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Dreams of Postmodernism and Thoughts of Mortality: A Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective of *Blade Runner*

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Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* opened twenty-five years ago to scornful critics and a disappointed public confronted by a moody, violent and densely layered science fiction film governed by existential themes and Marxist tendencies. Most journalistic critics found the film's tone aloof, its themes remote and its story too stark to digest. Although the film was valorised for its bold and rich production design and was praised as the cinematic phenomenon of technological artistry, *Blade Runner* was largely condemned and discarded as a curious and expensive debacle – full of powerful images yet plagued by inert intellectual rewards. Diverse American critics such as Pauline Kael and Stanley Kauffmann complained that the hero's humanism lacked depth and verve, and that the story is clouded by confusing themes. Scott, they said, was far too interested in developing style rather than content, more interested in detailing his sets than developing his script. These views were (and are) unsatisfying.

Academic and independent critics, however, were more patient in their efforts, more meditative in their appraisals. [\(1\)](#) Over the years, they have created a richly sedimented body of criticism that has settled beneath the flotsam of journalistic reviews. Unlike any other effort in recent cinematic history, the critical recovery of *Blade Runner* has been a long and intense affair. This recovery began unofficially with Michael Dempsey's literate and sensitive critique in *Film Quarterly* in 1982. He greeted Scott's film with a qualified ambivalence but was enthusiastic about the film's powerful visual motifs. A few years later, David Desser (1985) tied *Blade Runner* to its literary inheritance, while Susan Doll and Greg Faller (1986) explained why movie reviewers mishandled this work of *avant-garde* cinema. By the late 1980s and early '90s, the movement to taxonomize this film still remained strong.

Critics from diverse disciplines committed themselves to discussing the film's many themes. Judith B. Kerman's *Retrofitting Blade Runner* (1991) collected an outpouring of interpretations that broadened and expanded how academics saw *Blade Runner* from their own disciplinary spheres. In "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*", Guiliana Bruno (1993) applied Fredric Jameson's theory of pastiche to explain *Blade Runner*'s postmodernist vision. M. Keith Booker (1994) included *Blade Runner* in the canon of dystopian literature, while Scott Bukatman (1993, 97) and Paul M. Sammon (1996, 99) explained in separate accounts the contemporary artistic influences on the film's meticulously detailed production design. Two years ago, Will Brooker's *The Blade Runner Experience* (2005) focused its critical light on the objects created in the penumbras of the film, such as games, varying DVD versions of the film, a bookish sequel and academic criticism. [\(2\)](#)

Of course, not all of these appraisals were positive; however, the majority of these critics encouraged their readers to re-view and reinterpret the film's many ideas. These interpretive acts moved the discussion of the film to smaller, discourse-specific audiences and asked them to examine the critical disputes over the film's thematic meanings. In this sense, academics have kept the discussion of the film open. This recursive act (regarding one film) is at odds with the normative practices of journalistic movie reviewers, but academics, with some exceptions, have not been overtly privileging their interpretations and practices over their journalistic counterparts. Rather, academics have been engaging this film in true rhetorical fashion by interpreting and arguing about this film to specific audiences in different contexts at particular times.

Because so much has been written about this film, the prospects of any work promising a fresh interpretation may seem unpromising, so any new essay that analyses this film must selectively take stock of existing scholarship in order to forge new interpretive paths. For instance, critics have touched briefly on the themes of spatiality and temporality, and of time's relationship to being. Yet most critics have used these terms within a broad theoretical sphere without explicitly framing their discussion within the Heideggerian and Nietzschean views related to freedom, political power and existence. In addition, although others have written with insight into the film's use of memories by focusing on the *mythogenic* powers of imagery, this essay examines the film's assertions regarding the psychodynamic connections between the *mnemonic* orientation and cognitive abilities of certain characters, a focus that could help explain further the film's use of memories. My hope is that this retrospective will help readers comprehend the great extent to which critics have tried to come to terms with *Blade Runner*'s thematic expression of imperialism and neo-colonialism, technology and classism, spatiality in relation to temporality, and the ethics of personal heroism.

A Synopsis



After twenty-five years, many articles and repeated television showings, a synopsis of the film may seem unnecessary. But a brief account may help new viewers interested in joining the *Burkean Parlor* dedicated to understanding the film's artistic significance. *Blade Runner* opens with an extreme close-up of an eye and an expansive shot of fiery industrial smokestacks illuminating the nocturnal sky and polluting the heavy air. As others have noted, this juxtaposition establishes a frame of reference that governs the film's many themes, a reference that fluctuates between blindness and sight, uncertainty and actuality, obscurity and illumination. The story is told on a physical and symbolic level, creating a world where fiction is established as real and where reality is presented in a series of violent and nightmarish acts. Here, a deeply flawed yet decent ex-police officer cum executioner, Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), is coerced back into service to hunt and terminate four fugitive replicants. These humanoids were manufactured as slave labour to help humans colonize space, and a handful of these replicants have escaped to earth to confront their makers. As Deckard tracks these fugitives (accompanied, in the original theatrical version, by a Chandlerian voice-over), they search for answers about their creation. As the film explains, replicants were engineered with explicit termination dates – a four-year life span – and their time is lapsing. Although they were created by humans to resemble humans and imitate human behaviour, replicants are treated as aliens, slaves who cannot participate in the civic affairs of human society. Led by Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), their existential quest is presented as a search for greater personal freedoms, but their efforts lead to a series of unsatisfactory confrontations with their makers. When Batty finally confronts their patriarch, Dr. Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel), his request for “more life” is rebuked sharply by Tyrell as a genetic impossibility. Batty treats his human-maker, his god, Tyrell, as an antagonist and murders him by dramatically crushing his skull with his bare hands.

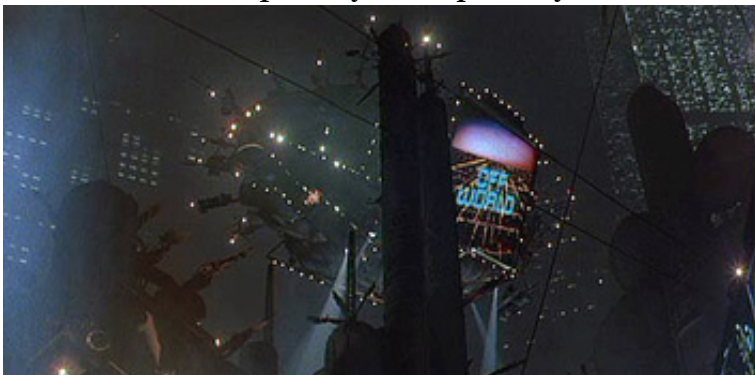
In the film's existential framework, the ethical dimensions in which the characters live are quite narrow. Characters are forced into accepting their social roles either by genetic design, the dictums of commerce, or pressure from the police state. The ex-policeman Deckard is shown as a deeply troubled man of practical wisdom. At first, he refuses to track down these replicants, but the threats of his autocratic ex-boss force him to take the assignment. His choice to be an executioner rather than a

victim, however, still puts him in harm's way. As he chases these fugitives, he faces numerous physical challenges: he is beaten, battered, and nearly killed. After three replicants are retired and, after Tyrell is murdered, Batty confronts Deckard in the stalwart yet decaying Bradbury Building. This confrontation leads to Deckard's defeat. However, as Deckard is about to fall to his death, Batty spares his life. This redemptive act gives Deckard a new perspective toward these machines and insight into himself. With his new vision, he decides to flee the city with Rachael, a special replicant who had saved his life and with whom he has fallen in love.

An Existential Search, a Marxist Critique

As others have noted, *Blade Runner* lacks the explicit features of a conventional detective mystery. Although there is no murder for Deckard to solve, his pursuits are rooted deeply within an existential revolt against the social conditions under which the characters live. The replicants return to earth seeking answers regarding their creation. Their quest is framed by a Marxist critique of capitalism as a provider of prosperity and social order. This thematic juxtaposition creates interesting character contrasts. For instance, although Deckard has spiralled into an emotional stasis, Batty is zealously bent on freeing himself from his genetically predetermined servitude. His impassioned search to extend his life is contrasted not only with Deckard's own struggles, but with Rachael's desire to come out of her blindness. Though they never meet, Batty and Rachael (Sean Young) become spiritual counterparts. He is a hardened soldier who seeks to escape his slavery; she is a poised yet vulnerable experimental model who had been deceived by Tyrell into believing she was human. These comparisons help *Blade Runner* delve into the issues of alienation and individual freedom so that we may critically explore a civic world in which freedom has been forfeited by a political system that exploits both humans and humanoids. In this economy, replicants are disposable materials, and their condition explains Batty's mindfulness of his impending death and his relentless search for solutions to extend his life. Deckard's social position, however, is only slightly better; the threats by Captain Bryant (M. Emmett Walsh) reveal Deckard's subordinate status; he faces execution if he does not execute these replicants. Here, the politics of economics and science dominate, and, in this symbolic and physical universe, commerce and science have evolved into a hegemony that trades freedom for slavery because these characters are prevented from comprehending reality and are forbidden from seeking independence. In this moral climate, the Protogorean paradigm of man is the measure of all things is conceived as a Nietzschean power struggle between the master morality of humans and the slave morality of the replicants.

The Norm of Temporality and Spatiality



These ethical dilemmas play out within a broadly defined postmodern environment. Plenty has been written about the mesmerizing art and production design created by David Snyder and Laurence G. Paull. (3) The city's architecture is a confluence of high-tech and ambient skyscrapers juxtaposed with (as Kael and others have noted) the ancient neo-Mayan designs of the Tyrell Corporation's building. Initially, these contrasts may seem like capricious juxtapositions that exist as part of an aleatoric postmodern system that favours randomness and chance, but scrutiny reveals that the mix of ancient, contemporary and futuristic designs not only imposes a sense of hierarchy and majesty, but creates a synthetic environment that links the past, present and future. This particular postmodern vision not only represents a symbolic culture composed of and strengthened by diversity but also helps develop the thematic issues of temporality and spatiality. Scott wants us to think about the interaction between character and environment, so he focuses on towering skyscrapers, floating vehicles and blimps to illustrate how a highly commercialised society exploits space. But the agents of capitalism aren't alone in controlling the skies: the police hover in the air, monitoring the streets from above.

When we examine this symbolic culture more closely, we begin to understand that Scott's visual thesis is not just interested in the issues of spatiality but examines how capitalism helps govern a large, multiethnic population. *Blade Runner* illustrates how a highly alienating commercial culture exploits and victimizes its inhabitants. The city beneath the monolithic Tyrell Corporation is a highly decentered space saturated by kitschy Coke commercials and aural appeals to live and work in outer space (emitted from a blimp, no less). This commercial culture assaults its inhabitants to the point where people have become desensitised, and in the midst of this kind of loud and trashy commercialism is a strange nostalgia for old clothing and old music. Working within this postmodern pastiche is the Marxist concept of *commodity fetishism*.

In Marx's perspective, capitalist economies tend to measure human value in terms of their productivity. Marx further argues that workers often transpose their value to the very products they make. Here, it's quite clear that different people have had a hand in creating these machines. For instance, Hannibal Chew (James Hong) claims to have made Batty's eyes, and J. F. Sebastian (William Sanderson) states that he helped create Batty. But, according to the film, this kind of production has blinded these characters to the overall value of these humanoids because these labourers have transposed their own value to only the parts they have made. Because of this circumstance, Chew and (to some extent) Sebastian are incapable of seeing these replicants as more than the sum of their labours. This kind of blindness is at the very root of their own social alienation and the basis of the exploitation of the replicants.

Although humanity's role in the colonization of outer space is not clearly explained, we understand that man's ambition has carried him beyond the spheres of earth. In this spatial leap to implement a vaguely defined interstellar manifest destiny, man has become the master; replicants, the slaves. As the film explains, these new frontiers and markets have relied on slave labour to help create those spaces. These political circumstances advance Scott's existential concerns regarding the condition of freedom for replicants who exist *in themselves* for humans, but who, ultimately, wish to exist *for themselves* as autonomous, free subjects.

The film develops the issue of spatiality in other thematic ways. For instance, the

metropolis is busy with people, and the interior of people's homes is filled with heirlooms, toys and other objects. Kauffmann pointed out the irony that

the streets are choking; even apartments, except for one tycoon's residence, are cluttered, as if people feel uneasy with roominess. The Space Age has brought, in personal reaction, an aversion to space. (4)

Scott's juxtaposition of space and time introduces the thematic relationship between *spatiality* and *temporality* and how this relationship influences the consciousness and the actions of the characters. Wide space does characterize Tyrell's office especially in the scene in which Deckard interrogates Rachael. In their initial meeting, Deckard and Rachael are far apart – even in binary positions as interrogator and replicant – but their pairing forces us to consider other probabilities for their relationship especially because he does not capture or kill her.

After Rachael returns to Deckard's apartment, Scott lingers on familial objects, such as old pictures on a piano. This *mise en scène* suggests Deckard's heritage as well as his isolation. This motif carries over into the numerous toys and robots (simple companions to fill a lonely man's life) that inhabit Sebastian's place until Batty, Leon Kowalski (Brion James) and Pris (Daryl Hannah) occupy his house. The relationship between space and time is crystallized in the character of Sebastian, a young man who suffers from an incurable disease that ages his body. And man's relationship with time is dramatically heightened in various other ways. More pressingly, lack of time and thoughts of mortality are what drive Batty to seek Tyrell. Time, again, is brought up when Deckard surmises that Gaff (Edward James Olmos) spared Rachael's life because of her four-year life span (Gaff is wrong, we are told), and Deckard references love and time in the film's closing scene when he escapes with Rachael. These character distinctions, among others, help us construe that thoughts of spatiality and, especially, temporality not only occupy the *anima* of these characters but play a large part in their actions. For Batty, in particular, time is the primary object of interrogation because time governs *Dasein*. All of these traits suggest the Heideggerian notion that humans can move through and control space but cannot govern or influence time. Although Batty struggles against the social determinism that has governed his creation, he concedes as he is dying that he is controlled by a temporal order and must take his place in the succession of time as a mortal artefact.

The Ethics of Personal Heroism: Agent as Subject, Object



History teaches us that fascist cultures favour binaries over pluralities. Deckard's

moral choice to be a killer rather than a victim is but one example among many of how these characters are caught between extreme positions. His dilemma is that he either faces his own execution or be killed pursuing these fugitives. Deckard's protagonism is based not so much on classical definitions of valour but on his struggle for survival. Under these circumstances, the film portrays Deckard in varying states of agency and passivity. His agency is revealed in his physical actions: his investigation, interrogations, executions and his eventual rescue of Rachael.

As we follow Deckard, we also follow the objects of his search: Leon, Pris and Batty. Their status as commercial objects establishes them as slaves. However, their acts of resistance transform them from objects to subjects. Because of their afflictions, they seek their makers to discover a cure, but as they meet their makers (and dislike the answers they receive), they kill them – Chew, Sebastian and Tyrrell. Clearly, their sense of self is defined by their intensive and combative relationships with the state and their corporate agents. However, *Blade Runner* asks the question: how does one escape these binaries? How does one transcend social determinism? The film argues that transformation involves personal redemption, and redemption lies in not eliminating your enemies but altering them by acts of mercy and, perhaps, developing an empathic understanding for them. For instance, Deckard's transformation from an executioner to the moral agent who rescues Rachael occurs because of two remarkable and unexpected acts of empathy: Batty spares Deckard's life and Gaff spares Rachael's. Although Batty spends the majority of the film trying to find answers to extend his life, he realizes by the film's end that the future is closed to him and that he cannot live beyond his purpose. Although he has murdered many people, Batty redeems himself by accepting his mortality and by sparing his executioner; at the moment he saves Deckard, perhaps for the first time in the film, Batty sees a world that exists outside of his own needs.

Scott dramatically heightens Batty's dilemma by synthesizing Christian symbolism with varying existential themes. A modern audience might admire Batty's will to flee the confinements of slavery and perhaps sympathize with his existential struggle to live. Initially, however, his desire to live is subsumed by his desire for power to extend his life. Why? In Heidegger's view, because death inevitably limits the number of choices we have, freedom is earned by properly concentrating on death. Thoughts of mortality give us a motive for taking life seriously. Batty's status as a slave identifies him as an object, but his *will to power* casts him as an agent and subject in the Nietzschean sense. His physical and psychological courage to rebel is developed as an ethical principle in which he revolts against a social order that has conspired against him at the genetic, cultural and political levels. In Heidegger's view, Batty's willingness to defy social conformity allows for him to authentically pursue the meaning of his existence beyond his programming as a soldier. Confronting his makers becomes part of his quest, but killing them marks his failure to transcend his own nature.

After locating Tyrell, Batty stands before his creator and proceeds to ask him questions, questions for which there are no satisfactory answers. Then, he uses his status to make demands, demands for which there are no acceptable compromises. Finally, after understanding that he has no ability to transcend his material existence, Batty – in a shocking scene – violently kills Tyrell, piercing Tyrell's eyes with his thumbs and crushing his skull. By killing his master, Batty evolves from the

slave to the slayer, but this act of savagery only signifies that his world is closing and that, at a materialistic level, he has failed to transcend his limitations. But in his final scene, with his hand pierced by a rusty nail and after chasing Deckard, Batty realizes that he is consigned to dwell in this failure. But as he watches Deckard struggle for his life, Batty decides to spare Deckard in one final act of mercy. Then, he humbly recounts and illustrates some brief “moments” from his life, imagistic references to his life as a slave and his experiences in space. We assume, of course, that these memories are real. As Batty accepts his deliverance through death, he releases a Dove, an act that symbolizes his transcendence.

With his life spared, Deckard gains further insight to the moral condition of these slaves, an insight that transports him from his isolation to his communion with Rachael. Initially, the film treats the natural and artificial as contraries, but the film moves beyond this binary by having the human Deckard escape this environment with Rachael. We are told early on that Rachael is special, an enhanced model not constrained by a four-year life span. Although all replicants are self-reflective (they know what they are), Rachael initially is not. Programmed to believe she is human, Rachael emerges from her blindness with Deckard’s help by accepting her less than human essence. Although Deckard’s growing concern and loyalty to her re-energizes his passion for life, their relationship illustrates the interrelation of the natural and artificial.

Natural and Artificial: *Ars Memorativa*



This relationship between the natural and artificial is carried into the film’s use of memories. (5) When replicants were initially constructed, they could not associate their present experiences with any other temporal or experiential context. Consequently, replicants would fall into deep psychosis, unable to manage the simultaneous creation of thought and memory. As Tyrell explains, artificial memories were then given to replicants to “cushion” their responses – to regulate and control them. Despite the artificiality of these memories, replicants grew to depend on them, learn from them, need them. Artificial memories allowed them to grow feelings and develop an inner life.

Both Marleen Barr and Gloria Pastorino have explained the relationship between

mythogeny and identity development. Here, I add another thematic purpose for the use memories beyond its status as a reservoir of myth. The cognitive capacity of each of the main characters is influenced directly by their *mnemonic* orientation. In Rachael's case, her memories are actual human memories (from Tyrell's niece). When Deckard applies the Voight-Kampff test, Rachael is able to parry and thrust with the skilled investigator, and her answers provide abstract insights into family and culture. In many ways, Rachael's advanced status allows her to approximate human behaviour better than other replicants because she *believes* she is human.

Later on, after Deckard reveals Tyrell's deception, Rachael takes refuge at Deckard's apartment. In a difficult but beautiful scene, Rachael remembers music lessons (in Greek *mythos*, Memory is the mother of the Muses). Though she expresses doubts about the authenticity of her "lessons", she reads music and plays the piano (a piano is a "machine", as Jacques Barzun reminds us), trying to figure out if her artificial memories matter. We equate her musical inclination as a sign of a gifted mind able to grasp the delicate balance between the patterns of thought and harmonies of sound. Rachael has a strong acoustical memory, and this *mnemonic* emphasis is played out in Batty as well. Though Rachael understands the performative nature of music, Batty is mindful of the poetic movement of language. He is an eloquent, rhapsodic figure with a memory for poetry, a mind for words, and a taste for violence. His poetic prose and rhetorical flair is matched by his fluid movements and action. Though he has been called the cinema's archetypal Aryan superman, Batty is cast as a neo-Renaissance figure – a poet and a killer.

Although both Rachael and Batty have a *mnemonic* orientation that focuses on a semantic understanding of acoustical *episteme* (cadence, rhythm), Leon, by contrast, possesses a memory for 'things' or external objects. Quite interestingly, his imagistic or iconic orientation results in a lack of fluency and sophistication, a condition that represents a subordinate state of mind—a slave consciousness. For instance, when Holden (Morgan Paull) gives Leon the Voight-Kampff test, Leon can manage only disjointed answers, and when his trivial elaborations fail, he collapses into violence. Although the fragile psychodynamics of Leon's mind compel him to cling to photographs, Batty, on the other hand, has no affinity for pictures. In an early scene, he mocks Leon's obsession after he failed to retrieve his photos before Deckard seized them. Rachael, as well, discards her photo after she is confronted with the knowledge that she is a replicant. Their dissociation not only rejects imagistic objects but rejects the entire memory system based on false imagery.

And what about Deckard? Despite the pictures adorning his apartment, his only use for photographs is as forensic evidence in his investigation. Deckard's *mnemonic* orientation is quite different from Leon, Batty and Rachael's. Although his voice-overs fit into the convention of detective narratives, we may believe that his mind is oriented by varying degrees of speaking (acoustics) and writing (object-oriented). Though no one would confuse Deckard's musings with the tradition of the Homeric bards, Deckard is *Blade Runner's* storyteller. In hardboiled fashion, his voice-overs are personal and social; they are expository, interrogative and, essentially, rhetorical, all of which reveal the psychodynamics of his actions and the measurement of his growth – giving insight into his awareness, character, and evolving consciousness. As others have noted, Deckard speaks to us, "reading" his thoughts and recording his vocabulary in narrative form. His oral performance seems to be derived from a literate though not a poetic mind. Although we see

Deckard reading a newspaper, the *milieu* of the future remains an oral society – where the spoken word is given primacy through its poetic power. For these characters, language is an existential concern; it is an opening into reality, a way of comprehending social standing and a means of arguing for freedom.

Scott's Stand

In the last twenty-five years, the lively discussions regarding this film have resonated far beyond the narrow readings of journalistic reviewers. Careful critics, academics and dedicated fans have extended *Blade Runner's* life by analysing and discussing its aesthetic merits and philosophical arguments. Critics such as Bruno, Leonard G. Heldreth and C. Carter Colwell have shown that Scott's directorial efforts create harmony between the work of Paull, Douglas Trumbull (a special photographic effects supervisor), director of photography Jordan Cronenworth, and scriptwriters David Peoples and Hampton Fancher, a circumstance that refutes the initial criticism that Scott favoured style over substance. Scott cares deeply about the connection between character and consequence, the environment and identity, the natural order and the human need for artificial enhancements.



In the original theatrical release, Deckard's dehumanised state implied that he resembled a replicant and suggested that he may be the prey that he is hunting. This irony was never fully developed because Deckard's dehumanised state is initially meant to encourage the audience to grapple with whether his biological orientation – and his humanity – matter at all. However, because Deckard is human, his alienation not only represents man's lack of fullness but symbolizes humanity's fall. Although Deckard's fall is redeemed by Batty's redemptive act and Deckard's effort to save Rachael, Deckard's growth, in a larger sense, allows for the redemptive nature of humans. In this context, *Blade Runner* seems to be arguing that mankind needs artificial assistance to realize its full human potential. In this dystopia, Deckard – the human –overcomes his alienation by uniting with Rachael, an object of science, because he needs artificial cultivation to regain his humanity and achieve wholeness.

However, in separate statements and interviews, Scott has stated definitively that Deckard is a replicant. Of course, directors are free to make their own artistic choices and there are plenty of reasons for viewers to interpret the film in Scott's way. (6) But Scott's directorial intent isn't quite consistent with the rest of the story. For instance, Deckard's dehumanised state rather than his definitive status as a replicant coheres better with the film's most important points. Thematically, Fancher and Peoples' script argues that binaries (such as the natural and artificial) are tentative in their orientation and often collapse into symbiosis – that the natural

(Deckard) and artificial (Rachael) exist in a dialectical relationship – as human and machine. Deckard and Rachael's departure signifies that their world is composed of suffering, blindness and unfulfilled desires, a world that does not allow for a just man and woman to exist, so they must flee as fugitives and transgress their environments in order to unite. As a thematic argument, this synthesis of science and humanity is more compelling than Scott's interpretation that pits machines against humans without resolve.

Why We are Fascinated

The academic fascination with *Blade Runner* is explained by three prominent reasons. First, Scott's film possesses themes of enduring value: the practical and philosophical search for the meaning of existence, knowledge of the brevity of life, and the important distinctions between illusion and reality – themes which are placed within mankind's dramatic struggle to rediscover its own humanity. Second, *Blade Runner* also asks us to contemplate the profound affiliation between memory, knowledge, and identity, an affiliation that academics, regardless of discipline, study and teach in some fashion. Third, as a work of art, *Blade Runner* provides us with arresting images of dark, "terrible beauty", as Dempsey noted twenty-five years ago. These vivid images ask us to contemplate a dying culture in which the characters who demonstrate the most intensity and understanding for life are not human beings at all. The fragmentation, decenteredness, and displaced morality, all of these characteristics are caused by a deeply flawed commingling of multiculturalism, capitalism and fascist politics. Not without irony, this film doesn't endorse the postmodern world in which the characters inhabit. Rather, this film indicts the very world it so breathtakingly portrays. When we measure these ironies with the film's lyricism, we realize that *Blade Runner*, like the very best films, was meant to be preserved in our memories. Over the years, academics, careful critics and fans have looked for ways to keep the discussion of this film open, bringing a sorely needed *interdisciplinarity* to their acts of interpretation. These critical inquiries fostered good critical will, opened new boundaries, and expanded the potential for multidisciplinary insight to new audiences. Twenty-five years later, in the midst of our activities, *Blade Runner* passes before our eyes, and we are still compelled to pay close attention.

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Endnotes

1. This retrospective focuses mostly on academic efforts. Academics, for the most part, have more time to write critical essays than movie critics. Equally impressive are the collective efforts produced in the public sphere. Independent critics and fans who have posted their interpretive efforts on the internet deserve their own retrospective as well. Certainly, Matt Hills' essay in *The Blade Runner Experience* (2005) breaks down the distinctions between academic and fan-based interpretations, and problematises the distinctions between cultish fans and cultish academics. ↑
2. According to *Variety*, this long recovery appears to have compelled Warner Bros. to release *Blade Runner: the Final Cut* later this year. Reportedly, a new version of the film will receive a limited theatrical release. My response to this news is simple: a phenomenon so persistent as *Blade Runner* deserves not only a new theatrical audience but more critical consideration as well. ↑
3. *Blade Runner*'s "look" has many contributors, including Syd Mead, but the cumulative efforts of every one are too many to list here. ↑
4. Stanley Kauffmann, "Blade Runner", in *Field of View: Film Criticism and Comment* (New York: PAJ, 1986), p. 100. ↑
5. In classical studies, memory is divided into two areas, according to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: "natural memory is what is engrafted in our minds [...] artificial memory is a memory strengthened or confirmed by training." ↑
6. In a later edition of the film, a sequence involving Deckard's dream of a unicorn was added to correspond with Gaff's creation of an origami unicorn. This relationship implies strongly that Gaff knows about Deckard's dreams because Deckard is a replicant. In addition, much has been made about the glowing eyes of certain replicants. No doubt, Batty and Rachael's eyes reflect candle flames and kitchen lights, as do Deckard's in one key scene when he stands with Rachael facing his kitchen. Rather than signify their replicant status, the incandescent eyes may serve as a point of irony rather than a point of identity – that those figures with illuminated or heavily reflected eyes are limited in their sight or are somewhat blind in their knowledge. ↑



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