The Posthuman in a Retrofuturistic World

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts In English

Haverford College

Haverford, Pennsylvania

April 6, 2017
Introduction

Ridley Scott’s 1982 film *Blade Runner* presents a dystopian and frighteningly prophetic vision of the near future, at a time not only when commercialization, pollution, and industrialization have reached new heights, but also when artificial intelligence has become nearly indistinguishable from human intelligence. The film takes place in 2019 Los Angeles and follows a police detective, called a blade runner, named Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), who is charged with finding and killing four escaped androids who have fled an offworld colony for Earth. The androids are a new model called Nexus 6 replicants, indistinguishable from humans in every way but their internal composition, and were created by the mysterious technocratic Tyrell Corporation. The humans, fearing this resemblance, have banned all replicants from Earth so that they cannot integrate into society and threaten mankind’s solitary dominance. One of the central themes of *Blade Runner* is the conflict between man and machine - creator and created.

The film is rich with cinematic and literary heritage. Containing elements of both film noir and science fiction, *Blade Runner* is aware of Hollywood history and exploits this history in order to forge its own unique identity. Though the film is an adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, it owes more allegiance to Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel, *Frankenstein*, and James Whale’s 1931 film of the same name. In order to understand the final monologue of Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), the film’s leading replicant, one must read *Blade Runner* through a historical lense. The climactic showdown between Rick Deckard and Roy Batty, man and machine, past and future, is a collision of the film’s lineages of noir and science fiction in what is ultimately a retelling
of the *Frankenstein* myth. Just as *Blade Runner* itself, as a film, is the result of decades of technological improvements in cinema, Roy Batty, as the representative of the successful posthuman, is the result of countless iterations and improvements (both imagined in the world of the film and in actual literary history) which began in Mary Shelley’s novel. Roy Batty is able to transcend his mechanical origins and display real human emotions. His ultimate revelation suggests that there is hope, at least for the replicants, of surviving in a world destroyed and dehumanized by technology. Is there any hope for the humans of such a world? *Blade Runner*’s status as a descendant of literary and cinematic traditions positions it as a piece that must confront the conflict of *Frankenstein* in an age of advanced cyber technology, where the line between creator and created is even more uncertain.

## I. *Blade Runner* and Genre

It seemed natural that Harrison Ford would take the role of Rick Deckard in *Blade Runner*. Coming hot off the success of George Lucas’ *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg’s *Indiana Jones*, Ford had cemented his status as the grouchy-but-likeable action hero. Audiences were therefore caught off guard with *Blade Runner* when they were presented with an atmospheric and slow meditation instead of another swashbuckling fantasy adventure. As a result, *Blade Runner* was not initially successful, and though it was received well by critics the film was not accepted by general audiences until years later. Such a reception for *Blade Runner* is understandable as the film itself grapples with time displacement, expectations, and genre boundaries. In his
article “Science Fiction as Medium: Film,” Mark Bould defines genres as “not objects that already exist in the world but fluid and tenuous discursive constructions formed by the interactions of various claims made and practices undertaken by writers, producers, distributors, marketers, readers, fans, critics, and other discursive and material agents” (Bould, 157). Thus, to define Blade Runner’s genre, one must look at both the source text of the film and of the cinematic tradition from which it emerges.

Philip K. Dick’s 1968 short novel, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (DADOES), is the source text of Blade Runner. Though the narrative skeletons of the novel and film are roughly similar, there are critical differences between them. Ridley Scott made many creative decisions to differentiate his film from its novelistic source. Dudley Andrew’s essay, “Adaptation,” defines this sort of transfer as “Intersecting,” where many elements of the original text are not assimilated into the adaptation, and though there are many commonalities, the spirits of the two works are different (Andrew, 374). He writes on the interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period with the cinematic forms of another - in other words, “the intersection of the flashlight of cinema on the chandelier of the novel” (374). Thus, Andrew concludes, “the study of adaptation is tantamount to the study of cinema as a whole” (Andrew, 378). Blade Runner draws its premise from Dick’s novel, but its essence owes more allegiance to the cinematic traditions of the twentieth century from which it descends.
Science Fiction and Film Noir

*Blade Runner* borrows heavily from both science fiction and film noir. The film exists in a liminal space between the two genres, displaced both thematically and temporally. Kaja Silverman, in her essay “Back to the Future,” writes: “*Blade Runner* is simultaneously science fiction and film noir, it points both forward and backwards in time” (Silverman, 109). Taking place in 2019 Los Angeles, but imagined in 1982, the film looks just thirty-seven years into the future and predicts dire circumstances. The setting is quintessential to science fiction, which Bould describes the field as “the literature of cognitive estrangement” which “depicts materially rationalized counterfactual worlds” (163). The opening of *Blade Runner* epitomizes this claim. After the expository credits and text describing the replicants and the job of the Blade Runners, the viewer is thrust into 2019 Los Angeles through a long aerial shot that scours the constructed, crowded, and polluted urban sprawl (*BR*, 3:20). In Mark Lussier’s and Kaitlin Gowan’s essay, “The Romantic Roots of Blade Runner,” the authors claim that this shot possesses romantic, gothic, and sublime aesthetics, and that it evokes John Martin’s hellish depictions of *Paradise Lost* (Lussier and Gowan, 165). Pillars of fire shoot from smokestacks as flying cars whiz by overhead. The city stretches out forever into the night, for it is always night in *Blade Runner*, and the enormous pyramids of the Tyrell Corporation are visible through the haze in the distance (*BR*, 3:57). Though this shot calls upon the Romantic period, it is firmly rooted in science fiction cinema. Bould writes that science fiction, and film as a whole “has, since its origin, been as concerned with spectacle as with narrative” (Bould, 163). To
reinforce the power of this spectacle, Scott includes two brief shots in between the long
takes of the city - both close ups of the same eye with the belching flames and city lights
reflected in its blue pupil (BR, 4:20). To whom does the eye belong? The film never
attempts to explain or integrate these shots any further. Only after watching the film
does it becomes clear that the eye belongs to Roy Batty, leader of the escaped
replicants and the embodiment of the film’s science fiction heritage. The audience is
seeing the world through his eye, or more specifically, the artificial world through his
artificial eye.

If Batty is the representative of science fiction in *Blade Runner*, than Rick
Deckard is that of film noir. After a brief scene that introduces Leon, another one of the
four escaped replicants, the film’s focus returns to the exterior of the city. This time the
point of view is lower than the initial urban shot; the camera is positioned at about half
the height of the all encompassing skyscrapers (BR, 7:45). A giant video billboard
featuring an east-Asian woman fills the screen in what is the first signifier that *Blade
Runner*’s Los Angeles is a “racial and ethnic meltdown” (Silverman, 114). Next, the
viewer is taken down to the congested street level. Overhead, a blimp floats by
advertizing the offworld colonies and a better life, that is, for those who can afford it. The
masses push past each other, step over trash, and carry fluorescent umbrellas as
protection from the tumultuous acid rain. In the background Rick Deckard rests against
a shop window, one crammed with flashing television screens, while reading a
newspaper (BR, 8:12). Already looking the part of the noir hero in his trench coat,
Harrison Ford’s voice over confirms Deckard’s role: “They don’t advertise for killers in
the newspaper. That was my profession. Ex-cop, ex-blade runner, ex-killer” (*BR*, 8:45).

Ford delivers the lines in a deadpan, disinterested manner, evoking the narrations of classic noir movies of 1940’s and 1950’s Hollywood. In his essay “Notes on Film Noir,” Paul Schrader labels “The Hard-Boiled Tradition” as a defining element of noir which features the ‘tough,’ or a protagonist with a cynical way of acting or thinking that isolates him in his defeatist attitude (Schrader, 585). This tradition is not only evident in Deckard’s monologue, but also in his forlorn look towards the blimp in the sky which calls out to the masses below: “A new life awaits you in the off-world colony. The chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure. New climate, recreational facilities…” (*BR*, 8:35). Deckard ignores the advertisement in a sign of apathy which reinforces the notion that he is hopeless and has no chance for a future, and is a stylistic element of noir identified by Schrader (586). The humans of *Blade Runner*’s Los Angeles are the remainder who could not afford to buy a ticket to the new colonies. They are the underprivileged leftovers who, either through medical defects or poverty, were denied escape from their hellish city.

Although film noir has been previously referred to in this essay as a genre, Schrader writes that noir is not so much a genre as it is a tone, mood, and period of film history ranging from 1941 to 1953 (Schrader, 581). Some of the major themes of noir identified are loss, nostalgia, insecurity, and a fear of the future (587). From a narrative standpoint, film noir narratives are characterized by a lone-wolf private eye (Deckard), political corruption, police routine, and a blurred line between the protagonist and antagonist (587-9). The themes and narrative elements of noir appear persistently
throughout *Blade Runner*, and are all present in Deckard’s introduction through his monologue and actions. The scene reinforces the noir elements in its visual presentation. Paul Schrader writes, “in film noir, the central character is likely to be standing *in* the shadow” (Schrader, 586). This is replicated in Deckard’s positioning as he leans against the shop window, nearly unnoticeable in the equal light emphasis between actor and setting. Additionally, the weather of *Blade Runner* helps to cement its status as film noir; this scene takes place at night in the pouring rain, a classic noir setting. Rain is so important in film noir that Schrader writes: “there seems to be an almost Freudian attachment to water...and the rainfall tends to increase in direct proportion to the drama” (Schrader, 586). The intensity of the rainfall becomes central in the final showdown between Deckard and Batty at the end of the film. Though this early scene is abundant with film noir references, *Blade Runner* itself is not quite film noir, nor is it a strictly science fiction film. Instead, a combination of these two traditions reveals a better paradigm which with to examine the film - retrofuturism.

**Retrofuturism**

Elizabeth Guffey’s and Kate C. Lemay’s essay “Retrofuturism and Steampunk” identifies the term “retrofuturism” as a style that emerged in the 1970’s as a nostalgic look at what was once considered the future, but marked by a scepticism that such a future will emerge (Guffey and Lemay, 435). *Blade Runner* imagines such a world, where “the future is made to look regressive” (Redmond, 174) and technology has brought about dystopia. Guffey and Lemay argue that pure futurism was born out of the
Industrial Revolution on the precepts that technology will bring about utopia.

Inventor-heroes such as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford embodied the popular obsession with applied science and mechanical improvement (436). These industrial values had implications in film as well. George Méliès’ 1902 film “A Trip to the Moon” is considered the first science fiction movie ever made and combines the practical special effects available at the time, such as painted sets, smoke machines, and crafty editing, to imagine an exciting future with scientists as the leaders. Dziga Vertov, an avid Soviet futurist, directed “Man with a Movie Camera” in 1929, which is a testament to the observational power of the camera, the mechanical eye, and celebrates its increasingly prevalent role in the world. Futurism was popular in both film and literature for most of the twentieth century, but by the 1970’s that framework took on a darker role. The Vietnam War, confrontation of social inequalities, and ecological concerns gave birth to a darker vision of the future, one where the promised technological utopia failed to appear (Guffey and Lemay, 437).

Thus, retrofuturism was born as a style that describes how we once imagined the future, and how such memory is complicated in the era of postmodernism (Guffey and Lemay, 434). As science fiction transports the viewer out of the present and into the future, retrofuturism throws the viewer into a temporally impossible alternate reality where past and present collide. In a retrofuturistic world, there is no faith, little hope for the future, and a surplus of nostalgia. Blade Runner exists in such a world. Technology, instead of improving the world and its citizens, has degraded both parties to gasping, wheezing, and dying relics of their past selves. In Sean Redmond’s “Purge! Class
Pathology in *Blade Runner*, the author draws many parallels between 2019 Los Angeles and its inhabitants. Redmond claims that *Blade Runner* is predominantly preoccupied with urban disintegration, as “the city is a nightmare of globalization, capitalism, cyberpunk, and noir” (Redmond, 180). Instead of being an ultramodern city, the Los Angeles of the film is dirty and dying. The scene in which Pris, one of the escaped replicants, meets J.F. Sebastian, a genetic engineer who works for the Tyrell Corporation, epitomizes the themes of erosion and loss which radiate from the city and its inhabitants.

**Neo-Romanticism**

Pris, one of the escaped replicants and Roy Batty’s lover, is described to Deckard as “a basic pleasure model” (*BR*, 15:37), implying that the replicants are used for other functions than just doing hazardous labor. When Pris first appears in the film, she is wandering the streets of Los Angeles alone and disguised as a human prostitute. She looks up to the sky and sees the same blimp which Deckard gazes at in his introduction (*BR*, 37:30). For Pris, the ‘off-world!’ advertisement flashing on the blimp has a starkly different connotation than it does for Deckard. She has fled the very destination Los Angeles’ citizens wish to escape to. To them it is salvation, but to her it is enslavement. Her gaze drops back down to street level as she walks towards the Bradbury Building amid wind-swept debris and garbage. The Bradbury Building is a historic Los Angeles landmark which has become forgotten and dilapidated in *Blade Runner*’s world. Though the building has no connection to science fiction author Ray
Bradbury, the name nonetheless evokes the landmark author of the genre, deepening the connection between *Blade Runner* and its science fiction roots.

Pris takes shelter from the oppressive rain and flashing lights under the entranceway to the Bradbury Building, and it is not long before J.F. Sebastian, a genetic engineer for the Tyrell Corporation, pulls up and finds her on his front porch. Not knowing that she is a replicant, Sebastian is kind to Pris, and she earns his sympathy as well as an invitation inside (*BR*, 39:30). Pris giggles and acts frightened to earn Sebastian’s trust, but once he turns away to open the door the camera lingers on her face as her shy smile turns into a deadpan look of determination as the music darkens (*BR*, 40:00). When Pris comments that Sebastian must get lonely living all alone in an abandoned building he replies: “not really, I make friends. They’re toys, my friends are toys, I make them. It’s a hobby. I’m a genetic designer” (*BR*, 41:15). Sebastian’s apartment is riddled with his ‘friends’ - robotic creatures which resemble a cross between humans and cartoon characters. Sebastian’s sad living situation mirrors the sentiments of retrofuturism. Instead of improving his life, the technology that surrounds Sebastian further isolates him from any real human contact. Even Pris, whom he thinks is another person and with whom he is excited to interact, is a machine herself. Sebastian is utterly solitary in his obsession.

Later in *Blade Runner*, just before Batty arrives to Sebastian’s apartment to reunite with Pris, Sebastian is sleeping at his workshop table, seemingly holding court among his robotic constructions, his ‘friends’ who surround him (*BR*, 1:13:09). Pris is still in the apartment, and when she wakes Sebastian up and a point of view shot from
his perspective shows her red mechanical eyes glow through her artificial pupils (BR, 1:13:50). When Pris asks Sebastian his age, he replies that he is only twenty five, though he looks much older, and that he suffers from “Methuselah Syndrome,” which causes accelerated decrepitude and prevents him from passing the medical test to leave Earth for the off-world colonies. In her essay “Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner,” Giuliana Bruno identifies J.F. Sebastian’s accelerated decrepitude as a mirror to that of the Los Angeles of the film, which is itself a metaphor for the postmodern condition (Bruno, 65). Bruno writes that Blade Runner’s Los Angeles is “characterized by pastiche and schizophrenia” because it possesses “the aesthetics of decay, the dark side of technology, and corrosive disintegration” (Bruno, 62-5). The goal of postmodernism is a return to history, therefore the architecture of the film “bears different and previous orders of time and space” (Bruno, 66). The Bradbury Building itself, in which Sebastian lives alone, is a monument of historical glory which has fallen to the wayside. The building is dark, wet, and in ruin, much like the city itself.

Sebastian’s medical condition not only evokes the tropes of postmodernism and the aesthetics of the city, but also it is a connection to Roy and Pris. They too are plagued with accelerated decrepitude, in their case a four year lifespan which was installed by the Tyrell Corporation as a failsafe in case any of the replicants decided to revolt. When Roy appears in the apartment, he tells Sebastian: “we’ve got a lot in common, similar problems” (1:18:25). Sebastian does not seemed concerned with his fate, instead he only marvels at Roy and Pris, among his other creations. Sebastian’s apathy towards his own death is in stark contrast with the Nexus 6 replicants’ complete
obsession with theirs. Roy reveals to Sebastian that he has returned to Los Angeles in order to confront the Tyrell Corporation and find a way to remove the lifespan mechanism from himself and Pris. Peter Atterton, in his essay “More Human than Human” argues that to be human is to know that one is going to die, and to dread this eventual death (Atterton, 47). Thus, since the replicants of the film dread death more so than any real human, they themselves epitomize the human condition better than their organic creators. In this context, Roy is the true hero of the film. Though he has a distorted morality as he is willing to murder to achieve his ends, Atterton argues that “Blade Runner is about how truly valuable life is with the fact that there is nothing else” (Atterton, 48). Sebastian, like the other humans of the film, seems to be so preoccupied with his technological innovations that he is psychologically removed from his human condition and does not fear his deadly illness. Roy and Pris’ fear of death renders them more human than Sebastian.

Lussier and Gowan’s “The Romantic Roots of Blade Runner” explores the connections between Blade Runner, postmodernism and the major themes of the Romantic period. Lussier and Gowan identify three primary aspects of the Romantic period: a search for one’s origins, the aesthetics of the gothic and sublime, and a renunciation of the will (Lussier and Gowan, 166). All of these elements are present in J.F. Sebastian’s encounter with Roy and Pris, and it is fitting that Sebastian eventually leads Roy to Tyrell himself. Sebastian epitomizes the retrofuturistic citizen on Blade Runner - one who is completely absorbed in technology and suffers the consequences. He shows little emotion, and even in the company of Roy and Pris he is utterly solitary
in his humanity. Roy and Pris, on the other hand, are much more lively, capable, and have a very specific antecedent within the literary movement - Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

**II. Frankenstein**

Roy Batty’s struggle with his organic creators resembles the central conflict in Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel, *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*. In Shelley’s novel, a young and ambitious Swiss scientist named Victor Frankenstein creates “the Monster,” and eight foot tall creature assembled from various human corpses and infused with some mysterious chemicals which spark life. Victor is repulsed by his creation as soon as he takes his first breath. The Monster flees into the forest where he learns language over a period of several months, but he is repeatedly rejected by the humans with whom he comes into contact. Finally, the Monster returns to Victor, begging him to, if not accept him, at least create a female companion for him so that he can live in peace. Victor agrees, but destroys his second creation before she is completed. The Monster continues to haunt Victor, eventually killing his younger brother and finally Victor’s bride on the night of his wedding. The novel concludes with Victor chasing the Monster into the arctic where he finally succumbs to the cold.

*Blade Runner* takes multiple cues from *Frankenstein* in its dealing with the creator against his creation, a connection that Lussier and Gowan identify in the film as “the contemporary and mechanical mutation of *Frankenstein*” (167). Just as *Blade Runner* combines past and future in its inclusion of both film noir and science fiction, it
also disrupts temporality in its stance as a romantic and postmodern text. The film looks simultaneously backwards to the legacy of *Frankenstein* and forward to the perversion of this relationship through cyber technology. Both Roy Batty and the Monster are oppressed and rejected by their creator, and both are physically superior to their organic counterparts. Victor Frankenstein and Deckard (on the orders of Tyrell) reject their creations and attempt to take away this given life out of a fear of what such created beings could do in a world controlled by humans.

**Meeting Your Maker**

Roy convinces J.F. Sebastian to take him directly to Eldon Tyrell, the CEO of the Tyrell Corporation, by acting superficially friendly as Pris did before. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* contains the same confrontation between creator and created when Victor and the Monster meet atop the glacier Mer de Glace for the first time since the Monster awoke. Both the Monster and Roy seek the same thing from their makers; the Monster asks Victor to create a female companion with whom he can have a child, while Batty seeks an extension on his four year expiration date. The scene in Tyrell’s bedroom begins with Eldon Tyrell lying in bed surrounded by screens and voices updating him on stock developments. Tyrell himself operates as a machine, having no life of his own outside of his work. Sebastian calls in over the intercom and interrupts Tyrell’s workflow, ordering “Queen to bishop six, check” in reference to their ongoing chess game (1:21:05). As Tyrell unsuspectingly gets up from his bed to make the move on his own board, the camera offers a broader view of his bedroom. A fire glows to the right of the
screen and bathes the interior in a dark golden light. The old wood-sculpted furniture and candles on the walls evoke a scene from the gothic period. Tyrell makes his counter move, only for Batty to whisper the checkmate move to Sebastian. Batty and Sebastian are waiting in an elevator outside Tyrell’s room, and Roy knows that this is the only way he can gain entrance into the chamber. There were other ways for Batty to gain access to Tyrell’s room, but by beating Tyrell at chess, a game which represents the scale of a person’s intellect, Batty both threatens Tyrell and positions himself as intellectually superior. He proves that he is smarter than his creator and father.

Tyrell’s bedroom door opens, and in steps Batty. He approaches Tyrell menacingly, and he explains: “it’s not easy to meet your maker” (1:22:52). Like Frankenstein’s Monster, Batty requests an extension of life from his maker. However, Tyrell responds that such an intervention is “out of his jurisdiction” (1:23:34). Why is it impossible for Tyrell to extend Batty’s lifespan? In Frankenstein, Victor denies his creation because he fears what would happen if more of his monsters were brought into the world. Does Tyrell have such a philosophical opposition to preserving his creation? It is unlikely as he has produced countless others like Batty. Lussier and Gowan explain Tyrell’s and Victor’s reactions to their creations’ demands as concerning “the survival of the human species when faced with a potentially superior being” (Lussier and Gowan, 167). This fear becomes more evident in the film when Batty takes another step towards Tyrell, the mechanical iris of his eye glimmering in candlelight as he growls: “I want more life, fucker” (1:23:38). Actor Rutger Hauer blends the word, the only expletive in the film, with “father” in an Oedipal display of resentment (Silverman, 121).
Finally, Tyrell gives a scientific reason for why he cannot extend Batty’s life span; any alteration in the genetic code once it has been written would cause a fatal, adverse reaction. Batty twice fires back a possible solution, and each time Tyrell explains the complication (BR, 1:24:46). Is what Tyrell saying true, or does he merely want Batty to stop causing him trouble once his time expires? Unlike Victor Frankenstein who despises and is disgusted by his creation, Tyrell exhibits pride in Batty. Tyrell tells him: “you have burned so very, very brightly Roy. You’re the prodigal son. You’re quite a prize” (1:25:02). The prodigal son line will be reinforced during the film’s climax when Roy and Deckard square off atop the Bradbury Building. Lussier and Gowan write: “Batty is not a fallen angel, but a slave revolting against controlled consciousness” (Lussier and Gowan, 168). Tyrell’s only solution in this situation is to attempt to pacify Roy through soothing praises and compliments. Roy’s response indicates that Tyrell’s plan is working when he, conflicted, admits: “I’ve done questionable things.” Tyrell puts his hand on his ‘son’s’ head and unflinchingly replies: “also extraordinary things” (BR, 1:25:22). The exchange between Batty and Tyrell is so carefully planned, each response reinforcing or deconstructing the one before. Tyrell tries to appeal to Roy’s ego, to build him up and attempt to calm him down. Roy appears conflicted and plays along, though he has another plan in mind. Their exchange is just like a chess game.

Batty turns to Tyrell on the bed, and placing both hands on Tyrell’s face, leans in for a long kiss. As the music swells Batty tightens his grip and digs his thumbs into Tyrell’s eye sockets. The scene is shot in close up, first with a shot of the kiss of death, then Batty’s face as he grimaces in both raw passion and fear of his own actions. Scott
cuts to a shot of Batty’s thumbs covering Tyrell’s eyes, then back to Batty’s distressed face as we hear him digging into his creator. The red light of Roy’s mechanical iris can be seen glowing in his eyes, and this is juxtaposed with a close up shot of the face of Tyrell’s mechanical owl, the same red iris reflects briefly on screen, then the camera cuts back to Batty (1:25:30-1:26:10). This shot-reverse shot sequence pairs Batty and the owl, reminding us of what Batty really is - a machine. His actions are made all the more complex and powerful with the fact that he is truly a sentient, but mechanical, creation revolting against his creator and oppressor. Batty’s expression, a complex display of free will that is manifested on his very face, during this sequence is one of the film’s strongest arguments for the emotional capacity of the replicants.

The Posthuman

Both Roy Batty and Frankenstein’s Monster are posthuman entities.

Posthumanism, described by Colin Milburn in his article of the same name, is “a scientific fable that ventures beyond its own ends” (530). The posthuman subject is the synthetically engineered successor of humanity (524), one who is a “motley patchwork of social and technological resources” (533). Both Batty and Frankenstein’s Monster are such posthuman subjects. They live alongside their human creators and represent both a threat to mankind’s survival and a testament to technological innovation. On the night that Victor finishes creating the Monster, he narrates his intense disgust towards the creation:

“How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form?..Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath;
his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips" (Shelley, 65).

Victor describes a horrific and crude face in great detail; however, it is only on the night of the Monster’s animation that he is disgusted by his work. In *Blade Runner*, Roy Batty and his other companions are Nexus 6 replicants, the latest and greatest models in an ever-improving line of manufactured humanlike machines. They are the descendants of a multitude of tweaks, adjustments and innovations. They are the Monster refined.

Deckard is introduced to Batty and his replicant companions, Zhora, Leon, and Pris, early on in *Blade Runner* at the LA police station when he meets with Bryant, the police officer who gives him the job. Bryant explains how Batty’s crew “slaughtered twenty three people and jumped a shuttle” (*BR*, 14:06). The two are watching a video of Leon’s VK test, a series of questions which determine a subject’s ability to show empathy and therefore reveal his or her status as human or replicant, and mug shots of the other replicants who are still at large. Bryant pulls up Batty’s mug shot, a close up video of his head rotating above his specifications including his model and serial numbers. Deckard looks on in an expression of concern and possibly fear as a low bass frequency builds up in the film’s score (*BR*, 15:10). Bryant says, “Nexus 6, Roy Batty, incept date 2016. Combat model, optimal self sufficiency, probably the leader” (*BR*, 15:15). Much like the Monster, Roy Batty is introduced as a menacing and unnatural entity. As a combat model with optimal self sufficiency, he fits the posthuman figure of
one whom “directly challenges the individual’s perceived biological mastery over the machines” (Galven, 419).

Both the Monster’s and Roy Batty’s introductions paint each character as an unnatural and menacing presences. In both cases, these first impressions label the two unfairly. Although Batty and the Monster are both introduced as horrendous adversaries, one key difference between them is their physical appearances. The Monster is Victor’s prototype, but Roy and his escapees are indistinguishable from human beings to the eye, and possess outstanding physical attributes and abilities. As a result, they are able to blend successfully into the Los Angeles society without raising alarm. If Frankenstein’s Monster was the prototype of the posthuman, than the Nexus 6 replicants are the pinnacle of posthuman engineering.

**Frankenstein on Screen**

Though Shelley’s Monster was a prototype, Boris Karloff’s portrayal of Frankenstein’s monster in James Whale’s 1931 film, *Frankenstein*, is both a new kind of prototype and a descendant. The film was produced by Universal Pictures as one of dozens of horror films that the studio churned out during the 1930’s. Whale’s *Frankenstein*, as both a science fiction and horror film, emphasizes spectacle over the philosophical concerns in Mary Shelley’s novel. In the opening monologue, which resembles a theatrical performance, James Whale enters the screen standing on a stage in front of a closed curtain. He says:

“How do you do? It would be a little unkind to present this picture without just a word of friendly warning. We are about to unfold the story of Frankenstein, a man of science, who sought to create a man after his own image without reckoning
upon God. It is one of the strangest tales ever told. It deals with the two great mysteries of creation, life and death. I think it will thrill you. It may shock you. It might even horrify you. So if any of you feel that you’d not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now’s your chance to, well, we warned you” (Frankenstein, 00:30-01:00). Presented as more of a thrilling monster movie than a macabre romantic text, the film condenses the events of Mary Shelley’s story into just a few days. Henry Frankenstein, an ambitious young scientist, digs up corpses to craft his Monster. Things go wrong when his cartoonish assistant, Fritz, accidentally grabs a brain labelled “abnormal,” which belonged to a criminal, rather than the brain that Henry wanted to use. Once the Monster comes to life, he strangles Fritz after Fritz antagonizes him with a torch. The rest of the film relates Henry’s attempts to kill the Monster, who instead of speaking lets out incoherent moans, all the while trying to escape his human pursuers.

In his article, “Looking at the Monster: Frankenstein and Film,” James Heffernan argues that James Whale’s film does a disservice to Mary Shelley’s novel by silencing the Monster: “his story has been mutilated and abridged” (Heffernan, 1). In Shelley’s novel, the Monster is described with disgust from Victor’s point of view, and it is not until Book II that the reader is exposed to the Monster’s perspective. In the initial confrontation between Victor and the Monster at the Mer de Glace, the Monster speaks to Victor eloquently and reasonably: “Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it...I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, that which thou owest me” (Shelley, 123). The Monster’s perspective humanizes him as a creature struggling for
acceptance in the face of hatred from both his creator and those who fear his appearance. In Whale’s film, the Monster’s silence robs him of any kind of humanity or sensibility, and Heffernan writes, “the film does not show us the Monster’s inner life” (1).

Victor Frankenstein of the novel is the true monster of that text. He cruelly spurns his creation, and in doing so causes the downfall of all the people he loves, including himself. In the film, Henry Frankenstein is treated with more sympathy. The Monster of the film never has the chance to appeal to Henry’s morality, and thus Henry does not face the same moral confliction that Victor does. Certain scenes hint at the film’s Monster’s ability to show compassion, such as when he follows Henry’s commands (*Frankenstein*, 29:40), or when he plays with the little girl by the lake (*Frankenstein*, 47:20). Unfortunately, he eventually resorts to violence in these situations, either induced by blind rage or by accident, and clearly cannot exist as a peaceful, reasonable being. The audience viewing the film can only empathize with the Monster as a terrifying, doomed, and childlike figure. *Blade Runner* sets up the replicants, especially Roy Batty, in a seemingly negative way. Human characters speak of the replicants’ murderous crimes and deceptive nature, and it is not until Roy is given screen time and a chance to speak, just like Shelley’s Monster, that he is able to justify his actions and make his case to live.

*Frankenstein*’s Monster, in both novel and film, resembles the replicants, and specifically Roy Batty, as an autonomous, physically imposing, yet ultimately sympathetic creation oppressed by his maker. Both Batty and the Monster desire more life from their creator. Victor Frankenstein and Eldon Tyrell both deny their creature, and
prevent him from extending his life, thus spurring their own death and the deaths of others. Whale’s Monster does not kill out of this same sense of revenge, but rather out of desperate and primitive reactions to the world around him.

III. Blade Runner’s Finale

The climactic scene of Blade Runner mirrors and challenges the final showdown of Whale’s Frankenstein. Scene analyses of Deckard’s and Batty’s confrontation and the Monster’s confrontation with the angry mob reveal the ways in which Blade Runner pays homage to the earlier work but also mutates its message in a future of advanced technology. Atterton’s “More Human than Human” and Berys Gaut’s “Empathy and Death in Blade Runner” lend critical insights into understanding how Blade Runner’s finale asserts its own position on what it means to be human. Fifty years after Whale’s film, Roy Batty’s final monologue, famously improvised by actor Rutger Hauer, redeems Whale’s silencing of the Monster, as Batty affirms the creation’s ability to transcend its origins and achieve humanity in just a few, sublime sentences.

Past vs. Future

Following the murder of Eldon Tyrell, Deckard is given a tip from the police station to track down J.F. Sebastian. He heads to the Bradbury Building and, as before, looks up to see a floating blimp, this time with the east asian woman from the advertisement in the beginning of the film (BR, 1:29:57). The off-world advertisement is noticeably gone, perhaps signifying that Deckard has no hope for escape now. Deckard
draws his weapon and climbs the ruins to Sebastian’s eerie apartment which is silent apart from the ramblings of Sebastian’s creations. Pris hides among them, blending in then lashing out when Deckard approaches her. In a frantic display of acrobatics, she nearly kills Deckard, but he manages to reach for his gun to shoot her just in time. Pris writhes on the ground, thrashing and screaming in what is obviously physical pain. Deckard, with a look of fear and sadness on his face, shoots her again to end her misery (*BR*, 1:33:27). Deckard’s role as hunter becomes more difficult for him as the film progresses, especially since by this scene he has fallen in love with Rachel, a Tyrell replicant who did not know she was a replicant until Deckard told her. Gaut writes: “the film explores the relationship of empathy and the awareness of mortality” (Gaut, 37). The scene in which Deckard must put Pris out of her misery directly conflicts with his duties as Blade Runner. The job itself cannot allow for empathy towards the replicants. 

Roy Batty rides up on the elevator, but both he and Deckard sense the other’s presence: Roy cautiously approaches the door while Deckard barricades himself down a hallway. Scott crosscuts between the two adversaries frequently in this sequence, and repeatedly shows how each character mirrors the other’s actions. Batty passes by Deckard’s hallway and dodges a shot from Deckard’s pistol. He can be heard taunting Deckard when he says, “not very sporting to fire on an unarmed opponent. I thought you were supposed to be good” (*BR*, 1:35:22). This is the first instance in which Batty and Deckard share the screen in the film. After spending time with each character, the audience identifies initially with Deckard, who is given the most screen time, but over the course of *Blade Runner* Batty becomes more of a protagonist than an antagonist.
This reversal throws Deckard’s actions into question, is he really doing the right thing by hunting down the replicants? Peter Atterton writes, “[Roy] accomplishes great things but his morality is distorted” (50). However, Roy must act the way he does because he is an oppressed individual revolting against a system and a species trying to put him down. In displaying Roy’s love for Pris and for life, Scott reverses Roy and the replicants from the primary antagonists of the film to the heroes, or antiheroes (Lussier and Gowan, 168). Neither Roy nor Deckard are purely protagonists, and both have much more in common than they realize (Atterton, 59).

Batty continues to taunt Deckard through the walls, “Aren’t you the good man? Come on Deckard, show me what you’re made of” (BR, 1:35:43). This question not only destabilizes Deckard’s morality, it also questions his status as human or replicant. *Blade Runner* is all about “what you’re made of” when it comes to organic or mechanical composition, and Batty’s phrasing hints that Deckard may not be who, or what, he thinks he is. In his essay, “Blade Runner and the Cognitive Values of Cinema”, David Davies argues for Deckard’s status as a replicant. Thus, Deckard is the strongest affirmation of replicant humanity, since the audience identifies with him as human through his emotional responses (139). While Roy taunts Deckard, the camera focuses on Deckard’s pistol. He has used it to kill two of the other replicants, and it is his only advantage over his physically superior foes. Batty recognizes this advantage, and smashes through the wall, pulling Deckard’s hand, with the gun, through and breaking two of Deckard’s fingers. However, Roy then places the gun back in Deckard’s broken hand, telling him “now it’s my turn” (BR, 1:36:35). For the first time in the film, Batty is
pursuing Deckard, their roles have reversed. Without the ability to use his gun effectively, Deckard is outmatched and must flee.

*Blade Runner* ’s final confrontation is strongly connected to that of Whale’s *Frankenstein*. In the film, the Monster escapes Frankenstein’s laboratory to find a little girl on the outskirts of town. The Monster sits with her by the side of a lake, and after she throws flower petals into the water explaining, “I can make a boat,” the Monster gets excited and throws her into the water, accidentally drowning her (*Frankenstein*, 47:50). This scene was originally cut from the theatrical release of the film because it was considered too shocking for audiences of the time, but it also changes the viewer’s relationship towards the Monster. This scene attempts to paint a more sympathetic image of the Monster, one who is doomed to violence through his incompetence. He appears as more of a dumb beast than a fearful villain.

After finding the little girl’s body, an angry mob of villagers forms and chases the Monster to the outskirts of town. (*Frankenstein*, 1:01:05). Henry Frankenstein leads the charge, but is knocked unconscious by the Monster when he is separated from the group. The Monster carries Henry to an abandoned windmill, which is evocative of The Bradbury Building in *Blade Runner* in its dilapidated interior and verticality. The Monster and Henry ascend many levels, just as Roy and Deckard do, in their struggles that eventually lead them to the roofs of both structures. Henry wakes up from his stupor while the Monster snarls from the window at the angry mob below. In two point of view shots Whale positions Henry looking at the Monster, directly into the camera, from the Monster’s perspective, then the Monster looking into the camera from Henry’s
perspective. In each shot, the spokes of the windmill turn past the character’s faces, so that it appears they are watching each other in the spinning reel of the film, in which each shot is spaced between black strips. These shots reinforce the importance of the Monster’s appearance, as Heffernan writes on the film’s definition of monstrosity: “one’s malformed body proclaims the viciousness of his or her soul” (Heffernan, 7). Henry, the handsome hero of the film, looks considerably more human than the Monster from the same perspective. Heffernan believes that audiences watching *Frankenstein* are therefore supposed to identify with Henry, and see the hideous Monster from his perspective. Heffernan writes: “filmmaking itself is a Frankensteinian exercise in artificial reproduction” (3). These two shots work to emphasize both the Monster’s monstrosity and comment on the very essence of filmmaking itself as a voyeuristic enterprise. The Monster eventually tosses Henry off of the roof towards the snarling mob below (*Frankenstein*, 1:03:14). Henry’s fall is broken by the windmill as he eventually drops to the ground, unconscious. Though the townspeople have no empathy for the Monster, should the audience? Whale’s positioning of the Monster as a scared, cornered animal reveals him to be not an evil being but a frightened one.

Back in *Blade Runner*, unlike in *Frankenstein*, no group of angry townspeople waits outside ready to save Deckard; it is just the two adversaries. Emblematic of noir, the rooms are darkly lit, with boarded up windows casting horizontal shadows on the character’s faces. Lightning flashes and thunder booms outside as the rain pours down harder than ever before in the film. Emblematic of science fiction, mechanical structures and beeping machines set the backdrop while Batty, now nearly naked in only his
underwear, screeches and stalks Deckard throughout the halls of the Bradbury Building. Batty’s hunt embodies the technological nightmare that is the world of the film. *Blade Runner* represents the collision of these two disciplines, noir and science fiction, past and present, and the confrontation between Deckard and Batty is the manifestation of this collision, as each character represents his respective genre and temporality.

Batty’s vitality is nearing an end, and he knows it. In a close up shot, his pale white hand uncontrollably clutches and begins to make a fist, signalling that he is beginning to shut down as he has reached his expiration date. He growls, “Not yet!” while he grabs a nail out of the floorboard and drives it through his palm in an attempt to shock it back to life (*BR*, 1:39:30). Roy gasps in pain as Scott cross-cuts with Deckard struggling to tape his broken fingers together, making the same facial expression. Roy suddenly busts through the doorway of Deckard’s room. He says: “6, 7, go to hell or go to heaven!” (*BR*, 1:40:35). Knowing his death is at hand, Roy becomes more animated and preoccupied with living life as fully as he can with his remaining time. Peter Atterton writes that “Roy wants to extend the final scene as long as possible” (59). When Deckard bashes Roy over the head with a lead pipe Roy shouts: “That’s the spirit!” (*BR*, 1:40:45). He is attempting to awaken Deckard’s humanity (biological or mechanical) in this scene, to connect with him before dying. In Whale’s *Frankenstein*, it is unclear why the Monster carries Frankenstein into the windmill. Does he know that Henry is his creator? If so, what does he hope to do with him? Since the Monster has no voice, and no clear motives other than to ward off his assailants, it is unclear if he intends to try to reconcile with Henry. Batty, on the other hand, relishes his conflict with Deckard.
Knowing he will soon die, he is searching for some type of final connection. Deckard, like Henry, only wants to escape from or kill his adversary, and avoids this personal connection with him.

Deckard manages to climb to the roof of The Bradbury Building, where pipelines snake through the scene while steam and blue light fills in the background. Two rows of small windmills line the center. Batty bursts through the roof and confronts Deckard again, and though the two do not see each other through the spokes of the windmills, they stand in between them, seeing each other clearly. This design choice is a clear visual reference to Whale’s *Frankenstein*. Then, as in *Frankenstein*, Deckard leaps across to another roof but comes short and dangles from a steel beam above the street hundreds of feet below (*BR*, 1:43:57). In a low angle silhouette shot, Batty looks over the edge of the Bradbury building with the windmills spinning behind him (*BR*, 1:44:15). Batty is the 21 Century Frankenstein Monster, but smarter, quicker, faster, and more human. This humanity is conveyed in Batty’s final action before he dies - he saves Deckard’s life. Berys Gaut, in his article “Empathy and Death in Blade Runner” writes, “Batty’s final transformation is underpinned by religious iconography attached to him” (38). A still medium shot of Batty with his arms crossed over his shoulders shows one hand clutching a white dove, and the other pierced with a nail through the center in an allusion to Christ (*BR*, 1:44:34). Roy easily jumps the gap Deckard failed to clear, and peering over the blade runner in extreme close up says, “quite a thing to live in fear isn’t it? That’s what it is to be a slave” (*BR*, 1:45:11). Silverman identifies this master/slave dynamic in her article, “Back to the Future”. She argues that it is purely positional and
cultural since the replicants are virtually identical to their human makers (Silverman, 110). This final scene, which effectively humanizes Batty as one struggling for freedom, also reverses Batty and Deckard’s roles as hunter/hunted, and master/slave. Gaut argues that it is at this moment when Roy decides to save Deckard, “out of a common fear of death” (Gaut, 39). This is the moment of Roy’s complete redemption, his transition from killer to savior, from devil to angel.

The Deaths of the Monsters

Roy grasps Deckard at the last second and yanks him up onto the roof. Frankenstein’s Monster in Whale’s film on the other hand does not understand himself or his creator in the same way. Roy is able to transcend his monstrous roots and exhibit empathy in this moment, affirming his status as human. He sees Deckard’s sheer terror and saves him out of a love of all life. Until this point in the film, Deckard shows no empathy while Roy shows an overabundance of it. As Peter Atterton writes, “Roy represents the humanity of man better than any human in the film” (53). This scene is both Roy’s redemption and Frankenstein’s. The posthuman warned about in Whale’s film has finally arrived. In fact, as he saves Deckard, Roy represents a hope that Deckard, devoid of emotion and love for life, could be saved as well. Roy is the ultimate redeemer, a Christ figure made of circuits and metal created by apathetic humans. This is reinforced by the close-up shot of Roy’s hand clutching Deckard’s wrist, while the nail protruding through Roy’s palm is clearly visible (BR, 1:45:35).
The angry mob of *Frankenstein* burns the mill with the Monster in it. They cheer as he screams and goes up in smoke. The film ends with Henry lying bedridden but safe, expected to make a full recovery. In this iteration of the *Frankenstein* story, Henry’s mistakes have been corrected and all is well in the world again. The humans have regained control over their world and will be allowed to freely continue to advance technologically without challenge. Whale evokes the lynch mobs of the American South in his depiction of the angry mob, thus positioning the Monster as one who is a victim of unearned fear and hatred. Like Shelley’s Monster and Roy Batty, Whale’s Monster is oppressed because of his difference, but unlike his counterparts, this Monster cannot speak to express himself. He dies as a frightened and hated creature, not one who has come to understand himself and his creators. He is a victim of violence and prejudice, but lacks the intellect to transcend his position.

Roy Batty’s death is much different than Whale’s Monster’s. Batty’s cinematic lineage descends directly from the Monster, but with many technological improvements to both his body and mind. After dropping Deckard on the roof, Batty sits down opposite him cross legged. Finally, the two can speak peacefully, though it is Roy who does all the talking. Roy’s monologue was famously improvised by actor Rutger Hauer, and was labelled by Atterton as “the most moving death soliloquy in film” (Atterton, 60). The speech is so powerful due to Hauer’s impassioned delivery and to the extremely personal nature of the memories that he describes. He says to Deckard:

“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 the Tannhauser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.”

(*BR*, 1:47:06)
These final lines, coupled with the act of rescuing Deckard, affirm Batty’s status as a human, or at least as a being possessing real human emotions. Though these memories that Roy speak of do not add to the plot, they are memories that he knows belong to him, of things that only he has experienced. Atterton writes, “[Blade Runner] presents the romantic view that it is not knowledge but experience that counts” (52). Roy wants so desperately to live beyond his four year expiration date, and shows a stronger passion for life than any other character in the film.

In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, the Monster also reflects on his life and his experiences. Unlike Batty, the Monster is extremely remorseful for his actions and chooses to end his own life as punishment. He is tortured by Victor’s rejection and by the immorality of his own actions against Victor’s family. Right after Victor dies of frostbite and exhaustion, the Monster finds him. As Walton, captain of the Arctic ship that Victor scrambles onto just days before his death, stands shocked in front of the Monster as he looms over Victor’s fresh corpse, the Monster speaks:

“But soon,” he cried, with sad and solemn enthusiasm, “I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames” (Shelley, 280).

The Monster does not relish his experiences; he is tortured by them. While Batty sadly succumbs to his natural death, the Monster brings his own end about prematurely. The novel’s greatest irony is that Victor’s ambition to create life leads only to death (Heffernan, 3). However, the Monster and Roy kill not out of evil but out of revenge and suppression. When Tyrell cannot offer Roy an extension of his expiration date, he murders him. When Frankenstein denies the Monster a female companion, the Monster
kinds Victor's companion. Had the Monster instead murdered Frankenstein and no one else, perhaps he would not resort to suicide out of guilt. Roy did not take innocent lives in *Blade Runner*, but instead went directly for his adversaries, and did so because his death was looming in the near future. the Monster, on the other hand, did not have an immediate expiration date and murdered innocent associates of Victor through jealousy and rejection. Therefore, though his final lines to Walton are not a redemption in the same way that Batty’s are, they are at least an acknowledgment of wrongdoing.

Although both Batty and the Monster are very much posthuman beings, the Monster is undeniably more “monstrous” in his actions.

Batty decides to save Deckard from his peril, but would Deckard have done the same? Batty’s empathy and redemption are the key pieces of evidence Deckard needed to be convinced that the replicants are more than just machines. Deckard recognizes this humanity in his final monologue:

“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 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 sit there and watch him die” (*Blade Runner*,1:47:28).

Gaff, a member of the police department and Deckard’s handler, immediately appears to tell Deckard that he’s done a *man’s* job. If Gaff mistakenly thought that Deckard did in fact ‘retire’ Batty, then his choice of words is very interesting. In the last scene of the film, Deckard finds a small origami unicorn in his apartment which corresponds directly to a dream that he had earlier in the film of a unicorn running through a forest. Gaff is seen earlier in *Blade Runner* crafting origami figures, so the unicorn indicates that Gaff
knows Deckard’s dreams, and therefore that Deckard himself is a replicant. Gaff’s line therefore makes perfect sense: replicants were created to do the jobs of men. By putting down Batty’s rebellion and suppressing the escaped replicants, Deckard has done the Tyrell Corporation’s job for them; he is a productive replicant.

**Blade Runner’s Legacy**

Though the posthuman improves alongside technology, *Blade Runner’s* vision of a future intertwined with technology is not one of improvement, but of degradation, dehumanization, and decay. The film argues, through Roy’s final act of salvation, that it is not the posthuman we need to fear, but our own isolation from our very humanity. This disconnection is echoed in the retrofuturistic, neo-romantic elements of both narrative and visuals of *Blade Runner*. The heavily polluted, constructed, and mechanical world is better suited for the posthumans who were born in it and will inherit it than the humans who created it. Roy himself displays more human emotion in the final sequence of the film than the actual humans themselves, especially if Deckard is himself a replicant. Eldon Tyrell is the most mechanical character in *Blade Runner*, and his suppression of the lively replicants mirrors that of Victor Frankenstein in Shelley’s novel. But if Tyrell does not want the replicants to be free, then why did he create them with the capacity for such complex human emotions? Did he anticipate such real vivacity in his creations?

Victor Frankenstein creates the Monster out of a passion and excitement to spark life, but does not account for what will happen when he actually succeeds. The Nexus 6
replicants are created with intention and purpose, but have somehow managed to relate to the world in a way that was not designed. Something happened in between the Nexus 5 and the Nexus 6 production line of replicants. Some kind of enhanced processing capability or prominence of memory allowed the Nexus 6 replicants to transcend their systematic, encoded consciousness and to question the nature of their very being. Batty’s murder of Eldon Tyrell in his tomb-like pyramid marks the beginning of the age of the posthuman on Earth. Though the off-world colonies advertised on the pervasive blimp are never visited in the film, they represent the new frontier for the best, brightest, and wealthiest of humanity. They also signify that Earth is doomed, a forgotten and burned out wasteland. Perhaps the only hope for the humans is off-world, where they are free from the pollution, crowds, and poverty of the planet they left behind. Are they then doomed to repeat the same cycle, leaving a path of ruined planets in their wake?

Tyrell’s replicants take on a life of their own, but he is not to be credited for this. The replicants were not developed to possess empathy, they developed these feelings for other beings through their experiences. This development, more so than any technological arrangement of mechanical hardware and computer coding, renders the souls of the replicants. The scene in which Roy and Deckard sit across from each other at the end of Blade Runner, man and machine, noir and science fiction, past and future, is a quiet moment of shared experience. Batty’s words are simply the transmission of memory for its own sake. This engagement, for no benefit to either Roy or Deckard, comes from a being who is trying to understand himself, to convey his memories to
another in a gesture of camaraderie and lamentation. Perhaps Deckard, if he is a replicant, does not respond because he has not yet developed the emotional capacity that Roy has. Maybe this final confrontation and sharing of memories awakens in Deckard a real sense of empathy, of humanity. Though his efforts to save himself and Rachel from the Tyrell corporation at the end of the film may be in vain, they are still the efforts of a creature, either biologically human or mechanically conscious, acting of his own volition and out of empathy.

In Shelley’s and Whale’s *Frankenstein*, the world was not yet ready to accept the posthuman, and the posthuman was not ready to inherit it. Humans were still improving, constructing, and appreciating their world. The Monster in both novel and film was primitive, a prototype. By 2019, humanity’s Earth-bound progress has stopped, the natural world is destroyed, and humans have begun leaving for a better life on different planets. Likewise, the posthuman replicants are capable and ready to inherit Earth, the only place that they can hide. Roy Batty, as the leader of the first replicants to truly develop emotions, to awaken, to transcend his mechanical subordinance, stands as a precursor for the posthumans who will arrive and live after him. Roy’s final speech to Deckard in which he shares his experiences represents hope that the empathy and consciousness that he feels can be shared with other replicants, and can awaken them as well. The film closes with Deckard, like Batty, on the run from human suppressors, carrying the torch that has been passed to him. Drawing from its cinematic and literary ancestors, *Blade Runner* asserts that the posthuman has arrived, and only the posthuman can thrive in a retrofuturistic world.
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