



**UNIVERSITAT  
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**CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION**

**Is Blade Runner from 1982 a good representation of the world today?  
Analysis of the movie**

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## **1. Summary and plot of the movie**

The movie Blade Runner was first released in the year 1982. It was directed by Ridley Scott, a famous British producer and director (IMDb, n.d.). The movie was set in Los Angeles, USA, in November 2019 and shows the world as a dark, divergent and overcrowded place where technology has immensely advanced and created robots so similar to humans that it is impossible to distinguish between them. The artificial humans were called the replicants, and could copy a human being in every way except in emotions. However, throughout the movie, this has been questioned as some of them has shown the ability of developing feelings as well, making them even closer to people.

The replicants are not allowed to live on Earth and therefore, the police in Los Angeles has hired blade runners – special agents whose duty is to hunt, recognize and execute replicants. As seen at the very beginning of the movie, the only way blade runners can reveal a replicant is the Voight-Kampff test. It is a test that consists of different questions regarding emotional situations and actions in their lives, while scanning and observing the examinees' pupils with a specialized technology, in order to detect different behaviors.

After affirming that four replicants illegally came to Earth, the police hires best of the best blade runners, Rick Deckard. Although in the beginning he did not want to go along with it and perform this task because he was already retired, in the end he agrees and discusses details with the chief officer. The officer shows him pictures of the four refugee replicants (Roy – the leader, Leon, Zhora and Pris) and hereupon his mission begins. The first step was meeting with the creator of the replicants – Mr Eldon Tyrell, the founder and owner of Tyrell Corporation. Deckard meets him at his office, which, by its characteristics and appearance, clearly shows the power and influence the corporation has. In order for Tyrell to verify the Voight-Kampff test, he asks Deckard to perform the test on his assistant, Rachael. After a long lasting and exhaustive testing, Deckard comes to a conclusion that Rachael is actually a replicant, but she is not aware of it. He confronts Tyrell who explains she was an experiment to show is it possible to implement memories in the replicants as a form of emotional factor.

Deckard continues his search and deals with the replicants one by one. His mission is not as simple as the replicants are a part of Nexus 6 generation which implies they are stronger and faster than regular humans. In the meantime Deckard finds out the real reason they rebelled – their lifetime is only four years, leaving them only a short period to live. Thus, their plan is to get to Tyrell, their creator, and force him to ‘fix’ them. While they are trying to get to Tyrell using both force and intelligence, Deckard succeeds in retiring (in the movie instead of murdering replicants, they use the term ‘retire’) the first one. Afterwards the officer orders him to retire Rachael as well, which he doesn’t seem to be willing to do. Then, another replicant attacks Deckard and Rachael saves his life.

After this event, an interesting plot occurs in the movie as Rachael and Deckard start falling in love. The two worlds merge. In the meantime, the two remaining replicants (which seem to be a couple) are trying to get to Tyrell over one of his employees, J.F. Sebastian, who is responsible for developing the replicants’ mind. The interesting thing is that they are trying to convince him to take them to Tyrell (who is usually a very hard person to reach) using empathy. As J.F. Sebastian has a disease that makes him age very quickly, his lifetime is also restricted as theirs. The replicants used that situation and finally persuaded J.F. Sebastian to take them to Tyrell. When he did so, the leader killed Tyrell since Tyrell was not able to give them what they asked for. They asked for life, however he said there is nothing he can do now as they are already programmed to live only four years.

Coming to an end, Deckard firstly retires one of the two remaining replicants, and then confronts the last one – the leader himself. After a barbarous struggle, Deckard runs for his life and ends up hanging of a building, when at the last moment the replicant leader Roy saves him. Before dying, Roy talks about all the things he saw in his short life, with sadness in his eyes. As he dies, a white dove flies away, possibly representing peace and pureness. In the end of the movie, Racheal and Deckard run away together.

## **2. Analysis**

The movie has shown an interesting approach to the future and developing world. Different aspects, such as technology, population, environment and distribution of power were considered and projected in the movie. In the following paragraphs, those aspects will be analyzed.

### **2.1 Technology**

Firstly, the movie has shown an extensive advance in technology. Flying cars, robot servants, artificial animals and, above all, artificial humans. None of those actually exists today. Although there is an emphasis on technology improvement and development in the movie, some of the predictions they have made are a bit misjudged. For instance, the world seems to be so advanced that the great minds were able to create a being superior to human, while at the same time looking and acting in the same way as humans, but then again there are no mobile phones or laptops. There are flying cars, but they still look like old-timers. There are video calls, but people are still using payphones (a video payphone). Then, in the movie we saw that Decker was relying on his 'printed' pictures, whereas today everything is digital so most probably this would not be the case. Furthermore, the lights in Decker's apartment were automatized (whenever he would enter a different room the light would turn on by itself), however his flat was not very modern. His TV was a big box, kitchen was very simple and with no additional equipment that people regularly use today (microwave or other similar devices) etc. Even the office of Tyrell in the mighty Tyrell Corporation seemed very unmodern comparing to today's design of big organizations.

Moreover, one innovation was particularly interesting as it showed an idea of a really advanced technology. It was the device Decker used for analysis of his pictures. He placed the picture in the device and then only by using voice orders he was able to analyze details and extract needed information. Although it seems unlikely that from one specific photo he obtained so many details, it was still an interesting approach and concept of technology.

All in all, we can see that in the movie they perceived the world to be a very technologically advanced place where everything is robotized and automatized. This can be seen even from

the simplest examples – traffic lights which, with a severe robot voice, indicated to pedestrians when was it safe to cross the street, and when not. In the first case the robot voice would repeat: “Cross now, cross now...” and in the opposite: “Don’t walk, don’t walk...”.

## **2.2 Environment**

According to the movie, the prediction for the year 2019 and the future in general was darkness. Not even one sun ray has been seen or felt by the citizens throughout the movie. The only time the sun was slightly exposed was when introducing Tyrell Corporation, most probably as a form of expressing power. Nevertheless, the rain never stopped pouring, there were no lights, and Los Angeles seemed like a black hole. There were no colors, only a few commercials on the giant screen. People were smoking everywhere, including bars and offices, which shows in 1982 they probably didn’t expect rise of the ‘health trends’ that we witness today. The environment seemed threatened and hopeless, while people were walking in the crowd without many interest. Polluted air, lack of trees or plants of any kind, together with the lack of sun, have led to animal species extinction. This could be seen from the fact that, in the movie, there was a need to develop artificial animals for personal use, as they mentioned real animals were too expensive. Only two animals have shown up in the movie and both were artificial – an owl and a snake (there was also the dove in the end, but it wasn’t very clear was it real or not). Also, the choice of the animals itself (an owl and a snake) could represent darkness and night.

So, Blade Runner perceived the future of our world to be very dark and negative – more pollution, more dark and more cold, assuming less sun, less animals and poorer nature.

## **2.3 Population**

Urbanization, overcrowded city, increase in population. All of those characteristics were present in the movie. The streets were congested, showing that the predictions for the future were overall increase in population.

Another aspect considered in the movie was merging cultures. It was clearly visible how Asians had an impact on The West as half of the people in the movie (not to say most of

them) were Asian and they were speaking Chinese. Also, most of the commercials and ads were in Chinese. Taking demographics into account, it is reasonable they assumed Chinese population will keep increasing fast and due to globalization, cultures would fuse more and more over time.

## **2.4 Distribution of power and influence**

Even in this world of chaos and darkness, distribution of power and influence can be distinguished. Tyrell Corporation was presented as an exceptional organization with a genius CEO who developed the worlds' most advanced technology. He had the control and the world in his hands, while others had to subordinate him. This could be seen from the position of his building, the magnitude of the pillars in his office (which represent strength), and also from the fact that the only time when the sun was showing in the movie, it was through his window. Also, when the replicants tried to reach him, they had to go over several people to finally be able to see him, as he was presented as a very important person with a lot of influence that is almost impossible to reach.

Following the elite, humans were on the second level of the hierarchy, while the replicants were considered as their property and slaves. The problem arised when the replicants started to generate feelings and emotions, making them almost the same as regular humans. The question here is where to draw a line and how to separate them from humans then. Should they even be separated or maybe not? Obviously, the elite would not allow such thing as the replicants are their products, and therefore, should only serve their purpose, without many deprecation. For this reason, the replicants rebelled and asked for life since they considered they have the right to live as everyone else.

## **3. Evaluation – a good representation of the world today or not?**

Considering the movie was made almost 40 years ago when the technology, demographics and environment attributes were quite different from today, it is very interesting to see what were they expecting from the future and in which way they thought the world will evolve. Some of their predictions were more close to the world today, and some of them less.

Starting with technology, it could be said they were more wrong than right. Although technology actually has extremely advanced in the last years (and is expected to develop even more over time), the way it emerged was not quite as they thought it will be. There are no flying cars, no artificial animals, nor artificial super-humans. Any of the designs from the movie are not present in today's world, which implies their predictions regarding the velocity of technology changing wasn't so accurate. However, if we focus on the main idea of the rapid growth of technology, instead of the technology products themselves and their design, the movie has in fact forecasted a robotized and automatized world where people depend more and more on technology, which, undeniably, is the case today.

Similar observations could be stressed regarding the environment. As previously mentioned, they perceived the world to be excessively dark and polluted. No sun whatsoever and the amount of smog led to animal species extinction, making the world a sorrowful place to live in. Likewise, there were no trees, parks or any green areas. The rain never stopped pouring and the whole concept seemed like an environmental catastrophe. Now, although today's world is facing severe environmental challenges, it has not yet reached that level. The following pictures describe the world in Blade Runner, compared to the Los Angeles city today.

**Figure 1: Comparison: Los Angeles in Blade Runner and Los Angeles today**

**a) Los Angeles in Blade Runner**



Source: Rugoleor, 2015

**b) Los Angeles today**



Source: Viator, 2019



As seen on the pictures, the difference is quite big. The reality in Blade Runner seems a lot more destructive than today's world. Although in the movie the city was full of high buildings and skyscrapers, same as it is today, the atmosphere feels different. In Blade Runner, the darkness prevails and the city gives an impression of a robot world that reminds of space (because of the total darkness and the amount of buildings from which little light comes out through their windows, creating an image of stars). As for the sun and nature, we can see that the situation today is not as bad as they predicted it to be. There is still sunlight, trees, water, green surface and lots of animals. However, although comparing the pictures they look like two different worlds, in fact there is some truth in their forecast for our environment. As already said, we have not yet reached this critical level as the movie describes, but our world is facing some serious environmental and ecological problems. Global warming, emissions, pollution, as well as water, energy and other resource scarcity are just some of them. Because of irresponsible way the humanity lives, the question arises as to whether or not people will be able to redress those challenges. As a form raising awareness on those issues in the world, the United Nation has established 17 Sustainable Development Goals and urged countries and organizations to get involved in projects on that topic in order to create a better world (SDG, n.d.). However, how and to what extent are these measures going to help us, is to be seen in future.

Furthermore, overpopulated streets, urbanism and world population growth in general that were predicted in the movie have shown to be more-less accurate. Our world is globalizing which implies mixing and blending of cultures, as they tried to demonstrate in the movie by using both Chinese and English language in a multinational environment. From Blade Runner, it could be understood they assumed greater influence and growth of Chinese population in future, which has also occurred. It could be said that, in a way, the movie has predicted high level of joining cultures in future, which we are witnessing today.

Finally, how could we compare the distribution of power in the world today with the one from Blade Runner? Well, although the movie was fiction, there are a lot of aspects that can be spotted in the society today. As already mentioned, Tyrell Corporation was presented as a powerful organization who was on the top of the hierarchy. It can be seen as the elite that

controls the world and has the most influence of all. Reflecting the society today, Tyrell Corporation could be identified as the 1% of the richest who own more than half of the world's wealth. They are the ones with power in their hands and get to make all the important decisions. However, yet they only operate according to their own interest, neglecting needs/desires of the middle and lower class and the society as a whole. In the movie, this could be seen in Tyrell's behavior – he created the replicants for his own purposes and performed experiments on them without caring about possible consequences for the replicants. For instance, when he installed memories in Rachael, he just wanted to see if she will be able to develop emotions and live in a belief that she is human, without considering the negative impact this will have on her if she actually does develop feelings.

Furthermore, the revolt of the replicants can be considered as another correspondence to today's world. They believed they were entitled to life as other human beings because, in the end, the difference between them was negligible. In the beginning of the movie, the replicants inability of developing emotions was underlined as the only reason they are more categorized as robots. However, throughout the movie we saw Rachael developing feelings for Deckard, as well as Roy saving Deckard in the end of the movie, proving his humanity. Nevertheless, today we witness lots of revolts due to people believing they are mistreated or because of injustice or inequality of some kind.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Blade Runners' forecast for the future has shown it does have something in common with today's world - a world that is out of control, only in a different way. While the environmental catastrophe has not yet reached the darkness and the critical level as described in the movie, our society is struggling to live and maintain good health and atmosphere. As for technology, the idea of the rapid growth and increased utilization of it has indeed come true, thus people tend to depend more and more on it. However, none of the main technological products presented in the movie – such as flying cars, robots servants, artificial animals and artificial humans are not existent today. On the contrary, the predictions regarding population growth, urbanization and merge of cultures bear great resemblance to today's world. Lastly, power and influence of the Tyrell Corporation from the movie can be identified in our society as well. One way of interpretation would be the 1% of the richest that have control and power over the rest of the world. Also, other members of our society who have been denied certain rights are revolting, like the replicants in Blade Runner. The most common reasons are inequality, injustice and urge for better life.

Overall, Blade Runner has shown how in 1982 they have perceived the world to be and to develop over time, while some aspects were more accurate, and other less. Regardless, the movie is known as one of the all-time science-fiction classics that even today, almost 40 years later, is still reputable.

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