

BLADE RUNNER
THE APEX OF CREATION



Blade Runner initiates with words, a view of the city, and an eye in a state of perceiving. We are told of the present condition of our society[s]. There now exists two distinct [being]s, humanity and a genetically engineered species birthed-forth from our human mind, ‘a being virtually identical to a human - known as a *Replicant*.’ [1] The film Blade Runner is an ancient myth brought forth into modernity by Ridley Scott’s vision: The conception of a new type of goddess, the warrior Athena who sprung forth from the mind of the god Zeus. This myth has been interpreted in literature and cinema many times over from Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Each author or directors’ interpretation reflects the cultural and sociological influences of society and the economic conditions of their time. Ridley Scott couples conventional cinematic narrative in the forms of *film noir* and science fiction with modern and post-modern analysis as a method of interpreting the future of the individual and collective within an urban landscape, the future city. The modern and post-modern analysis is conducted through the use of ‘signifiers.’ Ridley Scott uses a broad range of signifier types such as architecture, poetry, art and music to create tension. The signifiers are introduced as a seemingly random ‘pastiche’ alongside a very conventional narrative. The narrative is obviously linear whereas the modern and post modern signifiers are not, this results in a visual and temporal ‘pastiche’ where the reality of time and place are suspended. The belief systems held by the individual viewers are suspended in this non-temporal space and we are led to believe that anything is possible in this new futuristic world. Placing us in this world that is both known and unknown allows Ridley Scott to delve deeper into the problems relating to capitalism, society, technology, waste, and ultimately the outcome of humanity. The tension between the linear and non-linear elements creates a dystopic vision of the future where ultimately the cycling and recycling of visuals not only becomes a reality of the future city but a metaphor applying to several layers of the film. This paper intends to cover the critical examples within Blade

“Pastiche, as an aesthetic of quotation, incorporates dead styles; it attempts a recollection of the past, of memory, and of history.” – Giulianna Bruno [2]

Runner that relate to the film noir genre. The examples of film noir are discussed and contrasted with the modern and post-modern signifiers. The modern and post-modern signifiers Ridley Scott uses within the film noir narrative in order to expose the paradox and ‘pastiche’ of his future vision.

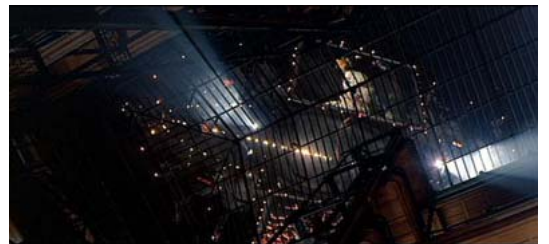
‘Film noir is an urban genre.’ [3]

The film noir genre purposely focuses the narrative within *the city* where the narrative subtexts are amplified by the pressures and constraints of city living. Claustrophobic and subversive elements are brought to full fruition in spaces lacking privacy. The post-industrial cities of New York and Los Angeles stood as dark counter parts to the clean and sterile 50’s suburbia. The post-war boom in America bared witness to a time of flight to the suburbs where one could *be* safe. Americans had left or were trying to leave the city for the suburbs. The suburbs of Los Angeles promised safety by buffering families and individuals in plots of green grass amongst a sea of generic homes. Americans psychically needed to re-establish control. The suburbs isolated the individual whereas the city compressed and intensified the relationship by the very nature of the architecture. Blade Runner returns to this time in the future, to create paradoxically a future-memory, although this exodus is motivated by different factors. The exodus occurs on a planetary scale where the wealthy and privileged have left for the *off colonies*. Flying advertising blimps, [which suggest that city property values are costly but oddly enough the buildings look void] similar to 50’s adverts try to lure people to the *off colonies*.

A radio voice blares into the dense streetscape:

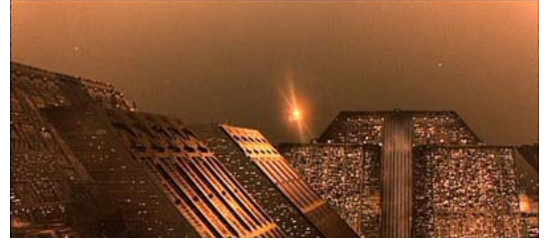
‘A new life awaits you in the off-world colonies, the chance to begin again. A golden land of opportunity and adventure. Lets go to the colonies! Helping America into the new world. Use your new friend at the tailored genetically engineered humanoid Replicant designed especially for your needs so come on America! [4]

In Philip K. Dick’s book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* the *off world* of the future is equivalent to the 1950’s Los Angeles suburb. The viewer understands the motivation to leave for the off world colony by observing the future state of the city of Los Angeles. Ridley Scott is relentless in presenting the degeneration and squalor of the future Los Angeles. Modern and post-modern signifiers allow us to understand that the Los Angeles has



evolved from a city of open horizontal landscapes to a contained, dense, vertical landscape similar to New York. Although the city is stated as Los Angeles 2019 there are many visual cues signifying the contrary

Film provides architecture with an outlet for realizing visions that can never exist and conjures up experience that in reality have not. As a two dimensional form, the freedom of expression is limitless because the economics, logistical, and legal constraints are no longer a burden. The creative process and hence cinema becomes an ideal medium created for utopian visions and different approaches to architectural design.
-Natasha Higham [4]



The city of Los Angeles 2019 now supports a population of 90 million. The urban landscape is totally synthetic and has suffered urban decay through the economic pitfalls of globalization. The upper echelon have moved completely out of the city or to off-worlds. Ridley Scott takes a familiar place, the city of Los Angeles, and hypothetically subjects it to the economic, social, and cultural implications of globalization. During the 1980's the United States suffered considerable economic paranoia with the rise of the Japanese economy. At an individual level, people were terrified of impending corporate takeovers that would engulf small business and lead to the complete disappearance of 'the little person.' Ridley Scott amplifies the American sentiment with the use of Japanese models who consume corporate products such as pharmaceuticals and cigarettes on inescapable billboards that either drench the building facades or infiltrate buildings as flying blimps. Ridley Scott repeats the signage scenes as a method of punctuating the *cyclical stand-still* quality of the film. A poignant example Deckard's inability to shed the swollen blimp signage in the public domain of the street, in the supposed privacy of his apartment or in the final scenes combating Roy. This sends a message that the city is a voyeuristic and oppressive place where the individual is kept aware of their vulnerability to the giant corporations. Marketing and bill boards are a modern signifier. The fact that they are a displaced product of a period of American 1980's socio-economic paranoia and that their meaning and intention is suspect in the film defines them also as a very complex and problematic post-modern signifier. Whatever we know of present day Los Angeles is buried under a global lens. The city of 2019 is a city of contradiction. Visual layering of architectural typologies and artifacts from various cultural histories create the contradictory future-memory of a globalized world. The city as an overall plan seems to be governed by a very rational plan similar to Le Corbusier's

Radiant City. He then interjects this formality with the complexity of post modernist ideals, specifically, the ideas of Venturi. One particular idea is understanding the complexity and fluidity inherent in cities. Venturi did not believe Le Corbusier's vision was possible, particularly within a city. A city thrived on the complexity and contradiction of various cultures and peoples coming together within a constrained area (i.e. present day New York or Toronto with their distinct ethnic communities.) Venturi promulgated the belief that individual architectural structures can remain autonomous within the complexity of an organic urban city-scape. Ridley Scott interjects characteristic architectural icons such as The Bradbury Hotel and Union Station, (which are obvious New York city icons) onto his vision of Los Angeles. This serves to reinforce the time space meltdown where the viewer is kept suspended in a place and non-place.

I took the two world trade towers in New York City and the New York street proportions as a 'today' model, and expanded everything vertically about two and a half times. This inspired me to make the bases of the buildings sloping to cover about six city blocks, on the premise that you needed more ground access to the building mass.
-Syd Mead [6]

The opening scene is governed by a seemingly homogenous system of city blocks that seem to be part of a functional and rigorous city plan, but as one descends into the streets we find that they are not the efficient channels for automobile traffic that Le Corbusier envisioned but a densely populated pedestrian core that seethes with post-capitalist vendors, restaurants, and ethnic markets. This street level density is very similar to New York, not Los Angeles. Ridley Scott not only subject the city to densification that occurs with overpopulation, the city is ravaged by a post-industrial, post-Ford, consumer society. Architectural signifiers are strewn and layered like waste everywhere. Giant pineapples used in southern architecture to signify health ironically enough lie outside Sebastian's apartment. Post-Ford industries and economics are foreseen and represented as production business. The farming out of Replicant industries to ethnic vendors as a means of reducing cost which is equivalent to present day after-market industries flood the streets. The recycling of expensive Replicant parts from the Tyrell corporation to generate parts for existing products is a rampant industry. Waste is layered, burying any evidence of present day the bungalows or green hills we know Los Angeles for. Bicycles and various ethnic minorities fill the streets in markets that are similar to New York City. Many minorities have come to



America to find their dreams. Blade Runner highlights the reality that many immigrants find in their attempt at integrating into society and achieving economic security. The ethnicity of the inhabitants generate a sub-commentary regarding the ‘American dream.’ This future city has adopted to the transactions of a populus whose cultures extend beyond the bounds of architecture. The buildings look empty yet the streets are alive. The middle-class suburbs have been overtaken by the city. The futurist city can not accommodate the rigidity of modernism, instead it folds and unfolds with the meeting of east and west.

There are several themes within the film but the most prominent is the questioning of how humanity is to position itself in the face of technology. At the turn of the century society anticipated great relief from medicine by providing greater amenity to humanity. The reality of the medical community and pharmaceuticals today tells another story of control and extreme capitalism with total disregard of the health and welfare of the disadvantaged, poor, and old.

Paul Starr who wrote a book on the social transformation of modern medicine encapsulates the shortcomings of science (should it relate to medicine or technology):

The dream of reason did not take power into account. The dream was that reason, in the form of the arts and sciences, would liberate humanity from scarcity and the caprices of nature, ignorance and superstition, tyranny, and not least of all, the diseases of the body and the spirit. But reason is no abstract force pushing inexorably toward greater freedom at the end of history. Its forms and uses are determined by the narrower purposes of men and women; their interests and ideals shape even what counts as knowledge. Though the works of reason have lifted innumerable burdens of hunger and sorrow, they have also cast up a new world of power. In that world, some people stand above others in knowledge and authority and in control of the vast institutions that have arisen to manage and finance the rationalized forms of human labor.[7]

Technology in the future may in fact turn out to have the same struggles as medicine has today and will probably continue to have in the United States 100 years from now if it remains under a capitalist system. Ridley Scott foreshadows technology as providing very little amenity on the planet earth. ‘high-tech plumbing retrofitted to street-level urban decay, what remains is recognizably the same vista of urban gigantism that Fritz Lang celebrated in Metropolis.’ [8]



One would anticipate urban architecture of the future to be influenced by the technological progress similar to perhaps the sustainable building technology or buildings which rely heavily on component design such as with Jean Nouville's work. Instead existing buildings are grafted on to by new buildings or infrastructure systems needed to supply building growth. One would expect piping to be virtually obsolete in the future, instead the buildings seem to suffocate with the piping clinging to them. Technology is absent in the urban scale it only serves to provide jobs similar to the computer industry today.

Recycling and waste are a by-product of a postindustrial, consumer society. When resources are scarce, the city looks to waste as a primary source. A cycle initiates and waste becomes an intrinsic part of the city.

'Blade Runner provides a powerful vision of the postindustrial city: as the city in ruins. On this account, the relation between postmodernism and late capitalism is evident particularly in the film's representation of post-industrial decay, the proliferation of waste having come to serve as an index of the accelerated turnover time of a new phase of capitalism. This, in turn, is reflected in an aesthetic of pastiche. [9]

We're in a city which is in a state of overkill, of snarled up energy, where you can no longer remove a building because it costs far more than constructing one in place. So the whole economic process is slowed down. -Ridley Scott [10]

The idea of recycling and cyclical themes are prevalent at all levels within the film. Philip Dick's theories speak about recycling and cycling of time specifically. He investigates ideas of time and space acting in a helix form whereby time and space experience elements of extreme compression and expansion. Ridley Scott adopts Dick's theories within the film. At the most fundamental level the actual production of the film adopted many layers of recycling as a means of reducing budget cost. Ridley Scott used as many scenes and props as possible from previous productions. *'The launch*

sequence on the computer is the same one used in his previous film Alien. The black and white display of the VK machine is also the display from Alien. The same background hum used in Deckard's apartment is used in parts of Alien.'[11]

The production of the movie recycled as a means of reducing cost. The choice of the Bradbury building was governed by economics. Ridley Scott calculated that the cost of using an existing building that was to undergo renovation was sufficiently less than constructing a set within a city. Recycling is a factor of economics. The architecture in the future Los Angeles is also conceived of and guided by economics and so the futuristic buildings are built upon the existing structures we see today. We visually read from the street level only the systems of HVAC and exterior piping necessary to keep the city functioning well. Ridley Scott blurs the specifics of the new city which has covered the existing as a means of emphasizing the compression of city living and the compression caused by recycling. [Re]cycling of modern and post modern imagery results in streetscapes of compression and open areas of expansion.

Living amongst and creating out of the refuse we find characters who not only depend on the waste but embody it. J.F. Sebastian is plagued with Methuselah syndrome, or as Pris states 'accelerated decrepitude,' the accelerated death can be attributed to the compression of existing in a post-modern condition. He surrounds himself with recycled waste and enters into artificial relationships with the toys he constructs. His world is artifice. Similarly, Pris and Zhora are adorned with recycled waste as clothing, waste is intrinsic to their survival. Zhora means of living is publicly fornicating with the concept of waste as a snake club dancer. Pris hides her self amongst the refuse as a means of entering into Sebastian's world. The relationship of the characters heighten the belief of waste as a valuable commodity in a post-modern world.

The themes of recycling also find themselves in the smaller scale. Ridley excessively asks us to question ideas of serendipity or déjà vu that the viewer perceives yet does not fully comprehend for example: Deckard's newspaper he reads prior to confronting Zhora is Lyon's drawer liner at the Yukon hotel; A 17th century camera obscura that captures the Replicants who are then divulged from a tri-dimensional lens showing us pictures that are within pictures. The police chief's assistant, Gaff, recycles discarded items into sculptural origami pieces which are iconographic images within each



scene. The film ends with the recycling and questioning of Deckard's own authenticity.

The city represents corruption and subversity which film noir readily accepted and exploited by its' characters. Film noir is laden with crooks, mafia, and 'the bad guy' (which many times is a woman.) The film noir city oozes with these bad characters and city-scapes seem to fall under the literal shadows of their corruption. The film *Crossfire* (Edward Dymtryk, 1947) is an excellent example of the use of shadow to convey corruption and murder. The movie contains a variety of lighting methods that are also found in *Blade Runner* where scenes are lit indirectly or the narration is progressed from simple lighting techniques. The techniques hard back to the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* where the lighting acts as a medium to convey the emotional state of the characters to the viewer.

Several different lighting techniques are found in *Blade Runner* but the most frequent is the use of indirect lighting whether the characters are indoors or outdoors. The lighting of the film noir genre fits well with Ridley Scott's interpretation of the urban landscape where buildings are dense and natural light is virtually obsolete. It is interesting to note also that like Ridley Scott the filming of *Crossfire* was on a very tight budget. The director estimated that the filming was quicker with smoldering dark scenography. In an interview the director of *Crossfire* Edward Dymtryk tells of the necessity of his *chiaro scuro* shots. *'[B]ecause the three stars had been relatively expensive, he had to shoot the film on a tight schedule of twenty days. And so, seeking to reverse the standard 4:1 time ratio for setting up as against filming a scene, he wanted simple-height-contrast lighting: 'It was a lot faster to light the people and then throw a couple of big shadows on the wall. In the old days, if they were to light a wall, every fixture would be lit... with three point lighting. But we didn't have that time.'* [12]

The indirect lighting throughout *Blade Runner* serves to emphasize the dark narrative by placing the viewer in a psychological state of compression. Shadow work keeps the viewer aware of this state. A great percentage of the movie is layered in darkness in order to emphasize the scenes where light acts as a signifier. There is a change in the quality of light in the Tyrell building to signify the superior position the company holds in society. When Deckard goes to test Rachael the scenes are flooded with a golden hue. Tyrell is god-like in his ability to control the light when Deckard asks for darker conditions. An expansive view out to the city lies before



Tyrell as he waves his hand to draw the blind, a potent signifier of his control over the city. The dark lighting is an effective method of tying the scenes together within a specific context.

The psychological complications of female and male relationships in the 40's and 50's are heightened and explored within the city-scapes of film noir. Established gender roles were twisted and mutated to create psychic tension during a time when set gender roles and expectations were very high. Film noir is comprised of a fairly generic cast of characters that deviate film to film. The most notable is the 'hard-boiled' private eye created by Raymond Chandler in his 1939 criminal novel *The Big Sleep*. *Philip Marlowe*, private eye, has gone on to influence other film noir and current detective series. In the film Deckard is the retired alcoholic ex-cop, described by his ex-wife as 'a cold fish.' A Blade Runner who is coerced back into the force in order to retire five Replicants who have escaped and infiltrated earth from an off colony ship. There is also the femme fatale Rachael who is the aggressive female counterpart, the wealthy despot Tyrell and the deviant individuals who lie outside of society such as Sebastian.

'The [noir] films probe the darker areas of the psyche (obsession and neurosis are common preoccupations)- and focus in particular on male sexual anxieties and on the pathology of male violence. Their view of the legal system is frequently highly critical, and figures of the establishment are often shown as corrupt. Overall, they portray a society in which the American dream of success is inverted, alienation and fatalistic helplessness being the dominant moods, and failure the most frequent outcome.' [13]



The human female in Blade Runner is decidedly absent. Ridley Scott presents us with Rachael, a Replicant who is completely noir in her costuming. She is also very human in her initial aggression towards Deckard that later turns into a cry for help. Pris and Zhora are also Replicants and are presented as being highly sexualized. They are portrayed as smart, independent, strong and warrior-like, in a man's world they are punished for these traits and are ultimately killed by Deckard's phallic weapon. The purpose of Ridley Scott's intentions is questionable. Their death may signify the extent of which technology has infiltrated the human psyche. Despite the progression from the monstrous transformation of the female in *Alien* to a beautiful Replicant, women are still not accepted in this world, they are a commodity. The misogynistic elements are tempered or seem to be

overlooked because of the introduction of technology into the equation of male and female relationships.

Technology in Blade Runner benefits man through the creation of Replicant slaves.

Technology in Blade Runner has also the capacity to replace humanity.

Technology in Blade Runner replaces female reproduction and creates the perfect being- the Replicant.

Tyrell is the new god who has created a perfect child out of his own mind. Society is now controlled and created by males. Unlike Zeus, a god, Tyrell is human. Humanity tolerates and takes pride in achievements only as far as to not be replaced by them. Tyrell's Replicants are perfect: Refined perfection guided by humanity's *perceived* emotional, intellectual, and physical inadequacies. Similar to modernist principles a Replicants' physical and mental capacities are governed by their projected function. All the Replicants are slaves to humanity and their individual functions are specific to them: combat, labour, or pleasure. Humanity has the luxury of time to develop their position about where they stand in the world - our life is about *process*; Perceiving and processing with our mind, The accumulation of knowledge, The creation of a set of moral values from experiences. Replicants are innately embedded with their function and their pasts, their memories are given to them by their creator Tyrell. Whereas Zeus nurtures his warrior daughter Athena, human society severs the cord and abandons our creations/children to the off-worlds to serve our own good. Ridley Scott shows us the moral and ethical complications of creating without taking responsibility particularly when it is created out of selfish desire.

Ridley Scott explores several universal philosophical questions regarding humanity. He concentrates on the specific act of perceiving and the relationship of perceiving and memory. In the film, memory is defined as an innately human trait, as a means of defining who is truly human. The film plays with the us, plays with the notions of perception and what is *truthful* perception or merely *aesthetic*. The Replicants are also in possession of imbedded memories or what is perceived to be memories by them. Life experiences are absorbed and a memory is generated whereby the Replicants begin to display emotions based on life experiences- similar to humans. What is left to distinguish us from them? Nothing. Humanity tempers the Replicants perfection by condemning them to a four year life-span. The Replicants remain a transient being/memory in the human world. Ridley



Scott poses/reveals/explores what it means to be human and how do we stand as humans in the face of rapidly developing technologies?

Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell. More human than human is our motto.
-Tyrell [14]

The film follows the protagonist Deckard who is introduced to the moral and ethical dilemma's of genetic creation through his relationship with Rachael, a nexus 6 Replicant. During the development of their relationship the problems associated with the creation of these beings who are 'more human than human' come to life.

'As a generic field, film noir combines a number of elements in a way which makes it peculiarly complex and interesting: a distinctive and exciting visual style, an unusual narrative complexity, a generally more critical and subversive view of American ideology than the norm. For these and other reasons- the films' lack of sentimentality, their willingness to probe the darker areas of sexuality, their richly suggestive subtexts, the emotional force of the down beat- film noir as a phenomenon continues to fascinate.'
[15]



Philosophical problems are amplified when human emotions are involved and so love is added to the kettle. Emotions and passion are always generated with love. The introduction of love set against the eternal question of 'What it means to be human' complicates Deckard's mission. As the Replicants continuously demonstrate their capacity for human emotion [primarily because of Rachael] his ability to 'retire' the 'skin jobs' is compromised. Romance emotionally calls upon the viewer to perceive and Ridley Scott wishes for us to believe that the Replicants are human despite the foreign world they inhabit. Ridley Scott is clever in seducing and appealing to the emotions of the viewer in this subversive way. Deckard experiences love and ultimately reclaims life ironically enough through his interactions with the Replicants. At the onset of the film Deckard is quite cold and emotionless. He remains distant from life. His detachment is emphasized with his close affiliation with alcohol. His apartment is an inanimate extension of his spiritual psyche, specifically his dislike of society. In opposition to him stands Roy Batty, a Replicant, who is the emotional tenor throughout the film. Roy *actively* and *persistently* 'wills' for life, a longer life.

Right and wrong, bad guy and good guy are typically clear in film noir: The criminal deserves it for doing wrong and the protagonist has no

problem in intervening as it serves the common good. Good and bad in Blade Runner is totally blurred. As a result of Roy's commitment to 'willing,' his actions may not have always been good. He understands that his actions did not conform to [human] civil societies laws and customs. Roy confesses to his wrong doings thereby revealing that he possesses a conscience. A conscience understands what society considers to be right and wrong. He states that during his life '*he has done questionable things*' but he also understands that he has been treated inhumanely despite being created as 'more human than human.' Philosophically, he is the authentic 'being' and Nietzsche's mad man: His sense of self preservation, His love for Pris, His seeking out of Tyrell [his father] are all demonstrative of his humanity. At the end of his life Roy displays the most enlightened and transcendent of all human emotions, compassion . He raises Deckard using the hand he had speared to prolong its use. Through this act of forgiveness Roy is transformed into a Christ-like figure. Roy professes his sadness regarding the temporality of his perceptions, experiences, memory, and life. His absolute love for life allows him to experience death so profoundly. His final words to Deckard are given in the highest form of human prose - poetry.

Another example of the Replicants display of innately human traits and capacity for love occurs when the Lyon's photos that have been confiscated mix in with Deckard's own family history. On a piano within his apartment Deckard pins up Lyon's photos. Lyon's photos lie across Deckard's photographs of his own ancestry. Up until this point his apartment had no indication of domestic living. The piano humanizes Deckard. We are visually signified *that he once had emotions*. The film replaces the standard hearth with a piano. The piano metaphorically signifies the marriage of the individual and the collective within a finite space: A collective memory of family and gathering, A place of joy , A place of intimacy. It is in this metaphoric space where Deckard intuitively observes the same level of domesticity within one of Lyon's photographs. He places the photo into the Esper [scientific eye] viewing machine [which makes a very particular sound similar to a camera shutter –not the futuristic sound one might anticipate with new technology.] The Esper has the ability to interpret vocal commands and to respond using emissions of high frequency sounds. The Esper provides tri-dimensional analysis of high resolution photographs. It has the capacity to detect hidden physical planes that are not visible on the photographic surface.



The overall photo is a mish-mash of paintings by Vermeer and Jacques Louis David. Vermeer is a Dutch painter re-known for his interior ‘landscapes’ of the daily lives of Dutch people. Everyday scenes where the smallest tasks of everyday life are glorified and revered; painted with softness and intimacy. They depict the absolute universal joy of life in the most mundane of moments. Vermeer also used a pin-hole camera to frame compositions to paint. Images recorded with the camera often showed discrepancies in scale similar to the ones found in his paintings. His fluid, painterly treatment can be compared to the unfocused appearance of an image seen through such an optical device. His method was unconventional, painters of the time relied on live models. What the viewer perceives to be direct representations are in fact indirect - Vermeer is a perceptual forge. The paintings are subtle and full of signifiers that people would readily relate to during the 17th and 18th centuries. Ironically it is the Replicants who are found in these photos, they have posited themselves in the most intimate historical depictions of humanity. To be caught on film in such intimate settings is indicative of the sophistication of their own emotions. The photo documents offer proof that the Replicants have tasted domesticity; the mundane repetition of daily life, that they love and desire outside of their creator’s programmed function.



Our experience of architecture has become habit, a subconscious part of everyday life. Film has likewise become part of our subconscious memory, shading our impression of places we have never experienced and in many cases never will; influencing to the point of dictating how we should feel, think and operate in a particular space.

When films are set in New York the background is so dominant, and so instantly recognizable, that it cannot help but become almost an honorary member acting to validate the plot. If this is true then how do audience members make the cognitive leap between what they see and what they understand? -Natasha Higham [16]

Ridley Scott seamlessly collects and layers diverse and divergent forms of communication: Art, architecture, music, photography, poetry and through the film medium creates a visual ‘pastiche’ of our western collective memory. Like all societies our historical, cultural, and economic development is documented in these various forms of communication. Cinematically Ridley Scott assembles these seemingly disparate forms of communication [that act as signifiers] and he asks the viewer to engage in

thoughtful/truthful perception - active perception. He links the items together as collective signifiers. Their meanings unfold and surface relative to our knowledge and perception. Our individual knowledge regarding our collective society's history acts as a variable to which we as a viewer enter into the life of the movie. The narrative's physical landscape is set within the science fiction genre while the characters come alive within the genre of film noir. Ridley Scott vacillates between the two genres by his use of cinematography and the collection of signifiers. By juxtaposing the genres and signifiers he generates a tapestry of modern and post modern iconography. Our emotional attachments to/with the film and characters are heightened by these signifiers. Cinematically each scene is presented as a series of focusing, similar to the operation of a human eye. The result is a film that is littered with open ended interpretations and cyclical renderings of a fragmented and alienated world. The architecture of the film remains powerful and the foreshadowing of the fate of humanity in the face of growing technology and globalization remains to be seen.



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images

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