UWL REPOSITORY

repository.uwl.ac.uk

The music for those "more human than human": Authenticating consciousness through music in Cyberpunk science fiction

Silva, Liane (2024) The music for those "more human than human": Authenticating consciousness through music in Cyberpunk science fiction. In: Sound On Screen III: Music and Sound in Transmedia Franchises, 3 Jul 2024, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK.

This is the Published Version of the final output.

UWL repository link: https://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/12779/

Alternative formats: If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact: open.research@uwl.ac.uk

The music for those 'more human than human': Authenticating consciousness through music in Blade Runner

Liane Silva
University of West London

Key Concepts

- 'Existentialism' / 'Existentialist' / 'Existential':
  - Existentialist thought as popularised by philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre
  - Theoretical framework to better understand narrative themes and character inflexion points
  - Opposed to Essentialist thought ("Existence precedes essence")

- 'Soul':
  - Used here as synonymous with 'Consciousness' or 'Sentience'
  - Manifested through the Sartrean concept of acknowledging 'radical freedom' (i.e., living authentically and in full consciousness of our full plethora of choices, at any given moment, despite our facticities / limitations)

- 'Authenticity' as quality and tenet of Cyberpunk and Existentialism:
  - Deeply embedded into the narrative themes of the genre
  - Simultaneously as a central tenet to Sartre's Existentialism, in opposition to his concept of 'bad faith'

Key Concepts

- 'Authenticity' as a musicology-specific concept:
  - Allan Moore's definition of 'authenticity' as resulting from processes of 'authentication'
  - 'Authenticity' not as an inherent quality, but rather as an ascribed characteristic of popular music artists
  - 'Authentication' as the process through which someone (or something) is deemed 'authentic'
  - This concept shall be referred to as 'Authentication', to avoid confusion

- 'Scene':
  - A complete unit of worldbuilding and / or storytelling in film, television, and videogames
  - Flexible concept, but generally bordered by changes in mood, location, or narrative advancement
  - Can be more intuitively recognised in linear mediums, but is also present in interactive ones

Blade Runner Franchise

"*Blade Runner* has been made over as a 'franchise' rather than initially functioning as one."

- Hills, M. (2011, p.15)

Blade Runner Franchise
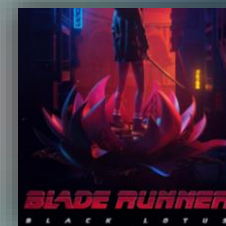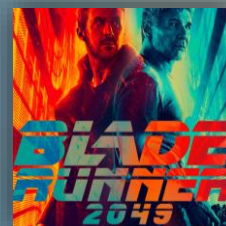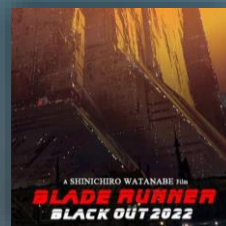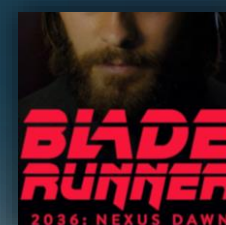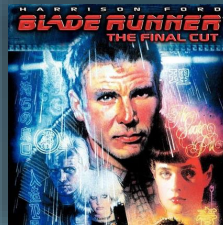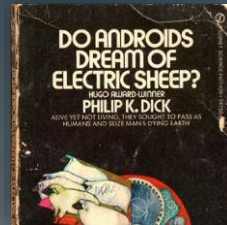
Preliminary Analysis Overview

Blade Runner Final Cut (BRFC) VS Blade Runner Enhanced Edition (BRED)
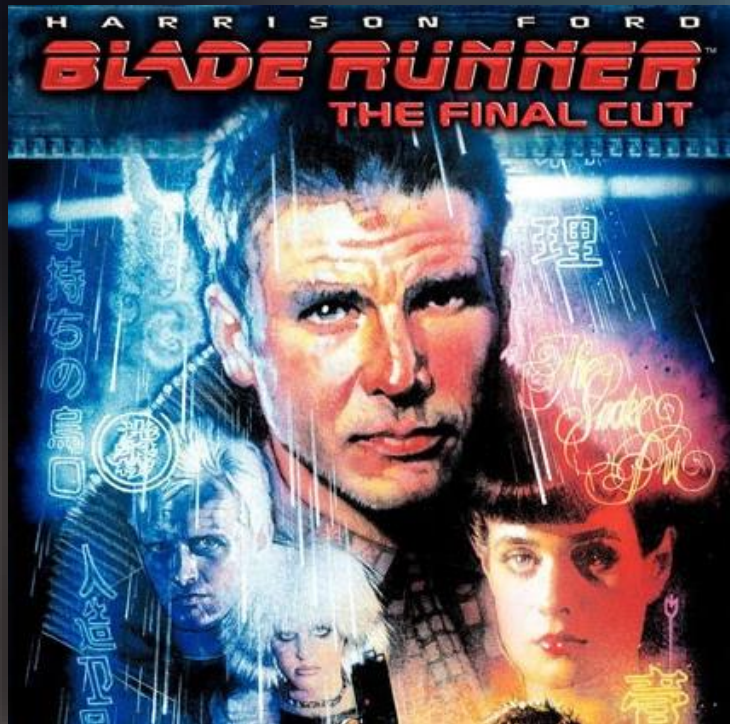
Blade Runner Final Cut (1982/2007)

Dir. Ridley Scott

Mus. Vangelis

Blade Runner Enhanced Edition (1997/2022)

Dir. David Leary, Jim Walls

Mus. Frank Klepacki

Preliminary Analysis Overview

- Blade Runner asks 'What does it mean to be human?' by asking 'What makes the Replicants human?' (cf. Treanor, 2020, p.70)

- Descartes' *Cogito*: 'I think, therefore I am' – quoted by Pris near the end of BRFC (Shanahan, 2014, pp.80-82)

- Human sentience: Cartesian 'thinking entity' and Sartre's 'radical freedom' (cf. McLachlan, p.164)

- 'Radical freedom': the full plethora of choices one has at one's disposal, at any given moment, despite their facticity / pre-determined characteristics and circumstances (cf. Sartre, 1943/2020)

Preliminary Analysis Overview

- With this connection to Sartrean 'radical freedom' in mind, scenes were selected at two narrative inflexion points that demonstrated the main characters':
  - An anti-existentialist mindset
  - A transitional questioning of the anti-existentialist mindset
  - An existentialist mindset

- As such, 2 inflexion points were selected for this Preliminary Analysis:
  - Introspection
  - Death [of non-character Replicants]

Methodological Overview

Figurative Semiotics Analysis

(Schutte, 2015) (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003)

- Based on Lakoff & Johnson's conceptualisation of metaphors.

- "Metaphor" – symbol, sign, image, etc.

- "G.I. Box" – identifies a metaphorical relationship between metaphors, one of which is the "Governing Instance", and the second of which is the "Governed Sector". Read as "x as (being) a y".

- "Bracket Formulas" – A(B) reads "A contains B". A→B reads "A dominates B". A…B represents a plural aspect found in the formula.

Methodological Overview

Metaphorical Musical Analysis

(Cook, 2004, p.99) (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003)

- Based on Lakoff & Johnson's conceptualisation of metaphors.

- Model that analyses the interaction between the different constituent elements within a singular text, under a metaphorical lens.

- Constituent elements of media can be found to be in Consistent Conformance, Coherent Complementation, or Coherent Contradiction.

SIMILARITY TEST

Consistent

Coherent

Elements are in Conformance

DIFFERENCE TEST

Contrary

Contradictory

Elements are in Complementation

Elements are in Contest
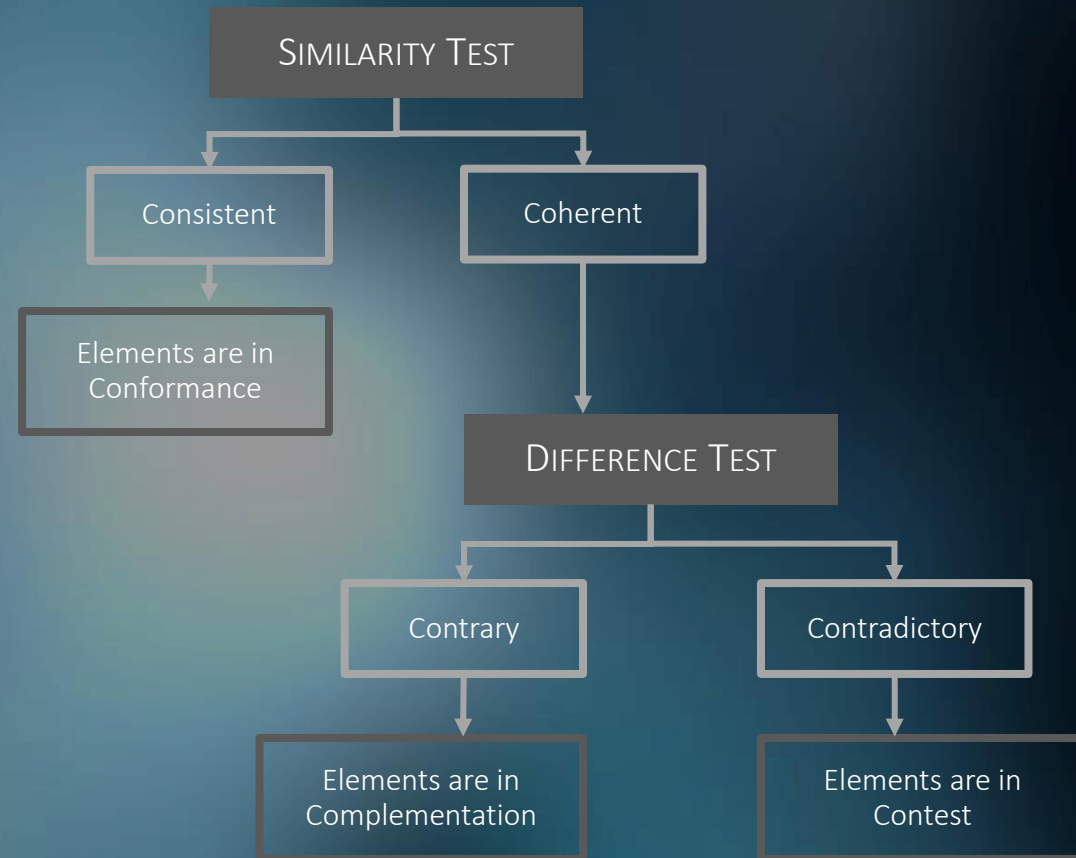
'INTROSPECTION'

Selected Scenes

Blade Runner Final Cut [FILM]

Deckard's & Rachael's introspection

Cue: Underscore + 'I Am The Business'

Rachael is distressed after shooting Leon to save Deckard. Deckard claims the psychological effects that this job has are just "part of the business". Rachael realises that she is "the business". She then questions Deckard as to whether he would still hunt her, if she ran away. Deckard says he wouldn't but that someone else would.

VS

Blade Runner Enhanced Edition [GAME]

McCoy's introspection

Cue: 'Blade Runner Blues' [Interpolation]

Blade Runner blues as McCoy thinks about the case (narration). The first time McCoy returns to his apartment, the game removes control from the player and automatically makes McCoy enter the balcony as soon as the player activates the Bedroom door.

After that, the cue triggers every time the player enters McCoy's balcony.

'INTROSPECTION'

BLADE RUNNER FINAL CUT [FILM]

Deckard's & Rachael's Introspection

Cue: Underscore + 'I Am The Business'

- Figurative Semiotic Analysis:
  - Visual signs:
    - Eye = Soul; Soul = Authentic identity; Eyes = Emotions; Emotions = Lack of control; Lack of control = Unusefulness
    - Eye = Soul; Glare = Inauthentic identity; Glare = Nondiegetic sign
    - Light = Clarity; Clarity = Awareness = To find
    - Darkness = Unclarity = Unawareness = To search
    - Red lips [Deckard's and audience's POV] = Beauty; Red lips [Deckard's and audience's POV] = Sensuality / Sexuality
    - Red lips [Rachael's POV] = Corporate objectification = [Being] Business
  - Dialogue & Narrative signs:
    - Retiring Replicants = Killing
    - 'Shakes' = Remorse; 'Shakes' = Business [part of]; Business [part of] = Routine; Retiring = Routine; Remorse = Routine
    - 'I am the business = [Being] Business; [Being] Business = Inauthentic identity; [Being] Business = Lack of power
  - Musical signs:
    - Synth = Technological; Synths = Inhuman; Randomised sequence = Lack of control
    - Tritone = Heresy; Tritone = Instability; Instability = Lack of control

'INTROSPECTION'

BLADE RUNNER FINAL CUT [FILM]

- Metaphorical Musical Analysis:
  - Alignment of signs:
    - 'Shakes' (aligns with) Absence of Music
    - 'I am the business' (aligns with) Absence of Music
    - Eye contact between Rachael and Deckard (aligns with) Music start (B and then F – tritone)
    - Rachael moves into Light (aligns with) Music stability grows (D and then C on Bass)
    - Eye glares show (aligns with) Absence of Music
    - 'But somebody would' (aligns with) Music returns (Ab to D – tritone)
  - Similarity Test passed – Coherent:
    - Absence of music (aligns with) Business [part of] / Inauthentic Identity
    - Tritone (aligns with) [Being] Business / Darkness / Instability / Eyes glare
    - Synth random sequences (aligns with) [Being] Business
    - More stable harmonic outlines (aligns with) Light / Red lips

'INTROSPECTION'

BLADE RUNNER FINAL CUT [FILM]

Deckard's & Rachael's Introspection

Cue: Underscore + 'I Am The Business'

- Metaphorical Musical Analysis:
  - Similarity Test passed – Coherent:
    - The metaphorical elements are Coherent with one another, but they are not thematically identical
    - This means that the different elements contained in this scene all contribute in the same direction towards larger metaphors and themes, but not in identical ways:
      - The Business of retiring Replicants is 'unstable' (alignment)
      - The Business of creating Replicants is 'unstable' (alignment)
      - The connection between these two Replicants is 'stable' (alignment)
      - Deckard feels 'remorse' after retiring Replicants (alignment)
    - The music, the visual signs, and the dialogue signs all point towards these (and more) larger metaphors present in the scene
    - But they do it in different ways, each adding its own bit of information to the whole (cf. Barthes, 1977)

'INTROSPECTION'

BLADE RUNNER ENHANCED EDITION [GAME]

McCoy's Introspection

Cue: 'Blade Runner Blues' [Interpolation]

'INTROSPECTION'

BLADE RUNNER ENHANCED EDITION [GAME]

McCoy's Introspection

Cue: 'Blade Runner Blues' [Interpolation]

- Figurative Semiotic Analysis:
  - Visual signs:
    - City = Technological = Industrial
    - Night-time = Darkness
    - Darkness = Unclarity = Unawareness = To search
    - Light = Clarity = Awareness = To find
  - Dialogue & Narrative signs:
    - 'Eyes' = Replicants' 'Will to live'
  - Musical signs:
    - Synth = Technological; Synth = Inhuman = Inauthentic identity
    - Melodic outline = Blue notes = Blues [genre]
    - Blues = Loneliness = Heartache; Blues = Oppression = Inauthentic identity
    - Blues = Introspection
    - Unclear harmonic boundaries (extensions) = Blending of harmonic movement (extensions)
    - Clear harmonic prevalence of im7 chord = Permanence of 'root chord feel' = 'Sameness' at its core

'INTROSPECTION'

BLADE RUNNER ENHANCED EDITION [GAME]

McCoy's Introspection

Cue: 'Blade Runner Blues' [Interpolation]

- Metaphorical Musical Analysis:
  - Alignment of signs:
    - City (aligns with) Introspection
    - Introspection (aligns with) Blues
    - Light and Darkness (aligns with) Unclear harmonic boundaries
    - Unclear harmonic boundaries (aligns with) Blurred lines between Replicant and Human
    - Synth (aligns with) Inhuman
    - Blues (aligns with) Authenticity and humanity (doesn't align with) Synth
    - Permanence on root chord (aligns with) Equality / 'Sameness'
  - Similarity Test passed – Coherent:
    - Blues (aligns with) Authenticity and humanity / Introspection
    - Unclear harmonic boundaries (aligns with) Blurred lines between Replicant and Human
  - Difference Test passed – Contrary:
    - Blues (doesn't align with) Synth
    - Retirement of Replicants = Killing Humans (doesn't align with) Protagonist's view (but is not Contradictory)

'INTROSPECTION'

BLADE RUNNER ENHANCED EDITION [GAME]

- Metaphorical Musical Analysis:
  - Similarity Test passed – Coherent AND Difference Test passed – Contrary:
    - The metaphorical elements are mostly Coherent with one another, with at least one exception where they are Contrary
    - Different elements contribute in the same direction, as well as contrarily, towards larger metaphors and themes:
      - The line between Humans and Replicants is 'unclear' and reflected musically (alignment)
      - McCoy questions retirement of Replicants, but does it anyway, with no 'remorse' (misalignment)
      - Replicants are Humans, but Blade Runners retire Replicants (misalignment)
      - The genre of Blues and its history run Contrary to the synth-based soundtrack (misalignment)
    - The coincidence of a Blues-themed melodic outline with a synth-based backing underneath runs contrary to its very definitions and to the protagonist's own mindset at this time, but it also ends up contributing a new insight into the major narrative of this world: Humans and Replicants (nature and technology) are closer than ever, in every aspect – including the value of their lives.

'DEATH'

Selected Scenes

Blade Runner Final Cut [FILM]

Zhora's death

Cue: Blade Runner Blues

Deckard finds Zhora's whereabouts and approaches her. She realises she's in danger and escapes out onto the busy streets of the night-time city. After being chased through crowded streets, Zhora is shot in the back, when passing a mannequin-filled storefront.

VS

Blade Runner Enhanced Edition [GAME]

Zuben's death

Cue: N/A
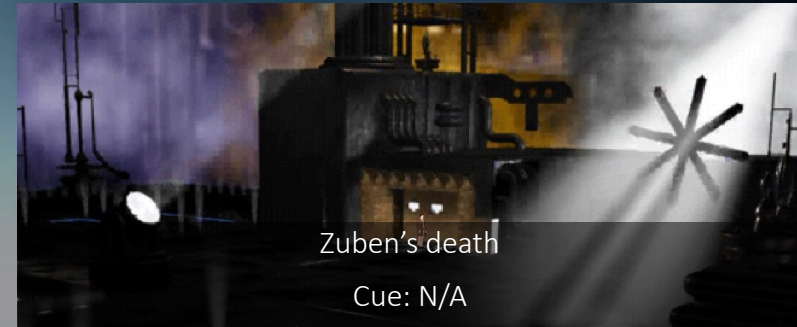
McCoy retires Zuben just before the previously analysed balcony scene. During Zuben's retirement, the game plays no music at all. There is a short conversation with Gaff after retiring Zuben.

'DEATH'

BLADE RUNNER FINAL CUT [FILM]

Zhora's Death

Cue: 'Blade Runner Blues'

'DEATH'

BLADE RUNNER FINAL CUT [FILM]

Zhora's Death

Cue: 'Blade Runner Blues'

- Figurative Semiotic Analysis:
  - Visual signs:
    - Night-time = Darkness; Darkness = Unclarity = Unawareness = To search
    - City = Technological = Industrial
    - Transparent raincoat = Transparency = Vulnerability
    - Glass = Transparency = Vulnerability
    - Mannequins = Artificiality = Inauthentic identity
    - Snow = Innocence; Snow = Winter = End
    - Tear = Fear; Tear = Death
  - Musical signs:
    - Absence of music = Chase
    - Retiring = Music
    - Synth = Technological; Synth = Inhuman = Inauthentic identity
    - Melodic outline = Blue notes = Blues
    - Blues = Loneliness = Heartache; Blues = Oppression = Inauthentic identity
    - Unclear harmonic boundaries = Blending of harmonic movement
    - Melody rising = Zhora's rising
    - Heartbeat sound = Zhora's life

'DEATH'

BLADE RUNNER FINAL CUT [FILM]

- Metaphorical Musical Analysis:
  - Alignment of signs:
    - Absence of music (aligns with) Chase
    - Start of music (aligns with) Deckard hits Zhora
    - Transparency [of Raincoat and Glass] (aligns with) Zhora's Vulnerability
    - Snow (aligns with) Zhora's fall and end
    - Tear (aligns with) End of heartbeat sound (aligns with) Zhora's death
  - Similarity Test passed – Coherent:
    - Blues (aligns with) Authenticity and humanity / Introspection
    - Unclear harmonic boundaries (aligns with) Blurred lines between Replicant and Human
  - Difference Test passed – Contrary:
    - Blues (doesn't align with) Synth
    - Retirement of Replicants = Killing Humans (doesn't align with) Protagonist's view (but is not Contradictory)

'DEATH'

BLADE RUNNER FINAL CUT [FILM]

Zhora's Death
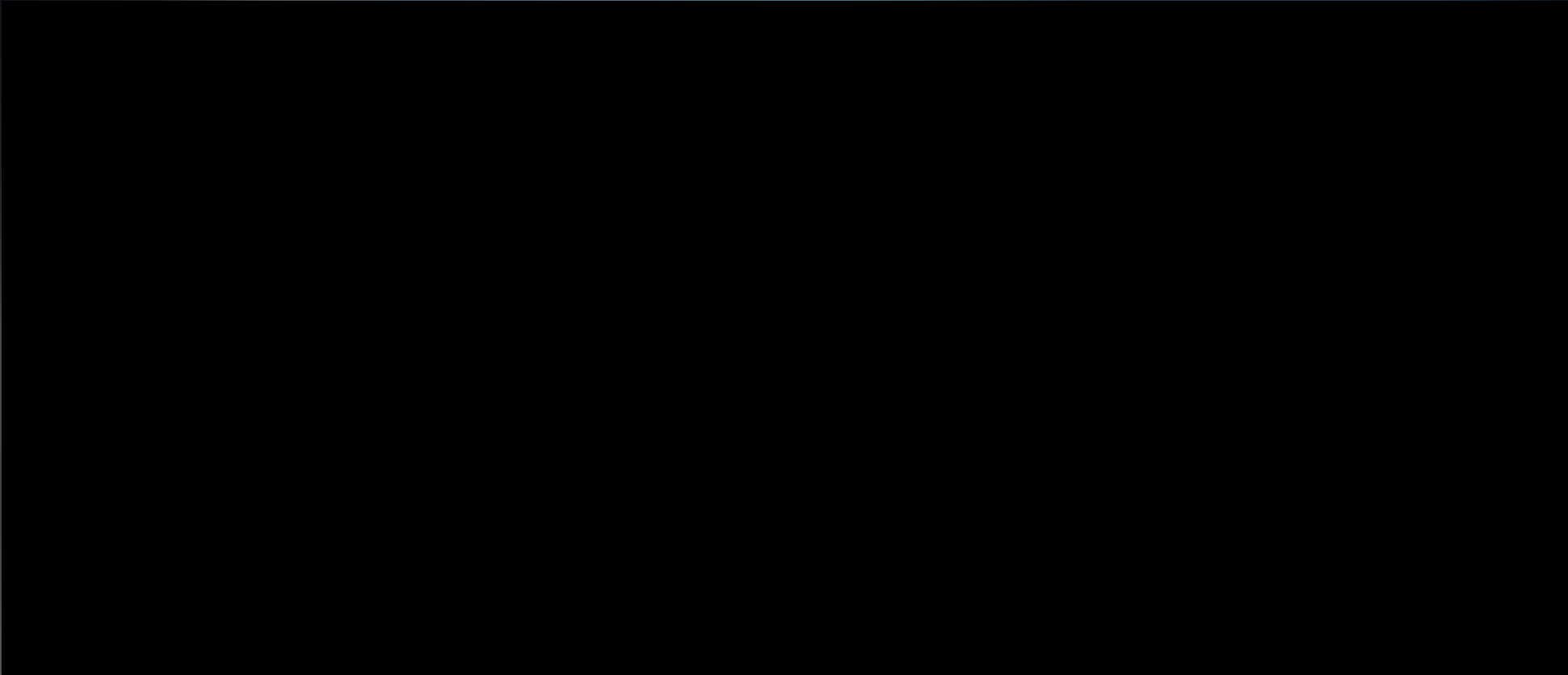
Cue: 'Blade Runner Blues'

- Metaphorical Musical Analysis:
  - Similarity Test passed – Coherent AND Difference Test passed – Contrary:
    - The metaphorical elements are mostly Coherent with one another, with at least one exception where they are Contrary
    - Different elements contribute in the same direction, as well as contrarily, towards larger metaphors and themes:
      - The line between Humans and Replicants is 'unclear' and reflected musically (alignment)
      - Retiring a Replicant is killing them and this is reflected musically (alignment)
      - The genre of Blues and its history run Contrary to the synth-based soundtrack (misalignment)
    - The coincidence of a Blues-themed melodic outline with a synth-based backing underneath runs contrary to its very definitions and to the protagonist's own mindset at this time, but it also ends up contributing a new insight into the major narrative of this world: Humans and Replicants (nature and technology) are closer than ever, in every aspect – including the value of their lives.

'DEATH'

Zuben's Death

Cue: N/A

'DEATH'

- Figurative Semiotic Analysis:
  - Visual signs:
    - Night-time = Darkness; Darkness = Unclarity = Unawareness = To search
    - City = Technological = Industrial
    - Gun = Retiring = Killing
  - Dialogue & Narrative signs:
    - 'Earning your stripes' = Good at retiring Replicants = Business [part of]
    - 'Retirement plan' = Business [part of]
    - 'Retirement' [of Replicants] = Killing
    - 'The magic' = Ability to tell that a 'mark' is a Replicant without testing
    - 'Retire a human' = Career-ending mistake
    - Retire Replicants = Career advancement

'DEATH'

Zuben's Death

Cue: N/A

- Metaphorical Musical Analysis – <u>in context with Introspection Scene</u>:
  - Similarity Test passed – Coherent AND Difference Test passed – Contrary:
    - The metaphorical elements are mostly Coherent with one another, with at least one exception where they are Contrary
    - Different elements contribute in the same direction, as well as contrarily, towards larger metaphors and themes:
      - The line between Humans and Replicants is 'unclear' and reflected musically (alignment)
      - Retiring a Replicant is killing them and this is reflected musically (alignment)
      - Retiring Replicants is good for those 'in the business' (misalignment)
      - The genre of Blues and its history run Contrary to the synth-based soundtrack (misalignment)
    - The coincidence of a Blues-themed melodic outline with a synth-based backing underneath runs contrary to its very definitions and to the protagonist's own mindset at this time, but it also ends up contributing a new insight into the major narrative of this world: Humans and Replicants (nature and technology) are closer than ever, in every aspect – including the value of their lives.

Preliminary Conclusions

- Differences between mediums:
  - The game has scarcer visual signs which coincide more scarcely with the musical signs – due to the technological aging and the limitations of the time during which it was created;
  - Despite this, the game was a still technological feat at the time, that brought a way of cinematic storytelling onto the videogame medium;
  - The interactive aspect of the game meant a longer experience of what it would be like to be both a Blade Runner and a Replicant;
  - In-game player choice meant that some of these narrative themes would not be experienced by all players – should they choose to be 'pure Blade Runners', e.g.;
  - More recent efforts and technological advancements in game development and computation mean that the cinematic aspects of narratives can be more intentionally integrated into videogames;
  - The film does not allow for interactivity, but it is not as limited, technologically and programming-wise;
  - The film allowed for a more intentional coincidence between visual, dialogue, and musical signs, which provided clearer metaphorical structures.

Preliminary Conclusions

- Both the film BRFC and the game BRED have two different pulls on their central themes (reflected in different ways on their music):
  - Society's dehumanisation of Replicants, embodied by the unaware Replicant Blade Runners and the Police who control them (pro-essentialist point of view);
  - Replicants' struggle to 'humanise' themselves, embodied by self-aware Replicants (pro-existentialist point of view).

- Awareness of Replicant origins can result in rebellion against pre-determined roles, both as Blade Runners and as Replicants:
  - Self-aware Replicant Blade Runners stop hunting Replicants (acting against their BR facticities);
  - Self-aware Replicant Blade Runners run away from being hunted (acting against their Replicant facticities).

- The music metaphorically works towards communicating a pro-Replicant and pro-existentialist point of view:
  - It runs parallel to some narrative elements - Conformance with pro-Replicant elements;
  - But it also runs contrarily to other elements - Complementation against anti-Replicant elements;
  - The music therefore authenticates the Replicants' existence.

Preliminary Conclusions

- Through Conformance and Complementation, the music Authenticates the 'soul of the Replicants':
  - Replicants are given a musical register of empathy, through metaphors of Consistency and / or Coherent Contrariety
  - The music seems to authenticate the Replicants' point of view and their validity as Humans
  - It also authenticates the artificiality of BR's world, along with other types of metaphorical signs (visual and otherwise)
  - But it does so maintaining throughout a tone of 'empathy' towards the Replicants – authenticating their 'souls'

Reference List

- Barthes, R. (1977) *Image-Music-Text*. 6th impression. London: Fontana Paperbacks.

- Chion, M. (2019) *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*. 2nd English edition. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Cook, N. (2004) *Analysing musical multimedia*. Reprinted. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

- Farmer, W. and Summers, T. (2024a) *Towards a Transformational Theory of Music in the Multimedia Franchise*. Unpublished manuscript.

- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980/2003) *Metaphors We Live By*. Cit. in Cook, N. (2004) and Schutte, C. (2015).

- McLachlan, J. M. (2019), 'Sympathy for the Existential Devils', in *Blade Runner 2049 and Philosophy*, Bunce, R. and McCrossin, T. (eds.). United States: Open Court Publishing.

- Moore, A. F. (2002). 'Authenticity as Authentication', *Popular Music*, 21(2), pp.209-223. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Sartre, J. P. (1943/2020) *Being and nothingness: an essay in phenomenological ontology*. Originally published as *L'Etre et le Neant*. Translated by Sarah Richmond. London: Routledge.

- Schade, L. D., and Askew, E. (2019) 'Less Human Than Human', in *Blade Runner 2049 and Philosophy*, Bunce, R. and McCrossin, T. (eds.). United States: Open Court Publishing, pp.205-211.

- Schutte, C. (2015), 'Figurative Semiotics: A Textual Analysis of FAK Songs', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 46(2), pp.371-400. Croatia: Croatian Musicological Society.

- Shanahan, T. (2014) *Philosophy and Blade Runner*. United Kingdom: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Shields, M. (2020), 'The Secrets Behind The Eyes of "Blade Runner"', *Film School Rejects*. Available at: https://filmschoolrejects.com/blade-runner-eyes/

- Suciu, P. (1998), 'Blade Runner – It's not murder, it's retirement', *SciFi Games* [Review]. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20080507084034/http:/www.scifi.com/sfw/issue59/games.html.

- Treanor, B. (2020), 'Being-from-birth: Natality and Narrative', in *Blade Runner 2049: A Philosophical Exploration*, Shanahan, T. and Smart, P. (eds.). New York: Routledge, pp.68-86.

- White, D. (2020) 'One Does Not Simply Walk Into Mordor: Sound and Music as Suture in the Opening Sequences of Peter Jackson's Middle-earth Films', Music, Sound and the Moving Image, 14(2), pp. 93–117.
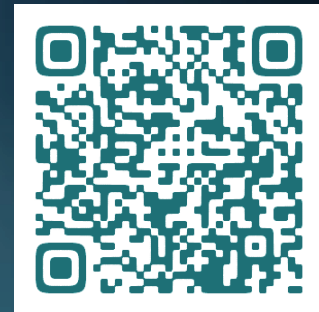
Thank you for listening!

Blade Runner Clips YouTube Playlist

The music for those 'more human than human': Authenticating consciousness through music in Cyberpunk science fiction

Liane Silva

liane.silva@uwl.ac.uk

University of West London

Contact Details

Transformational Theory in Blade Runner

A tentative in-franchise application (cf. Farmer and Summers, 2024a)

Blade Runner Final Cut (1982/2007) [FILM]

Cue: 'Tears in Rain'

Levels of Scale (synth-pad intro section added)

Simplicity (only harmonic movement in intro)

Echoes (Interpolation)

Connectedness

Blade Runner 2049 (2017) [FILM]

Cue: 'Tears in Rain' [adaptation / interpolation]

Transformational Theory in Blade Runner

A tentative in-franchise application (cf. Farmer and Summers, 2024a)

- Levels of Scale:
  - There is a new section (synth-pad intro) added before the 'Tears in rain' motif plays

- Simplicity:
  - The synth-pad intro has a reduced complexity, as it consists only of a harmonic outline of the piece

- Echoes:
  - The overall cue in BR2049 incorporates an interpolation of the original cue

- Connectedness:
  - The presence of the 'Tears in rain' cue in BR2049 establishes a connection between these two entries in the franchise
  - It is a musical connection, but also a semiotic one: in both scenes, a Replicant character who manifested free will is dying
  - There are numerous metaphorical and narrative implications, especially when we consider the Connectedness aspect of the music along with the semiotic signs present in the visual and dialogue elements of both films.