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Gaspard Delon (dir.), *Blade Runner 2049*, Denis Villeneuve. *Réplique et renaissance*. Bordeaux : Bord de l'eau (Le), 2023. Print ISBN - 9782356878854

- 1 When shown the preliminary footage of the film version of his book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), Philip K. Dick exclaimed: "This is not like anything we have ever seen... It isn't like anything that has ever been done."¹ Dick was far from the only one to marvel at seeing his vision projected onto the silver screen in Ridley Scott's 1982 sci fi masterpiece *Blade Runner*.² Its *film noir* aesthetic and futuristic soundtrack would facilitate *BR*'s transformation from niche, cult film to science fiction classic, often mentioned in the same breath as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Alien* (1979) while the profound philosophical questions it poses would inspire numerous critical, analytical and philosophical works to be written. These include but are not limited to Paul M. Sammon's *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner* (1996), Scott Bukatman's *Blade Runner* (1997) and Décio Torres Cruz's *Postmodern Metanarratives: Blade Runner and Literature in the Age of Image* (2014).
- 2 35 years later, in 2017, French-Canadian filmmaker Denis Villeneuve, whose career was inspired by the original film, would be charged with the heavy responsibility of helming its sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*.³ *2049* would attempt to answer the questions posed by its predecessor, in turn presenting its own queries and inspiring a new series of academic works and articles. *Blade Runner 2049*, Denis Villeneuve : *Réplique et renaissance* (2022), under the direction of cinema studies scholar Gaspard Delon, fits into this tradition as the first academic work on the film written in the French language. The

book was published as part of the *Cinéfocales* collection whose goal is to recenter the “film” itself as object of study. *Réplique et renaissance* thus strives to accomplish this by offering a collection of eleven essays plus an introduction by the editor. While these chapters analyse *2049* through a multitude of angles, they all strive to address a paradox which surrounds the film: its status as both Hollywood blockbuster and *film d’auteur*. At the same time, and as hinted at by the book’s title, the original *BR* of 1982 is frequently referenced throughout the essays. The sequel’s status in juxtaposition to the original serves as a way to compare and contrast the two films and their methods of tackling the socio-political and technological stakes of their respective eras. Indeed, as *2049* serves as a perfect counterpoint to *BR*, the former responding to the latter’s question of “What does it mean to be a replicant?” through its own question of “What does it mean to be human?”, no analysis of *2049* would be complete without an acknowledgment of its predecessor.

- 3 Roughly half of the wide-ranging essays featured in *Réplique et renaissance* comment on more easily accessible aspects of *2049* such as the film’s genre and status as blockbuster, its visual effects and soundtrack, Harrison Ford’s return to the iconic role of Deckard as well as a chapter on the reception of the film in France. These essays are interspersed with ones that cover more theoretical and philosophical readings of the film. For example, the concepts of perception, technology as tools of mediation and biopolitics and reproduction are all tackled. Indeed, the *Cinéfocales* collection strives to feature analyses that can appeal to students and academics as well as to more casual cinephiles, meaning even the more technical and theoretical essays featured in *Réplique et renaissance* are accessible to non-specialists. I thus found a major strength of the book to be that the wide range of topics covered do indeed allow for a comprehensive, but also approachable overview of both *2049* and *BR*.
- 4 The opening chapter, written by the editor Gaspard Delon, complements his introduction well by launching a panoramic view of *2049*. It does so by presenting the film through four different perspectives: its production process, relation to other science fiction films released in the past decade, and the status of the film and director as part of the *Blade Runner* “franchise” and as an auteur, respectively. The following four chapters, written by Réjane Hamus-Vallée and Caroline Renouard, C.E. Harris, Tatian Monassa and Chloé Huvet continue in this same vein, analysing *2049* from a practical standpoint, the first three concentrating on the visual while the final places the music and sound design under study. In their chapter, Réjane Hamus-Vallée and Caroline Renouard analyse the prevalence of digital visual effects, the use of which has grown exponentially over the past two decades. They do so by wading into an ongoing debate in the film industry, that of the overuse of visual effects to the detriment of practical effects. They argue that despite Villeneuve’s desire to be less dependent on visual effects, the film features heavy digital editing in the postproduction process which nonetheless contributes to the viewer’s experience while still respecting the aesthetic of the original. In keeping with the visual, C.E. Harris reads the *film noir* aesthetic of *2049* as a piece of expressionism, arguing that the *mise en scène* of the film becomes a text in and of itself, serving as a way to pass on specific pieces of information to the viewer. In a third chapter focusing on the visual, Tatian Monassa analyses different pieces of technology featured in the world of *Blade Runner*, more specifically how they serve to shape the reality of the characters, thereby also shaping in what way the spectator views what they are seeing on screen. Transitioning from visual to auditory elements, Chloé Huvet provides a study on the soundtrack and sound design of

2049 which had the lofty task of living up to the seminal score written for the original by Greek composer Vangelis. These four chapters provide precious insight into the film for fans and newcomers alike while providing a guide on how to carry out deeper readings of the film's visual and audio elements.

- 5 A second, more theoretical series of essays concentrating on representation follow, with contributions from Pierre Berthomieu, Diane Arnaud, Mathias Kusnierz and Charles-Antoine Courcoux. In one of the essays that stands out the most, Pierre Berthomieu elegantly blends an analysis of the minimalist features of 2049 and the links between heroism and feminine and masculine archetypes. Diane Arnaud complements this analysis by associating a study of the visual with that of the representation of the myriad female characters found in 2049, arguing that through Villeneuve's visual choices, "*Blade Runner 2049* extends the original and partially overlays it without wanting to coincide with Ridley Scott's film."⁴ The following two articles also complement each other through the topic of biopolitics, with Mathias Kusnierz questioning the representation of procreation and sterility in the film and its relation to the creation of franchises in Hollywood while Charles-Antoine Courcoux, on the other hand, interrogates the representations of hypermasculinity and technophobia which have characterised the science fiction genre. These more theoretical chapters are bookended by two essays which once again focus on more practical aspects of the film; Pierre-Olivier Toulza's *star studies* chapter takes a look at Harrison Ford's career and return to *BR* and the role of Deckard while Quentin Mazel brings *Réplique et renaissance* full circle by providing a view on the reception of 2049 in France, thus inviting the reader to consider the difficulty of evaluating a work which is both a sequel and a seemingly paradoxical *blockbuster d'auteur*.
- 6 *Réplique et renaissance* provides a comprehensive overview of both *BR* and 2049 that *Blade Runner* enthusiasts, cinephiles and academics alike will find appealing, achieving *Cinéfocale*'s goal of recentering the film as object of study. While some of the chapters feature concepts that may be alien to readers new to the world of academic writing, they are nonetheless written in a way that readers will find accessible. *Réplique et renaissance* is a valuable contribution to the already rich literature written about the *Blade Runner* franchise and one which promises to serve as inspiration for continued reflection on 2049.

NOTES

1. Whitehead, John W. "Blade Runner: What It Means to Be Humans in the Cybernetic State" *Scraps from the Loft*, 2017 (<https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/movies/blade-runner-what-it-means-to-be-humans-in-the-cybernetic-state/>, last accessed: Feb 5, 2024).

2. From now on *BR*.

3. From now on 2049.

4. Translation mine.

AUTHORS

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James Guttridge is a member of LARCA and a doctoral student at Paris-Cité University. He also studied at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, University College London and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. He currently works at Sorbonne University as an English Language Master. His thesis in media sociology, under the supervision of Ariane Hudelet and François Vergniolle de Chantal, focuses on the influence of television series on political polarization in the United States.