BLADERUNNER: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

A student guide

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Screen education unit
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### Glossary of Important Film Terms

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<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Camera angle</strong></td>
<td>The position from which the camera looks at what is to be filmed</td>
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<td><strong>Close-up</strong></td>
<td>A camera shot which shows a close-up view of the subject, filling most of the screen</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
<td>The way elements in a shot are arranged in relation to each other and to the viewer: the way they are framed. This is determined by the Director and Cinematographer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cut</strong></td>
<td>The abrupt transition from one shot to another</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Editing</strong></td>
<td>The selection and physical assembling of the pieces of film, which will comprise a finished movie. Editing also refers to the process of fine-tuning a script</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Film language</strong></td>
<td>The way films tell stories and affect viewers. All the elements of filmmaking play a part in this; but of particular importance is editing for particular effects, attention to characterisation (e.g. through costume), and use of close-ups to alert viewers to important action or emotional response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frame</strong></td>
<td>The rectangle formed by the outside of a movie screen. To frame a shot is to arrange its composition. A frame is also each separate image in a film</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High-angle shot</strong></td>
<td>The camera looks down at the subject from a high angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long shot</strong></td>
<td>A camera shot which makes the subject look small and far away. In reality, any shot which shows a person's whole body rather than close-ups of it</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low-angle shot</strong></td>
<td>The camera looks up at the subject from a low angle</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Medium shot</strong></td>
<td>A camera shot midway between a close-up and a long shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Montage</strong></td>
<td>A series of brief images put together to tell a segment of a story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pan</strong></td>
<td>The slow pivoting of a camera from one side to another (deriving from the word 'panorama')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scene</strong></td>
<td>A unit of film unified by time or place. Film scripts are divided into scenes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Screenplay</strong></td>
<td>A film script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequence</strong></td>
<td>Mainly used in this booklet to describe a series of scenes that describe a continuing action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shoot</strong></td>
<td>To film something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shot</strong></td>
<td>Any set-up of the camera so that something can be filmed. Also used as a verb, with the same meaning as 'filmed'</td>
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section 1: getting started

Blade Runner trivia quiz

1. What are three pieces of evidence in the film suggesting that Deckard is a replicant?

2. Complete Gaff's final words to Deckard at the end of the film, "It's too bad ____________________________ ."

3. What is the name of the eye geneticist?

4. Who says, "It's painful to live in fear."?

5. What does Captain Bryant label replicants?

6. Who says, "We're not computers, we're physical."

7. Complete the following sentence. Tyrell is described as 'the god of ____________________________ .'

8. What is the importance of memories in the film?

9. What is the name of the building in the final scene?

10. What are the Off-world colonies?
an introduction to Blade Runner: context and genre

context:
The original version of Blade Runner was first released in 1982. This was a period in which there was the frightening prospect of war between U.S.S.R and the U.S. There were many war zones at the time and the U.S. and the U.S.S.R were the arms suppliers for warring factions in various parts of the world. There were a number of films made at this time which record the real fears of a nuclear war or disaster. The Day After, Threads and Silkwood confront these sorts of issues. It was a period of brinksmanship (living on the edge) in which the world's major powers were struggling to assert the primacy of their own ideology. It was a continuation of the Cold War, which began after the Second World War, when the world was divided into two ideological spheres of influence. There was the 'free world', with the United States as the world's political watchdog and there were the Communist countries under the control of the U.S.S.R. These countries were the Eastern Bloc countries, and included Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia (invaded by the Russians in 1968) and to a lesser extent Yugoslavia. Nuclear arsenals, paradoxically, were the 'deterrents' used by both countries to 'ensure peace'.

The President of the United States at the time was Ronald Reagan, who described the U.S.S.R as the 'evil empire'. Demonising the U.S.S.R had been a strategy used by Western governments for many years. It enabled Western governments to justify their opposition to the U.S.S.R. and other communist countries. To ensure support in the West patriotism was used to play on the hearts and minds of the masses. Reagan also developed his 'Stars Wars' program in which nuclear weapons were to be deployed in space and aimed at strategic targets in the U.S.S.R. There was a real fear of a nuclear holocaust and there was a proliferation of anti-nuclear groups. These groups protested vehemently against the nuclear arms build-up, which they saw as M.A.D. the acronym for 'mutual assured destruction'. Armed with nuclear weapons, the United States and Soviet Union confronted each other. Each side felt it must have enough nuclear firepower to deter the other from starting a war. And because of the nuclear threat, neither side wanted to start one. The doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (M.A.D.) was part of the political rhetoric of the time.

This, then, was the context in which the original Blade Runner was made. The world of Blade Runner reflects the fears of the time. The original film, released in 1982, differs from the 1992 director's cut, which Ridley Scott wanted to release in 1982, in three different ways. In the 1992 version the voiceover of the 1982 version is deleted, there is a much more ambiguous ending and the important sequence of Deckard's dream of the unicorn is included. This raises the question of whether or not Deckard himself is a replicant, an issue that will be explored later.

Blade Runner was one of the prototypes, along with the Star Wars Trilogy for the modern sci-fi film (although Blade Runner is much more complex film and not simply a sci-fi film) of the eighties and nineties. These films include the Mad Max trilogy, the Terminator films of 1984 and 1991, Running Man, Robocop, Judge Dredd, Fortress,Gattaca, The Fifth Element and Dark City, all of which are worth viewing. It is interesting to note that many of these films are set in the early part of the 21st century. Many, too, use Los Angeles (ironically, the City of Angels) as the backdrop. It is presented as an archetypal post-modern city that is overcrowded, contaminated and alienating. Blade Runner is based on the science fiction novel, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? written in 1969 by Philip K. Dick. Dick despairs at global degradation and overpopulation (a strong concern at the time that his book was written). The world presented in this story reveals little evidence of social planning or environmental controls. It is a world in which value systems have fragmented, and monolithic megastructures have replaced the natural world.
Blade Runner mixes a number of genres. It is a film that blends detective, science fiction, romance and horror genres. Most transparently it is science fiction. It presents a future earth, corrupt, polluted and chaotic. One of the interesting features of science fiction is that it projects current fears and threats onto the future. Looking at these issues in a future context casts them into relief against an unnatural and unfamiliar world. This enables the issues to be divorced from their current context so that they can be examined.

Visually, the film has the common ingredients of sci-fi. Inventive technology, imposing buildings and a familiar path of ‘ecocide’ (nature being turned on its head) are powerfully represented. So, too, is social dislocation. There is little evidence of family, culture and education in the film. Men, like Tyrell and J.F. Sebastian, who play the gods of biomechanics in the world of Blade Runner, reign supreme.

Blade Runner also uses the detective/film noir genre in the form of Deckard. In dress Deckard resembles the detectives of the films of the forties and fifties - the cynical, world-weary, hard-nosed private investigator dressed in trench coat. He is the rugged loner pitted against a brutal, alienating world; a solitary, self-enclosed moral figure.

Although when we first meet Deckard, he asserts the orthodoxy, “Replicants are like any other machine. They're either a benefit or a hazard. If they're a benefit, it's not my problem.” But there is a growth towards an essential humanity in Deckard in the course of the film. He has already 'retired', having had his fill of killing. When we first meet Deckard he is in the usual context of a seedy, shadowy, yet vital Chinatown, a commonly depicted context in the film noir genre. He is detached and disillusioned, perhaps already having seen the impact of violence and bigotry.

In film noir the detective uncovers the corruption and ‘darkness’ within the city. Film noir is an urban genre, which represents a moral response to the abuses of power in civilisation. On a visual level film noir uses low-key lighting, which hides faces, rooms, urban landscapes and by extension, motivations and true character in shadow and darkness.

Detective fiction is primarily concerned with the nature of rationality and with the restoration of order from chaos. The detective stands outside the chaos and corruption, introspective and self-absorbed. This self-absorption often becomes a reflection on the nature of society itself. So Deckard is engaged in a reflection about the nature of good and evil and about social and moral responsibility.

Deckard has mixed feelings about the role of the Blade Runner, having recently retired from the police force. He recognises the immorality and bigotry of Bryant, who refers to the replicants as ‘skin jobs’. The debate about the use of technology for unethical and material ends is given resonance by fusing detective fiction and the concerns of science fiction. Just who is the more responsible and ethical? The replicants who kill because they do not want to die or the social engineers who have created them? Through this hybrid genre the viewer is positioned to engage in the debate on where moral and social responsibility for technology lies. It is difficult for the viewer not to respond in personal terms to this question.
Science fiction has a number of concerns and interests. Blade Runner is a modern version of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (whose main character creates an artificial life form). Victor Frankenstein’s creation causes great havoc in his quest for the future. Similarly, the Nexus-6 androids of Blade Runner want to create a future for themselves by extending their predetermined lifespan of four years. In doing so they, too, wreak havoc.

One of the strengths of Blade Runner is that it defies the predictable pattern of most film narratives. This ambiguity in Blade Runner has generated many questions that you might like to address. There are many gaps that the viewer must fill in while watching the film. The viewer is expected to speculate continually. The following are just some of the examples of the questions that are raised in the film.

- What are the off-world colonies?
- Who goes there and why?
- Why does the city seem both overcrowded and empty?
- Why is there is perpetual gloom and rain?
- Has there been a nuclear or environmental catastrophe?
- Why does Roy play with Deckard in the final scene rather than kill him?
- What’s the point to his game?
- Is there Christian significance in the nail that Roy pushes through his hand, the same hand that saves Deckard?
- Is Roy meant, in this scene, to represent a higher being, maybe even a Messiah figure?
- Are Deckard and Roy alter egos in the sense that they are visually and emotionally linked in the film?
- Is Deckard himself a replicant?
- Why does he not take his own Voigt-Kampff test?
- Is there evidence within the narrative to suggest that Deckard is not a replicant?
- What’s the significance of the tinfoil unicorn that Deckard finds in the closing scene?
- Why does Rachael, as a replicant, shoot another replicant?
- Are there any real humans in the film? If yes, who are they and how are they represented?

It is important to note these ambiguities and questions as you watch Blade Runner. Quite often it is a good idea to make a note of what you thought was not clearly stated by the film. You then have a basis for developing a shared understanding with other students who might have similar questions. Remember that Blade Runner is a film with no fixed meaning. The questions you develop can be the basis of a discussion in class.
reading non-print texts

some tips on viewing the film

You should aim to watch the film at least two or three times. The first time should be an uninterrupted viewing in full. As with any VCE English text you should aim to buy your own copy so that you have the advantage of re-visiting the film when you are preparing for essays and examinations. Remember that buying a video is not much more expensive than buying a novel. Perhaps you could share a copy with a friend. You can buy ex-rental and new copies from Melbourne Video Warehouse, phone 9460 8989, or from any Myer store. Remember to buy the director's cut, which was released in 1992.

If your school is within reach of Cinemedia's Treasury Theatre in East Melbourne, your teacher could organise a screening on their advertised dates. Alternatively, if you have a large enough group (over 40 students), then Cinemedia will screen the film for you. A lecture can also be provided after the screening of the film. The cost is $8 per student for a screening and a one hour lecture.

There are many advantages in viewing a film on the big screen. Obvious advantages are comfort, lack of disruption and better image definition, depth, colour and sound. Video is less satisfactory as it compresses the picture. This prevents the viewer from observing the periphery of the screen and the composition of each shot in detail. Remember that there are many images at the edges of the screen and in the background that complement the movement and dialogue in the centre. Choices made by filmmakers include these less transparent images. Viewing a film on the big screen may help the viewer to establish more empathy with the characters and to understand the point of view that is being explored.

what to look for when viewing non-print texts

Studying film should have parallels with studying novels, plays and short stories. The same attention should be paid to characterisation, plot, structure, craft (how the film is put together), themes and issues. You should look at film excerpts in the same way that you look at key chapters in a novel.

There are, however, obvious differences between print and non-print texts, which you need to be aware of. Look at how point of view is controlled by the camera, for example. This will determine which character's point of view we see the story from and is often influential in controlling our sympathies.

You should avoid looking at film as an entity that is totally different from other types of texts. There are some terms such as those you have had explained in the glossary of film terms, but essentially the rest of the language that you use when discussing film is the same as the language you use when discussing print texts.

The study of film should look at how and why meaning is constructed. As with the study of poetry, form and content should not be separated.
When looking at a film you will need to look at its elements which, when combined, create the film’s meaning.

Here is a list of film elements:

- **selection of the setting** - why Los Angeles?
- **costumes** - Rachael's forties' dress style, Deckard's trench coat and the impact of these choices on you
- **lighting** - the perpetual gloom
- **facial expressions/body language** - Roy's curious facial expression after he has killed Tyrell
- **subjective/objective shots** - most of the film is shot at middle distance and we rarely see the world from a particular character's point of view
- **camera angle** - the way we soar through the urban maze
- **duration of shots** - the close-ups of both Deckard and Roy at vital moments which reveal their inner feelings
- **editing** (sequence of images, cross-cutting) - the choice and sequence of images in the opening of the film establishes the film's mood
- **repetition** (repetition of images and dialogue - the interview with Leon is played over and over)
- **external sounds** - synthesised music of Vangelis and how this supports the film
- **links between the scenes** (how one scene echoes or anticipates other scenes) - look at the ways in which you are taken from one scene to the next. There is a kind of ‘staircase’ effect in films. We are gradually taken to the top of the stairs, scene by scene

While the filmmaker uses these elements to create meaning in a film they should not be regarded or discussed as separate from the film’s meaning. In film issues and aesthetics, or form and content, should not be separated. Instead, look at how meaning and reality are constructed through images, sound and dialogue and their interaction.

The choices made by Ridley Scott are not innocent but are quite intentional. Both what is included and what is excluded are of almost equal importance. Remember that every shot in a film is deliberate; calculated to have an effect on the viewer.
**CHOICES WITHIN A SHOT**

- **TYPE OF SHOT**
  - Close
  - Medium
  - Long

- **LENS MOVEMENT**
  - No Movement
  - Zoom

- **FOCUS AND DEPTH OF FIELD**
  - Soft
  - Sharp

- **DURATION OF SHOT**
  - Brief
  - Long

- **LIGHTING AND COLOUR**
  - Light and Shade
  - Colour filters

- **CAMERA ANGLE**
  - Wide
  - Low

- **CAMERA MOVEMENT**
  - No Movement
  - Pan
  - Tilt

- **CAMERA POSITION**
  - Eye Level
  - Looking Up
  - Looking Down

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**getting the most out of the film**

After a full screening of the film you should initially respond to what you liked or disliked about the film. At this stage you should fill in the narrative pattern of the film, working through the sequence of events. Look at the characters' journeys, how they resolve the conflicts in their lives. It is essential to compare the beginning and the end of the film in terms of character development.

Look at the opening sequence of the film and the way it sets up expectations. What is established in this sequence? How are the characters introduced? How are the concerns of the film foreshadowed? How is the narrative started? What judgments is the viewer invited to make? Which characters do you identify with? You should use your workbook for responses to these questions and come back to them later.

When looking at the closing moments of the film reflect on the way any conflict has been resolved and the ways in which characters have made discoveries about themselves.

Another useful viewing strategy is to play sequences without the sound. This helps you to focus on the images and how they are composed and connected. The strategy of ‘freeze framing’, in which you pause the video at key moments of the film, will also help you to build your response to Blade Runner.
Preliminary questions on Blade Runner

1. What ideas, themes and issues does the film explore? How are they explored?

2. How does the narrative structure of the film work to support its ideas? Is the film linear? Do we have to fill in gaps?

3. How do the physical setting and the cultural context work in the film to develop its themes and ideas? Comment on the fact that this is set in 2019.

4. Are characters drawn sympathetically? Do they change? Are the characters stereotyped? Are they polarised? Do we feel ambivalent about them?

5. How do voice, dialogue, action and image (visual cues and codes) and their interaction define character?

6. What values seem to be transmitted in Blade Runner by Ridley Scott? How is the viewer positioned? Or to put it another way, what are you as viewer invited to accept or reject in the representation of the future? In the case of Blade Runner, among other things, you are being invited to see the dangers of the over-technologisation of society. Your personal background, value system, gender, age range of experiences and attitudes will determine how you respond to the film and to the actions of the main characters.

Establishing some definitions

In Blade Runner many binary oppositions are presented

- Good + EVIL
- Hero + Villain
- Human + MACHINE
- Real + synthetic

activity 1

a. Without any reference to the film write down your understanding of these binary oppositions.

b. Does the film change the way you think about these binary oppositions? For example, do the humans in Blade Runner show compassion and are the humans (replicants) devoid of emotion?
In Blade Runner, Ridley Scott also explores a vast range of other issues, many of them listed below.

- Love
- Reality
- Empathy
- Trust
- Power
- Exploitation
- Memory
- Humanity
- Respect
- Moral responsibility
- Reproduction
- Self-preservation
- Totalitarianism
- Artificiality
- Nature

**Activity 2**

a. Before viewing the film write down your own definitions of the issues listed above.

b. After viewing the film write down or discuss that you think the film presented and compare them with your own definitions. Remember that the definitions offered by the film may be ambiguous.

There are many topics for discussion and many complex ideas in Blade Runner.
activity 3

Make your own notes on each of the following ideas or draw concept maps. Use your dictionary if you are having trouble with any of these concepts:

- entropy/empathy
- living machines (noting the categories in the film)
- cityscape versus blue sky
- othering (the replicants are from the outside and pose a threat to the established order. As the ‘Other’ they are to be feared and eliminated
- replicants/humans
- hunter and hunted
- racism/discrimination
- doubles (Roy and Deckard?)
- capitalism
- hierarchies
- authority figures
- class divisions
- advertising
- paternity and maternity (Frankenstein issues in the film)
- visual detail/ symbolism (eyes / photos/ mirrors, chess, origami figures and their significance
- Christ/Satan: references (see perspective and web references)
- animals (owl, snake)
- music (piano, saxophone and their connotations)
- diegetic/non-diegetic worlds (breakdown of distinctions between story world and non-story world)
- genre (Film Noir, other science fiction film: past and future)
- language (foreign: cityspeak, written: neon)

If you are interested in the production issues in Blade Runner see, Future Noir, The Making of Blade Runner, by Paul M. Sammon or the British Film Institute publication mentioned in the references. (p. 30)
running sheet and key dialogue

Below is the running sheet and key dialogue for Blade Runner. Note that some of the dialogue from the director’s cut and Deckard’s final voiceover from the 1982 version has been included at the end of the running sheet. This has only been done to fill in some of the themes and issues. Dialogue from the film script is in highlighted in Italics. Do not refer to the 1982 version in any of your written responses.

1. Mood-conveying music, background information and location are revealed. Los Angeles, 2019.

2. Exterior scene, cityscape. An eye gazing, reflecting the hell on earth. The Tyrell building looms in the shape of a giant microchip.


4. Street scene in Chinatown, a gloomy underbelly. Deckard is pressured by Gaff and leaves with him to see Captain Bryant.

5. Interior scene: Bryant needs Deckard as a Blade Runner to ‘retire’ escaped replicants who have returned to Earth.

6. Bryant and Deckard watch video of Leon’s test. Other replicants also shown, functions are described.

Bryant: Nexus 6. Roy Batty. Incept date 2016. Combat model. Optimum self-sufficiency. Probably the leader. [pause] This is Zhora. She’s trained for an Off-world kick-murder squad. Talk about beauty and the beast, she’s both. [pause] The fourth skin job is Pris. A basic pleasure model. The standard item for military clubs in the outer colonies. They were designed to copy human beings in every way except their emotions. The designers reckoned that after a few years they might develop their own emotional responses. You know, hate, love, fear, anger, envy. So they built in a fail-safe device.

7. Interior of spinner: Deckard is taken to Tyrell building.

8. Tyrell’s office. Deckard uses Voigt-Kampff test on Rachael. Has to ask many questions before he discovers that she is a replicant.

Deckard: Replicants are like any other machine. They’re either a benefit or a hazard. If they’re a benefit, it’s not my problem.

Rachael: May I ask you a personal question?

Deckard: Sure.

Rachael: Have you ever retired a human by mistake?

Deckard: No.

Tyrell: Commerce, is our goal here at Tyrell. More human than human is our motto. Rachael is an experiment, nothing more. We began to recognise in them strange obsessions. After all they are emotionally inexperienced with only a few years in which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we give them the past we create a cushion or pillow for their emotions and consequently we can control them better.
SECTION 2: THE FILM IN DETAIL

Deckard: Memories. You're talking about memories.

9. Exterior: Deckard and Gaff go to Leon's room at the Hotel Yukon.

10. Deckard finds an artificial snake scale in bath, and photos, which Leon holds dear, in a drawer.


14. Deckard's apartment: Rachael confronts him, leaving in distress when Deckard brutally tells her that she has memory implants. Deckard scrutinises Leon's photos.

15. Street scene: Pris takes shelter under pile of garbage, waiting for J.F. Sebastian.


17. Deckard's apartment: He dreams of a unicorn. When awake, he enhances one of Leon's photographs using the esper machine and identifies a snakeskin.

18. Chinatown: Deckard has the "snake scale" analysed and the maker identified. It is traced to a night club act.

19. Interior of night-club/change room: Deckard finds and questions Zhora, a snake dancer, who escapes into the busy street.

20. Deckard chases Zhora through streets, she is shot dead, as she crashes through plates of glass.


22. Deckard sees Rachael in the street. Leon menacingly confronts Deckard and is about to kill him but Rachael shoots Leon in the back of the head.

Leon: Painful to live in fear, isn't it?

[ Leon tosses Deckard down on his back. ]

Leon: Nothing is worse than having an itch you can never scratch.

Deckard: Oh, I agree.

[ Leon picks Deckard up by the collar, and slaps him across the face. ]

Leon: Wake up! Time to die.


Rachael: [ Crying... ] I'm not in the business. [ Pause ] I am the business.


Roy: We're not computers Sebastian, we're physical.
Pris: I think, Sebastian, therefore I am.

25. Inside the lift to Tyrell's building, Roy, who is more intelligent than his maker, suggests a chess move to induce Tyrell to meet Sebastian.

26. Roy meets Tyrell. Knowing that he will not have his life extended, Roy kills him, by gouging out his eyes.

Roy: I want more life, fucker.

Tyrell: But, uh, all of this is academic. You were made as well as we could make you.

Roy: But not to last.

Tyrell: The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long. And you have burned so very very brightly, Roy. Look at you. You're the prodigal son. You're quite a prize!

27. Exterior of the Bradbury building: Deckard on his way to see Sebastian.

28. Interior: an 'empty' room. Pris, camouflaged in a wedding veil, attacks Deckard, but is shot in the back and dies violently.

29. Hallway of same apartment. Roy returns, sees Pris' body, laments her death with a tender kiss and realises he is dying too.

30. Roy chases Deckard through building, onto rooftop. A game of cat and mouse ensues. He plays with Deckard but finally saves him as Deckard clings precariously to life. Roy dies, releasing a white dove at that moment.

Roy: Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave.

[ Deckard falls, Roy catches him. ]

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

* NB the voiceover from the 1982 version

Deckard (voice-over): I don't know why he saved my life. Maybe in those last moments he loved life more than he ever had before. Not just his life, anybody's life, my life. All he'd wanted were the same answers the rest of us want. Where did I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got? All I could do was sit there and watch him die.

31. Gaff appears on rooftop, congratulates Deckard, leaves with an ambiguous statement about Rachael.

Gaff: You've done a man's job, sir. I guess you're through, huh?

Deckard: Finished.

Gaff: It's too bad she won't live. But then again, who does?

32. Interior Deckard's apartment: Rachael is asleep - she and Deckard flee. Deckard finds the unicorn left by Gaff.
key scenes

In this section of the student guide you will see that there is commentary on the opening scenes, called ‘Welcome to my Nightmare’. The commentary focuses on all the suggested prompts. Although the commentary which follows is detailed and in the form of an extended response, you should only need to make short personal responses to the prompts. You can draw on your own short responses later when writing your own essays either in class or in the examination.

welcome to my nightmare
Scenes 1-4 from the running sheet

comment on the following:
The opening of the film foreshadows many of the discourses or points of view in Blade Runner and keys you, as the spectator, into the narrative.

The opening of Blade Runner takes the viewer into a nether world which is dark, claustrophobic and alienating (a Film Noir device). There is constant corrosive rain. It is a vision of Hell. There are few women and a teeming polyglot of races and faces (Asians are very prominent), although there is a seedy vitality and energy in this underworld. The use of a hybrid language indicates some of the ways in which society has evolved.

The prologue keys the viewer into the narrative. In the prologue the euphemism of ‘retiring’ replicants is first used. This term indicates that murder, and extermination of threats to the prevailing social and political orthodoxy, is committed without any regard for life of any sort. There is advertising everywhere in the form of giant neon hoardings and we learn of the Off-World colonies through the use of the mobile neon.

The eye is a recurring motif, appearing from the film's beginning. It represents the window to the soul and features consistently in the film. The Voigt-Kampff test on Leon being a case in point. Leon is terrified in the interview and the final question about his mother literally triggers the shooting of Holden. He, along with other replicants, wants life.

The inhuman scale of this world is quickly made clear, in particular, the scale of the Tyrell building is heightened as the ‘spinner’ soars through the urban maze on its upward flight. The music of Vangelis underlines the narrative with its plaintive tone and emphases.

The origami figure of the chicken is a comment on Deckard's reluctance to hunt the replicants. It is the first of three figures that Gaff makes.

- the use of the prologue
- the motif (recurring symbol) of the eye (make a list of the way in which the eye is a recurrent motif)
- the interview with Leon
- language/vernacular
- shapes and scale of the sets
- key imagery
- the elements of 'Film Noir' (see earlier notes on genre)
- advertising
- the underworld
- music
- the use of light and shade
playing god
scene 8 from the running sheet

comment on the following:
• the aesthetics of Tyrell's retreat
• the presence of the owl
• Rachael's persona
• the filmic representation of Tyrell
• the possible reason(s) that Tyrell lets Deckard test Rachael

' I am not in the business, I am the business'
Scene 23 from the running sheet

comment on the following:
• the effect of flashing lights
• Deckard's emotional growth
• Rachael's realisation
• Rachael's eyes
• Rachael's question about the test
• the music

the return of the prodigal son
scene 26 from the running sheet

comment on the following:
• light, colour and contrast
• the verbal exchanges between Roy and Tyrell
• the way in which Tyrell is killed
• Roy's facial expression at the end of the scene
• the biblical undertones of this scene how Tyrell's entrapment is elicited by the filmmaker
• the connotations of Roy's statement, "I want more life father/fucker". There is some aural ambiguity, if you listen carefully

deckard's dream
scene 17 from the running sheet

comment on the following:
• the significance of the unicorn
• the importance of the photographs on the piano
• the impact of the inclusion of this scene which was missing in the 1982 version of Blade Runner
Blade Runner has been variously described as a cautionary tale, a biblical parable, an incoherent mish-mash, a bleak prophecy, and Shakespeare on celluloid. Regardless of others' opinions Ridley Scott seems to understand our nightmares. Blade Runner has also been described as not just a film but a religious event. There are many Blade Runner fanatics, some of whom have contributed to the 300 articles written on the film and there is a huge Internet database. Even the music video clip, ‘Victory’, sung by Puff Daddy, resonates with the imagery of Blade Runner.

The science fiction genre projects present fears onto the future. The future can be seen as a metaphor for the misgivings of the present. For example, in Terminator 2, Judgement Day, which most of you would have seen, the cyborg asserts a kind of humanity. As cyborgs are given selected human characteristics to make them more efficient, they rise above their specifications. T800, the cyborg, is taught by the young John Connor not to kill and ultimately asks John why humans cry. Both Terminator 2 and Blade Runner are exploring what happens when humans overreach themselves and interfere in the natural order. Replicants are merely seeking an affirmation of their own lives in the cases of both films.

It is the ambiguity of Blade Runner, which is its strength. It is the antithesis of Hollywood films in which the law of the father and patriarchy are affirmed and there is a cliched, sugarcoated ending. The 1982 version, which shows Deckard and Rachael escaping to another, better world, has those Hollywood qualities. The director's cut, which you are studying, is very different. Blade Runner also breaks down the normal oppositions which exist in film: hero/villain, good/evil, human/machine, angel/Satan, past/future (to have a past is to have a possibility of a future).

There are raging arguments over whether Blade Runner is a racist text or whether it merely a case of Ridley Scott presenting the future world as he sees it. There are no black characters and the teeming Asian hordes in an East meets West hybridised decaying society (note the punks and Hare Krishnas) suggest that the post-modern world of Blade Runner is very different from that in 2000. Perhaps the film is a critique of the direction in which our culture is heading. This is registered in the chaotic depiction of a post-apocalyptic society in which people are desensitised to violence, live to pursue pleasure and lack a sense of social cohesion. There are also arguments over whether Blade Runner is a misogynistic (anti-woman) film in that it reveals hostility to the female subject. These two interpretations are explored in another section of the guide.

The essential issue that the film raises, however, is that of moral responsibility and what it is to be human. Humanity is ultimately affirmed in the film. The release of the white dove, Roy's words on the importance of life and Deckard's realisation of his identity (and the need to act and affirm his own humanity and moral responsibility) are key elements in this. More on this later.

Humanity is expressed in Rachael. Showing Deckard the photo of her mother, her hand trembles. Her nascent and fragile sense of self is contained in this photograph. There is a tenderness and sadness in Rachael. She is 'more human than human', and is the catalyst for Deckard's re-emerging humanity, attested in his love for Rachael. Deckard has killed without compunction, but with each 'retirement' there is a growing repugnance with his own actions, as registered in the close-ups of his face.

Roy must be acknowledged as a ruthless killer. Roy also can be seen as Lucifer in that he is seeking to precipitate the fall of humans in this world. But he can also be seen as a Christ figure that saves mankind and releases the dove at the moment of his death as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The film suggests that Roy's memories and spirit were not lost, 'like tears in the rain', but were given to Deckard to remember and pass on.
Roy is the sum of his own words on the rooftop of a decaying building in a decaying world. His speech is a lament on the loss of collective memory. Perhaps he saves Deckard because he knows that Deckard is also a replicant. Deckard learns what it is like to live in fear in the same way replicants do. Roy also saves another life as redemption for his own patricidal 'fall' (the murder of his maker, Tyrell).

The combat at the end of the film fuses Roy and Deckard. Roy emphasises the importance of life to Deckard before his own flame is extinguished. In the 1982 version, Deckard’s voiceover explains, “All he wanted were the same answers the rest of us want. Where do I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got? All I could do was just sit there and watch him die.” The film poses the following questions. Who am I? Why am I here? What does it mean to be human? Humanity is defined as showing compassion to fellow humans, respecting life and nature, and placing others before self. The replicants in the end are 'more human than human', to use Tyrell own words.

The final scene explores the nature of good and evil, and social and moral responsibility. Who is immoral? Is it the androids for wanting more life or the creators who exploit them? Deckard’s journey of self-discovery and embryonic signs of moral revulsion, is an allegory of the growth towards moral responsibility.

Another of Blade Runner’s strengths is that it is multigeneric. This is one of the things that prevent the film being pinned down to a fixed meaning. In this sense it is a quintessentially post-modern text. It straddles Film Noir and the detective genre that commonly has a detached, alienated, rugged loner at the moral centre. It is equally a film about Film Noir. Film Noir usually has a detective uncovering the corruption and ‘darkness’ within the city. Noir is an urban genre that represents a moral response to the abuses of power in ‘civilisation’. Blade Runner is demonstrably science fiction, has romance, and elements of the Gothic/horror genre. It is also a special effects film, with stunning sets and dazzling camera work. You feel as if you are flying through the urban maze at times.

Blade Runner is a critique of technology and post-industrial rampant capitalism in which consumption and production are idealised to our own detriment. Technology has replaced the natural; there is neon instead of sunlight. Genetic engineering is questioned because it ignores ethical questions, dehumanises everybody and is all about technocommercialism. Our creations tell us about the ugliness of ourselves, which, in Blade Runner, is the tragedy of misused technology, controlled by a technocratic elite.

The film argues against the neutrality of technology. Replicants are driven by the need to define their humanity. They are trapped in superhuman bodies with subhuman limitations. But who is less human? Is it Deckard, who assassimates because he is ordered to, or the androids that kill in their quest for longer life? The replicant’s bodies have been invested with pre-determined information in order to maintain existing power relations. Tyrell, their maker, is notionally human, but he is intellectual only, clinical and matter-of-fact, devoid of empathy.

Allied to the abuses of technology are the ways in which corporate power is exercised. Blade Runner presents the pervasiveness of advertising; Coca-Cola, TDK, neon signs are everywhere. The media blitz in Blade Runner acts as mind control. Television is pervasive. The pervasive power of the Tyrell Corporation is also self-evident. The Tyrell Corporation is a social engineer. Yet there is the contradiction that the Corporation that creates the replicants must also kill them. And it does so without a shred of remorse. Replicants threaten to make humans superfluous and take their place. For the corporate leaders life is dispensable and the profit motive underlines all decisions. Concentrations of power are presented as sinister and abusive in this film.

Blade Runner invites you to define the nature of reality? Artificiality pervades the world of Blade Runner, embodied in the owl, the snake and people. Reality is problematic in Blade Runner. It can be created, manipulated, implanted, exploited, misused. Nothing is really what it seems in the world of the film. This is the point of the replicants’ artificial memories. The replicants cling to their ‘memories’, created and implanted as cushions for their non-humanness.

The symbolism and imagery of Blade Runner all underline its concerns. There are the parallels between the baby spiders killing their mother and the replicants killing Tyrell, the eye as a mirror of our own image and a window into to soul, the connection of each of the characters with an animal, the tobacco haze that hangs over the film, a symbol of dissipation and self-indulgence and the acid rain which suffuses Los Angeles.
alternative readings of Blade Runner

a feminist perspective

Is the film misogynistic? This just means that there is a view that women in the film are seen in an unfavourable light by the filmmaker, Ridley Scott. This is often called a feminist reading. The brutal slaying of both Zhora and Pris by Deckard can both be viewed as misogynistic, especially the way in which they are committed. Both characters are cravenly shot in the back, the horror of Zhora’s death being amplified by the slow motion crashing through the series of glass panes as she stumbles towards her death. She is depicted as defenceless and vulnerable, as she runs for her life, hunted down like a rabid dog. The viewer is shown the bloody body in explicit detail, which is also heightened by her transparent clothes. Deckard's 'regret' at having shot her in such a cowardly way is also seen, but this, it does not water down the brutality of Deckard's act. And Deckard knows it.

Similarly, the murder of Pris can be seen as an act of misogyny. Although Deckard and Pris are shown in a battle of life and death, and the viewer sees the possible demise of Deckard as Pris clamps her thighs around his neck, Pris, like Zhora, is finally shot in the back. Her violent death throes (one of the most horrific scenes in the film) and clinging to life are evidence of another innocent victim. All she wants is life. A feminist reading would argue that both Zhora and Pris are seen as sex objects by the filmmaker. Pris is a 'pleasure model' and Zhora is an exotic dancer who is highly sexualised, evidenced in the shower scene in the nightclub. They are seen through male eyes, as objects of male desire.

Another issue in Blade Runner, which has been the topic of feminist reading, is the question of women’s rights to determine how they control their own bodies. Some feminist critics have decried the 20th practice of men (researchers, doctors, geneticists) attempting to usurp the reproductive role of women, which implies a drive to achieve total control over the body, particularly the female body. So the film can be seen as a heterosexist critique of male appropriation of the female body; men determining and controlling women's lives without women's consent.

There are other gender issues in the film as well. There is a suggestion that Rachael is a spider woman, a woman who uses her sexual allure to trap and deceive males. There is reference to this when Deckard describes the spiders to Rachael. This is problematic, all the same, as Rachael finds it hard to respond to Deckard's sexual advances. It is this scene in which Deckard coerces Rachael to kiss him that can also be seen as another example of males exerting physical strength over women. Why is Deckard so persistent? Should he have backed off after Rachael's reluctance? In all these cases women are seen as the 'Other', either eliminated or seen as deceptive or submissive.
Blade Runner as a racist text

Is Blade Runner a racist text? Does the film stereotype Asians? Where are the African-Americans in the film? There are some critics who view the film as one that excludes or trivialises races other than whites. Asians are either street vendors, entrepreneurial or in the case of Chew, the eye geneticist, a super-intelligent scientist, who speaks with a cliched accent. There is a definite ‘white’ emphasis in the representation of Roy with his Aryan looks, and the use of Harrison Ford, a noted male sex symbol. Blade Runner contains many races and sub-cultural groups but no African-Americans. Is this a racist oversight?
Genetic engineering and its ethics are the most obvious issue that you could explore. With the cloning of animals (sheep, pigs) you must ask yourself if this should be extended to humans and the production of a bank of body parts. Recent statements by President Bill Clinton regarding the Human Genome Project are another possible issue for you to explore.

You should consult your teacher about the different sorts of questions that you are going to encounter in the VCE examination. There is a new approach to this in 2000. One will focus on style, structure and tone and the other will focus on issues and themes, narrative and characterisation.

1. ‘Ridley Scott's intention in the film is to explore the question of true humanity.’ Discuss.

2. ‘I've seen many things you people wouldn't believe. Attacked ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. Watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.’ What does Roy Batty teach Deckard about being human?

3. ‘The film shows that, when technology dominates humanity has no place.’ Do you agree?

4. ‘The film Blade Runner is too pessimistic in its view of the future.’ Discuss.

5. ‘L.A. of 2019 is a claustrophobic and uninspiring city. Only Ridley Scott's visual and sound techniques save the film.’ Discuss.

6. In Ridley Scott's bleak view of the future, Deckard had no more autonomy, no more control over his life than do the replicants.’ Do you agree?

7. ‘Memories and photographs are unreliable: relationships are the only true witnesses to the past.’ Discuss.

8. ‘Blade Runner shows us a world in which the faults and shortcomings of our society are magnified.’ Do you agree?

9. ‘The techniques used by the filmmaker in Blade Runner involve us emotionally. They do not add to our understanding of the story.’ Discuss.
oral presentation - ‘hot seat’, a role-play based on Blade Runner

Form your own group in which you ask characters from the film about their motives and actions at various stages of the film. Each student in each group must take on a character’s role as you perceived and interpreted it in the film. Students must not introduce any personal opinion. You can be asked about your thoughts and feelings at any stage of the narrative, but focus on your attitude to the characters as they are presented in Blade Runner. The rest of the group has to ask the questions to draw out your response. Each person in the group must have at least ONE role to play and take it in turns to be interrogated. The interrogation for each character should last about five minutes. The group might like to formulate relevant questions for each character before starting the role-play. Some examples follow. You should do the same for characters that I have not included here.

**Deckard:** Why did you shoot two women in the back?

**Gaff:** How much do you know about who is a replicant?

**Bryant:** Are you a racist?

**Roy:** Why did you kill Tyrell?

**Tyrell:** What are your motives in creating the replicants?

**Rachael:** How did you feel when Deckard denied your memories of your family?
A number of resources and articles will help you put together your own teaching and learning materials on the film.

Inside Stories, Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, 1998
Blade Runner - BFI Modern Classics, Scott Bukatman, BFI, 1999
Web site http://scribble.com/uwi/br/off-world

**ROBOCOP** (Paul Verhoeven 1987)
In the corrupt, crime-ridden Detroit of the future, a multi-national conglomerate has assumed control of the Police Department. Law is now a business and profit essential. When Officer Murphy, (Peter Weller) is brutally murdered by vicious criminals, his body is transformed into a cyborg: Half-man, Half-robot - ROBOCOP. Equipped with the fastest reflexes modern technology can offer, onboard computer-assisted memory and a lifetime of on-the-street law enforcement, ROBOCOP launches into a relentless quest to serve, uphold and protect. Features non-stop action, comic book humour and electrifying special effects.

**TANK GIRL** (Rachel Talalay 1995)
The year is 2033 and water is a precious commodity. In the desolate windswept plains, animals are banned, bathing is unheard of, and the Water & Power Company, headed by the villainous Kesslee (Malcolm McDowell), have ultimate control over the precious water. One rebel girl stands in their way, Rebecca (Lori Petty), a ‘chick’ with attitude and an outrageous hairstyle. Water & Power capture her when they kill her boyfriend, kidnap her young friend, and try to blackmail her into joining their team. As a prisoner Rebecca discovers a new passion - tanks, and makes a friend with mechanic and pilot, Jet Girl (Naomi Watts), who helps her escape. Once free, the girls join forces with The Rippers, an army of half men and half kangaroos, genetically modified to be the ultimate fighting machines. Together they take Water & Power head on, lead by Jet Girl in the sky and Tank Girl on the ground with her beloved tank in a flurry of live action and comic strip visuals.

**THE RUNNING MAN** (Paul Michael Glaser 1988)
The year is 2019. All that has survived of the 20th century is television. Television is a new and twisted form of entertainment where the most powerful program on the air is a high-stakes, high-tech game show. ‘The Running Man’ is a deadly futuristic cat and mouse carnival in which contestants battle for the ultimate prize - survival! Based on the novel by Richard Backman, this was rated one of the best action movies of the year.

**THE TERMINATOR** (James Cameron 1984)
Arnold Schwarzenegger is the "Terminator", a deadly cyborg - part man, part machine, sent back from the future to present day Los Angeles. His mission is to kill an unsuspecting young woman, Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton). Her only hope for survival lies with a guerilla fighter (Michael Biehan), also from the future, whose task it is to protect her at all costs. A trail of destruction and violence follows in the wake of their desperate struggle to escape the Terminator. This is a gripping science-fiction thriller, packed with action, suspense, terrific special effects and just the right amount of dark humour.

**TERMINATOR 2: JUDGEMENT DAY** (James Cameron 1991)
Sequel to The Terminator. The story resumes several years later in present day Los Angeles. A cybernetic assassin and bodyguard are sent back from the future. This time the target is John Connor (Edward Furlong), Sarah’s son. The story revolves around the conflict between two terminators over the boy’s life and ultimately the future of the human race. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Robert Patrick are suitably impressive and menacing as the two cyborgs, but in the words of James Cameron, the director, the ‘real’ terminator is Linda Hamilton as Sarah Connor. Her transformation from desperate prey, in the original film, to vigilant guerilla is riveting. At the time of its release, Terminator 2: Judgement Day was the most expensive film ever made at a cost of $100 million. Fans of action adventure and mind-boggling special effects will not be disappointed.
Welcome to the study guide on Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner: The Director’s Cut.

The guide deals with how you ‘read’ and interpret visual images in film, generally, and how you reach an understanding of a film’s meaning.

Background information, interpretations and analyses of Blade Runner are all provided. There are also a number of suggested activities which will enable you to understand and discuss this complex film.

This study guide is intended for both teachers and students.