inside their brains and tickled into their film works but the fans… the fans who work 9 to 5 everyday, who have wives and husbands and children to come home to, the fans who work and toil and go out and watch films and read and eat and talk. The ‘docile populace’ waiting to be bladerunnered. If *Blade Runner* managed to make me write a book about it, then what has it done to humanity as a whole? Was it a philanthropic effort?

The massive community that has built itself around *Blade Runner* has to be admired. *Blade Runner*’s cult status has allowed itself to be flown into the cultural consciousness, skimming across it with subtle bits sticking into its whole. *Star Wars* exists in our collective consciousness, *Blade Runner* exists underneath that. It’s layered in the same way that Scott’s aesthetics are in the actual film. This film that had a troubled production, an artistic overhaul, a box office failure, a ‘Director’s Cut’ all finally came to fruition as being recognized as the watershed moment in science-fiction cinema that it truly is. That’s literally only because of the fans. I fully expect (and a hello!) for this book to be picked apart by a small legion of them, probably heavily criticised for my stances on some of its issues, but I do hope to become a part in *Blade Runner*’s longevity. Even if it’s just a pale blue dot on the horizon, it would be an honour to be a part of its history.

When I took on this project I knew full well that that it had been covered ad nauseum. This was a film which had touched so many people and that had revolutionized so many folks thinking and snowballed into the cultural smash that it deserves to be. If it wasn’t for the fans, I would not be writing these words right now. But *Blade Runner* has been covered by academics, film journalists, film historians, cultural researchers, film scholars, documenters and has been picked apart by a large mass of fans. What I wanted to do was amalgamate all of this, to consider my own interpretations in light of the theories and thoughts that I came across in my reading. I wanted to create an accessibly academic work, more of a fan’s labour than an academic dissection, and I think I’ve done that. For a film that’s been covered in a myriad of ways, I think there’s still plenty to be said. This was also the first work, to my knowledge, that used *The Final Cut* as a basis of discussion too.

There’s still a lot to be said. I would never be capable of delivering a pure detailed account of its production, that’s been covered extensively by Paul M Sammon in the brilliant *Future Noir – The Making of Blade Runner* (all books and materials detailed in the bibliography). I’m also not one to apply a true cinematographic eye to the
picture; I simply borrowed from my reading. But I will admit, even from a story and context standpoint there is still a wealth of issues to be investigated. Social issues such as the film’s presentation of races, the psychological aspect, its untouched philosophical pieces and its other genre tropes (besides tragedy and science-fiction) all deserved to be covered. Perhaps material for a sequel to this book? I’ll let you be the one to decide.

I’ll be releasing on the thirtieth anniversary but I’m not sure if you’ll be lucky to join me in the incredible celebration. You’re probably reading this a bit into the future, though hopefully not November 2019. With a sequel now confirmed by Scott, with a female lead too, the future still looks bright for Blade Runner. It’s a cult film that has garnered a mainstream reputation, and for someone who just spent two years with the film it’s quite touching. My thoughts have become the thoughts of the film, I’ve got the script inside my head, I’ve got pieces of production trivia at my fingertips and I even let quotes spit into my writing. The philosophical discoveries, emotional evolutions and thematic touchstones have blended into my true passion of writing. In short, Blade Runner has made me a better person and this book was an effort to repay that debt. I sit here now in my bed with looming, rain-soaked clouds read to spill their looming guts any second now. It’s perfect. Ridley’s 2019 has come early.

This book has been a pleasure and a privilege to write. Whether or not you found any piece of it interesting or took anything away would be fun, but if you’ve taken the high task of wading through my writing style and grammar issues then you’re already a hero in my books. I’d like to finish on the note of thanks to Ridley Scott for delivering a film that changed my life, and a thanks especially to you for reading this if you’ve got this far.

And on that note, I would love to finish with a short extract from Philip K. Dick in a letter written to Jeff Walker following his December 1981 screening of the film’s first twenty minutes. You can find the full version online at philipkdick.com.

“Let me sum it up this way... I did not know that a work of mine could be escalated into such stunning dimensions. My life and creative work are justified and completely by Blade Runner. Thank you... it will prove invincible.

Cordially,
Philip K Dick”


**Films:**

*Jurassic Park, A New Hope, The Empire Strikes Back, Return of the Jedi, Tarantino’s Filmography, Christopher Nolan’s Filmography, Ridley Scott’s Filmography, Metropolis, The Thing, E.T, Star Trek II.*

Obviously all versions of *Blade Runner.*

**Other works**

THANKS & INSPIRATIONS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathan Hardisty is a late teen-something currently studying a few things and trying not to mess everything up. Also he likes to write in meta-commentary, claims he loves archery when he doesn’t even know what a “longbow” actually is and takes part in NaNoWriMo by writing pathetic prose. He’s trying to write a five-volume series about video-games without killing himself, so far proving successful. He’s written for Platform Nation, Screenjabber, Destructoid (featured community piece), The Gamer Studio amongst some little others and is currently trying not to get into film journalism but it looks like it’s going to happen. That’ll be fun.

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