**America in the 1980s**

Students must analyse and discuss the relationships between media narratives and audiences, media narratives and the ideological, and institutional contexts of production.Students discuss how ideologies shape media narratives and the relationship between the narrative, the ideological and institutional contexts of production and audience consumption and reception.

For many people in the United States, the late 1970s were a troubled and troubling time. The radical and countercultural movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, the Watergate scandal, the Vietnam War, uncertainty in the Middle East and economic crisis at home had undermined Americans’ confidence in their fellow citizens and in their government. By the end of Jimmy Carter’s presidency, the idealistic dreams of the 1960s were worn down by inflation, foreign policy turmoil and rising crime. In response, many Americans embraced a new conservatism in social, economic and political life during the 1980s, characterized by the policies of President Ronald Reagan. Often remembered for its materialism and consumerism, the decade also saw the rise of the “yuppie,” an explosion of blockbuster movies and the emergence of cable networks like MTV, which introduced the music video and launched the careers of many iconic artists.

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**THE 1980S: RISE OF THE NEW RIGHT**

The populist conservative movement known as the New Right enjoyed unprecedented growth in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It appealed to a diverse assortment of Americans, including evangelical Christians; anti-tax crusaders; advocates of deregulation and smaller markets; advocates of a more powerful American presence abroad; disaffected white liberals; and defenders of an unrestricted free market.

**THE 1980S: THE REAGAN REVOLUTION AND REAGANOMICS**

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During and after the 1980 presidential election, these disaffected liberals came to be known as “Reagan Democrats.” They provided millions of crucial votes for the Republican candidate, the personable and engaging former governor of California, [Ronald Reagan](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/ronald-reagan%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) (1911-2004), in his victory over the incumbent Democratic president, [Jimmy Carter](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/jimmy-carter%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) (1924-). Reagan won 51 percent of the vote and carried all but five states and the District of Columbia. Once a Hollywood actor, his outwardly reassuring disposition and optimistic style appealed to many Americans. Reagan was affectionately nicknamed “the Gipper” for his 1940 film role as a Notre Dame football player named George Gipp.

Reagan’s campaign cast a wide net, appealing to conservatives of all stripes with promises of **big tax cuts and smaller government.** Once he took office, he set about making good on his promises **to get the federal government out of Americans’ lives and pocketbooks. He advocated for industrial deregulation, reductions in government spending and tax cuts for both individuals and corporations, as part of an economic plan he and his advisors referred to as “supply-side economics.**” Rewarding success and allowing people with money to keep more of it, the thinking went, would encourage them to buy more goods and invest in businesses. The resulting economic growth would “trickle down” to everyone.

*At the beginning of the decade, as the Cold War showed no signs of warming, arms control advocates argued for a “nuclear freeze” agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1982, almost a million people rallied in support of the freeze in New York City’s Central Park. Many historians believe this was the largest mass demonstration in American history*

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Historians link the rise of this New Right in part to the growth of the so-called Sunbelt, a mostly suburban and rural region of the Southeast, Southwest and [California](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/california%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), where the population began to expand after [World War II](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and exploded during the 1970s. This demographic shift had important consequences. Many of the new Sunbelters had migrated from the older industrial cities of the North and Midwest (the “Rust Belt”). They did so because they had grown tired of the seemingly insurmountable problems facing aging cities, such as overcrowding, pollution and crime. Perhaps most of all, they were tired of paying high taxes for social programs they did not consider effective and were worried about the stagnating economy. Many were also frustrated by what they saw as the federal government’s constant, costly and inappropriate interference. The movement resonated with many citizens who had once supported more liberal policies but who no longer believed the Democratic Party represented their interests.

Reaganism created several fields of discourse where common sense and ordinary, typically American values were celebrated. The American school system was employed to prepare the children for the harsh reality of capitalist competition. Racial and ethnic minorities and their cultural heritage were said to undermine the American agenda. Any form of cultural individualism was regarded as being dangerous. The family once again became the center of American culture. Women were supposed to be housewives and abortion was defined as a crime against nature. Minority youth gang members and drug addicts were used to produce a “series of moral panics” (Denzin 7) by being held responsible for a large proportion of crimes against orderly white citizens. The bottom of the American society was also accused of abusing the welfare system. In the eyes of the Right, “the welfare system undermined self-confidence and perpetuated poverty” (Denzin 7). Giving money to the needy constituted an act which endangered the earned wealth of the nation. Interestingly enough, the Right employed cultural texts to convince the public of the need for conservative policies:

Cultural politics became the main carrier of the conservative ideology. Since the public self was increasingly defined by mass-culture, this media-oriented strategy seemed likely to be very efficient.

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The growing influence of film and media in general also increased the awareness for support and criticism voiced through mass-media productions. Many cinematic narratives of the 80s engaged politics in a very immediate way. American military power, the revolutions in Latin America and the controversy regarding the war in Vietnam are some examples where the political material was emphasized and placed in the foreground (Prince 155-156). There also was a more indirect approach to political representation. Fantasy films, as Robin Wood points out, “by and large, can be used in two ways - as a means of escaping from contemporary reality, or as a means of illuminating it” (183). Wood compares Blade Runner and another very popular fantasy production: “Against the Spielbergian complacency of E.T. can be set Blade Runner’s vision of capitalism which is projected into the future, yet intended to be clearly recognizable” (183). E.T. was simultaneously released with Blade Runner, making the films competitors at the box-office. After the critical establishment’s reaction to E.T. had been ecstatic and Blade Runner had earned only indifferent or skeptical reviews, Ridley Scott’s movie became a financial failure while E.T. was a major success. This is especially surprising since an affirmative ending was added by the responsible studio. They feared that the original version would be too depressing and pessimistic for a commercial audience. All of this led Wood to the following highly political assumption:

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*I take these facts as representing a choice made in conjunction by critics and public, ratified by the Motion Picture Academy - a choice whose significance extends far beyond a mere preference for one film over another, expressing a preference for the reassuring over the disturbing, the reactionary over the progressive, the safe over the challenging, the childish over the adult, spectator passivity over spectator activity.*

The link between postmodernism and late capitalism is highlighted in the film’s representation of post-industrial decay. The future does not realize an

idealized, aseptic technological order, but is seen simply as the development of the present state of the city and of the social order of late capitalism.

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High rise, high-tech buildings stand next to decayed and rotten tenements. The chaos on the streets seems unbearable and the mix of races and advertisements signals the arrival of the global market. The American economic hegemony seems to be over and mainly Asians control the smaller enterprises. English is no longer the dominating language as Japanese, Spanish and even German sentences are audible. The visual design obviously speaks to contemporary dilemmas. The anonymous masses on the streets allude to another phenomenon of the 1980s, that is the explosive growth of homelessness and the resulting underclass in American society. The so-called ‘reform’ of low-cost housing together with a cutting of social services and a growing inflation endangered the economic survival of a large number of American citizens, forcing many of them out of their homes. Looking for food, clothing and jobs these “ghosts of former lives and selves” (Prince 168) gathered in the major cities.

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**THE 1980S: REAGAN AND THE COLD WAR**

Like many other American leaders during the [Cold War](http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), President Reagan believed that the spread of communism anywhere threatened freedom everywhere. As a result, his administration was eager to provide financial and military aid to anticommunist governments and insurgencies around the world. This policy, applied in nations including Grenada, El Salvador and Nicaragua, was known as the Reagan Doctrine.

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In November 1986, it emerged that the [White House](http://www.history.com/topics/white-house%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) had secretly sold arms to Iran in an effort to win the freedom of U.S. hostages in Lebanon, and then diverted money from the sales to Nicaraguan rebels known as the Contras. The Iran-Contra affair, as it became known, resulted in the convictions–later reversed–of Reagan’s national security adviser, John Poindexter (1936-), and Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North (1943-), a member of the National Security Council

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**THE 1980S: REAGANOMICS**

On the domestic front, Reagan’s economic policies initially proved less successful than its partisans had hoped, particularly when it came to a key tenet of the plan: balancing the budget. Huge increases in military spending (during the Reagan administration, [Pentagon](http://www.history.com/topics/pentagon%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) spending would reach $34 million an hour) were not offset by spending cuts or tax increases elsewhere. By early 1982, the United States was experiencing its worst recession since the [Great Depression](http://www.history.com/topics/great-depression%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). Nine million people were unemployed in November of that year. Businesses closed, families lost their homes and farmers lost their land. The economy slowly righted itself, however, and “Reaganomics” grew popular again. Even the stock market crash of October 1987 did little to undermine the confidence of middle-class and wealthy Americans in the president’s economic agenda. Many also overlooked the fact that Reagan’s policies created record budget deficits: In his eight years in office, the federal government accumulated more debt than it had in its entire history.

Despite its mixed track record, a majority of Americans still believed in the conservative agenda by the late 1980s. When Ronald Reagan left office in 1989, he had the highest approval rating of any president since Franklin Roosevelt. In 1988, Reagan’s vice president, George H.W. Bush, soundly defeated [Massachusetts](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/massachusetts%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) Governor Michael Dukakis in the presidential election.

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**THE 1980S: POPULAR CULTURE**

In some respects, the popular culture of the 1980s reflected the era’s political conservatism. For many people, the symbol of the decade was the “yuppie”: a baby boomer with a college education, a well-paying job and expensive taste. Many people derided yuppies for being self-centered and materialistic, and surveys of young urban professionals across the country showed that they were, indeed, more concerned with making money and buying consumer goods than their parents and grandparents had been. However, in some ways yuppiedom was less shallow and superficial than it appeared. Popular television shows like “thirtysomething” and movies like “The Big Chill” and “Bright Lights, Big City” depicted a generation of young men and women who were plagued with anxiety and self-doubt. They were successful, but they weren’t sure they were happy.

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At the movie theater, the 1980s was the age of the blockbuster. Movies like “E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial,” “Return of the Jedi,” “Raiders of the Lost Ark” and “Beverly Hills Cop” appealed to moviegoers of all ages and made hundreds of millions of dollars at the box office. The 1980s was also the heyday of the teen movie. Films like “The Breakfast Club,” “Some Kind of Wonderful” and “Pretty in Pink” are still popular today.

At home, people watched family sitcoms like “The Cosby Show,” “Family Ties,” “Roseanne” and “Married…with Children.” They also rented movies to watch on their new VCRs. By the end of the 1980s, 60 percent of American television owners got cable service–and the most revolutionary cable network of all was MTV, which made its debut on August 1, 1981. The music videos the network played made stars out of bands like Duran Duran and Culture Club and made megastars out of artists like Michael Jackson (1958-2009), whose elaborate “Thriller” video helped sell 600,000 albums in the five days after its first broadcast. MTV also influenced fashion: People across the country (and around the world) did their best to copy the hairstyles and fashions they saw in music videos. In this way, artists like Madonna (1958-) became (and remain) fashion icons.

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As the decade wore on, MTV also became a forum for those who went against the grain or were left out of the yuppie ideal. Rap artists such as Public Enemy channeled the frustration of urban African Americans into their powerful album “It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back.” Heavy metal acts such as Metallica and Guns N’ Roses also captured the sense of malaise among young people, particularly young men. Even as Reagan maintained his popularity, popular culture continued to be an arena for dissatisfaction and debate throughout the 1980s.

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**Blade Runner  and Reagan :**

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**how audiences from different periods of time engage with, consume and read media narratives**

**the relationship between media narratives and audiences**

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Very few films in contemporary American cinema have generated philosophical discussion, market exploitation, popular worship and entrenched criticism, all at once. Blade Runner has been, indeed, subject to all of these tendencies. The film premiered poorly when it was released in June 1982. Reviewers considered Scott’s slow-paced blend of film noir and science fiction, as well as its opulent dystopian setting and inquiries about the boundaries of humanity, pretentious and too reliant on special effects.

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The theatrical cut also contains some voiceover from ex-cop and Blade Runner Rick Deckard (played by Harrison Ford), which serves two purposes. One, it explains some of his character’s backstory, which could aid moviegoers who aren’t feeling up to a moody cinematic challenge. But it also makes the film feel even more like a neo-noir detective movie, in the style of Raymond Chandler. Blade Runner draws some visual and narrative cues from neo-noir — dark and moody lighting, light shining through window shades, a femme fatale, and a morally conflicted protagonist — while being set in a dystopian future (2019!), and the narration makes the neo-noir side really come through. This lends an extra sheen of moral ambiguity to everything that happens in the film.

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That said, the voiceover on the theatrical cut sounds bafflingly bad, and Ford’s listless delivery leaves much to be desired. Combined with the too-neat “happy ending” mandated by the studio, the theatrical cut isn’t anyone’s first choice, including Scott.

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The film earned $26 million in its summer run in 1982 — not bad, but not enough to get it into the summer’s top 10. And it was certainly not enough to make a profit (the summer box office was dominated by two films, “ET — the ExtraTerrestrial” and “Rocky 3”).

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Rotten Tomatoes says it was "misunderstood when it first hit theaters." In the original review, Variety reflected a lot of the mixed reaction, saying the film is "a stylistically dazzling film noir set 37 years hence in a brilliantly imagined Los Angeles... Special effects and sheer virtuosity of the production will attract considerable attention but unrelenting grimness and vacuum at the story's center will make it tough to recoup reported $30 million budget, not to mention ad-promos costs. Critical reaction will probably vary widely."

Many other reviewers also mentioned the budget, which was considered enormous (even though it converts to $76 million today, a laughably modest sum for such an ambitious film).

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Blade Runner earned two Oscar nominations: for art direction (Lawrence G. Paull, David L. Snyder, with set decoration by Linda DeScenna) and visual effects (the visionary Trumbull, Richard Yuricich, David Dryer). They all went home empty-handed. But over the years, filmmakers and audiences have appreciated their work, as well as the contributions of the entire team of the Michael Deeley-produced movie, including cinematographer Jordan Cronenweth, composer Vangelis, and casting directors Mike Fenton and Jane Feinberg.

It was the summer of a much kinder sort of science fiction, E.T, as its unprecedented success attests.The fact that Steven Spielberg’s feel-good tale conquered both box offices and the audiences’ hearts while Blade Runner was, at first sight, condemned to ostracism revealed eloquently how popular culture was beginning to articulate the sharp shift at play in American politics.

After the violent and anti-establishment stories of Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich, and other filmmakers from the New Hollywood, other kind of cultural discourse was to dominate American popular cinema through the 1980s; one attuned to the politi- cal landscape Republican president Ronald Reagan would tailor during his two terms (1981-1989).3 An agenda constituted by economic anti-interventionism, polarizing evangelical rhetoric, rehistoricization of the recent past, military reinvigoration, and patriotism was reciprocated with a string of box office successes that bears strong kinship to the conservative backlash of the 1980s. Suburban stories strengthening the importance of the nuclear family (E.T, Back to e Future [1985], The Breakfast Club [1985]), escapist tales reminiscent of adventure serials and comic book strips (  Ghostbusters [1984], Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade [1989]), and a new type of hyperbolic masculinity (epitomized by the second [1985] and third [1989] installments of the Rambo series) became the most cherished cultural products of the Reagan Era.

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However, parallel to this filmic and cultural sway towards conservatism, people r**eacquainted gradually with Blade Runner.** the palimpsestic texture of its aesthetic, and more pointedly, the ambiguities of the plot (mainly the real nature of protagonist Rick Deckard) prompted heated debate in the internet and in magazines among the increasingly large number of fans  Aware of the enthusiasm accruing on the film since its failed release, producers and director Ridley Scott reedited the film to attract the people that had been dissecting its intricacies for a decade. the result crystallized into Blade Runner: the Final Cut (1992)

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You might think a director’s cut would fix all those problems, but you’d only be sort of right. Blade Runner’s director’s cut took a tortured path to the screen, the minutiae of which is probably only interesting to die-hard Blade Runner fans; in short, the new cut was “supervised” by Scott, though the actual edits were performed by film preservationist Michael Arick based on Scott’s notes. It was released in theaters by Warner Bros. in 1992, and it changed a lot about the film people had seen a decade earlier.

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In the director’s cut, Deckard’s voiceovers disappear, as does the happy ending, restoring the intended ambiguous ending about Deckard and Rachael’s fates. But perhaps more importantly, several additions suddenly called into question whether Deckard is human — something the theatrical cut never gives much reason to interrogate — or is actually a replicant, created to hunt down other replicants.

This new ambiguity was accomplished largely through the insertion of a sequence in which Deckard dreams of a unicorn running through a forest. Because Edward James Olmos’ officer Gaff gives Deckard an origami unicorn, this seems to strongly suggest that Deckard’s memories are implanted rather than “real,” and thus he is a replicant.

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Scott eventually and ironically voiced his dissatisfaction with the director’s cut, too — when it was being edited together, he was working on Thelma and Louise, and he felt he didn’t give it proper supervision.

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**The way ideologies shape Media Narratives**

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Its reenactment as a cultural narrative, just a few years after Ronald Reagan left office, poses the need for a close analysis. Time has invested the story and its images with new meanings. As we will see, several elements in the narration represent a very critical examination of Reagan’s presidency. The film characterizes an economic and social system whose functioning and structuring encapsulate a speculative reading of the economic, political, and cultural practices of Reaganism.

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Being a product of the early Reagan-era, Blade Runner is inseparably linked not only to the prevalent world wide economic recession but also to the political circumstances of these times.

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When Reagan came to power in 1981, the United States were still suffering from the effects of economic crisis and recession. After the fall of Nixon and Carter, there was a longing for new concepts and ideas.

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The idealist movement of the sixties and seventies had failed and the stage was set for the rise of the so-called materialism. Reagan seemed to be aware of the desire for a reaffirmation of values. What America needed was a rebirth, a complete ideological renewal . Lacking a visionary program, the New Right emphasized a romatic nostalgia for the past, wiping out the boundaries between the past and the present.

The New Right established clear concepts of who the ideal subjects of the 80s and its ideology were and how they represented the **new values of hard work, self-reliance, health and religion.** A general politics of morality redefined the meaning of the average citizen, the ordinary individual

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Repressive politics centered around abortion, drug and alcohol abuse and **“the general social health and moral hygiene of American society”**

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The **underclass as well as homeless people and drug addicts were defined as morally unworthy and unemployment, in the eyes of the New Right, was the result of a lack willpower and initiative.**These ideological polemics helped the conservative government to maintain its control over society.

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Even economic and political crises were employed to strengthen the belief in the President and his policies.

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Being **patriotic became the most important identity an American could hold**

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Reaganism created several fields of discourse where common sense and ordinary, typically American values were celebrated. The American school system was employed to prepare the children for the harsh reality of capitalist competition. Racial and ethnic minorities and their cultural heritage were said to undermine the American agenda. Any form of cultural individualism was regarded as being dangerous. The family once again became the center of American culture.

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Women were supposed to be housewives and abortion was defined as a crime against nature. Minority youth gang members and drug addicts were used to produce a “series of moral panics” by being held responsible for a large proportion of crimes against orderly white citizens

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The bottom of the American society was also accused of abusing the welfare system. In the eyes of the Right, “the welfare system undermined self-confidence and perpetuated poverty” (Denzin 7). Giving money to the needy constituted an act which endangered the earned wealth of the nation. Interestingly enough, the Right employed cultural texts to convince the public of the need for conservative policies:

In each case, the moral panic took the shape of cultural texts. These texts attempted to capture the crisis in question, represent it over the media, and show how the New Right was containing these threats to the traditional order.

Cultural politics became the main carrier of the conservative ideology. Since the public self was increasingly defined by mass-culture, this media-oriented strategy seemed likely to be very efficient.

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Reagan saw fitting to introduce new approaches to an economy stagnant for most of the 1970s. A host of cultural observers and historians have analyzed in quite critical terms those policies of deregulation and strong reliance on free market that came to be known as Reaganomics

A handful of critics have stressed that the economic bonanza Reagan claimed to have generated had less to do with a uniform growth than with a markedly uneven wealth distribution, conveniently disguised as overall national reinvigoration, and dan- gerously built upon an “orgy of debt and interest

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Blade Runner, together with Escape from New York (1981) and Outland (1981) seemed to be the forerunner of a series of movies depicting critical visions of the future. This group includes the sequel to Scott’s Alien (1979) which was called Aliens (1986), The Running Man (1987), Robocop (1987), and Total Recall (1990). They projected the political present, offering “a harsh portrait of ongoing socioeconomic decay” (Prince 156).

Through the displacement of a future setting and the mediation of the fantasy and science fiction theme they indirectly addressed the increasing social and economic problems of the United States.

Their outward appearance being that of fantasy, the films pointed out the crises of contemporary American society. According to Prince their achievement was “to contextualize them (the crises) within that more comprehensive set of dilemmas of politics and representation known as postmodernism”

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The link between postmodernism and late capitalism is highlighted in the film’s representation of post-industrial decay. The future does not realize an idealized, aseptic technological order, but is seen simply as the development of the present state of the city and of the social order of late capitalism.

(High rise, high-tech buildings stand next to decayed and rotten tenements. The chaos on the streets seems unbearable and the mix of races and advertisements signals the arrival of the global market.

The American economic hegemony seems to be over and mainly Asians control the smaller enterprises. English is no longer the dominating language as Japanese, Spanish and even German sentences are audible.

The visual design obviously speaks to contemporary dilemmas. The anonymous masses on the streets allude to another phenomenon of the 1980s, that is the explosive growth of homelessness and the resulting underclass in American society.

The so-called ‘reform’ of low-cost housing together with a cutting of social services and a growing inflation endangered the economic survival of a large number of American citizens, forcing many of them out of their homes.

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The critical portrayal of the state’s representatives together with the anarchic mood in the future Los Angeles can be interpreted as serious skepticism regarding the ability of future structures of power to deal with what he film identifies as the main problems of the United States.

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**Social and Cultural and Political contexts in the 1980s that are reflected in Blade Runner:**

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Fear of growing economic power of Japan, general expansion in Asia:  wide media coverage of Japanese buying landmark real estate in New York (ironic considering that by the mid 90s the Japanese economy entered a fairly severe recession which it’s still in)

Anxiety over globalization, immigration; fears of foreign threats to an “American way of life;” led to notion that mainstream American culture would be lost amidst foreign influence (also ironic considering how much we export our own culture and are accused of cultural imperialism, especially in the digital era

Fears of social disorder, particularly based in the working classes: that central government would eventually become impotent in exerting control over urban centers

Still emerging environmental consciousness; in the late 70s and through the1980s, it finally began to hit mainstream culture after still being more of a concern of the progressive fringe through the 60s and early 70s

Emergence over the past few decades of the mega-city, like Los Angeles or Rio de Janeiro; cities characterized by huge populations and urban sprawl with no sense of centrality, planning or defined borders

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Reagan saw fitting to introduce new approaches to an economy stagnant for most of the 1970s. A host of cultural observers and historians have analyzed in quite critical terms those policies of deregulation and strong reliance on free market that came to be known as Reaganomics. e socio-economic system presented in Blade Runner adheres to this line of thought as it intends to deconstruct and pinpoint the contradictions interred within the dynamics of Reaganomics.

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Blade Runner opens with a long shot of a slightly gloomy yet exuberant Los Angeles: characteristically wide, luminous, and unmistakably set in the future as a ying car crosses the skyline. e perfected technology, along with Vangelis’ appealing score, pro ers an ode to opulence. After the first indoors sequence, a new long shot is presented to us, this time at a lower level of the cityscape. Nonetheless, the spatial and economic semantics remains the same. A gigantic virtual billboard of a geisha-looking woman covers the entire façade of a skyscraper. Consumerism has gained such dominance that is literally superimposed upon the cityscape, suggesting the strengths of the market (and, so we assume, of the national economy).

The hipercity that is presented to us during the  first minutes of the film conforms to the Reaganite narrative and its pervasive culture of greed.

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The selection of long shots, emphasizing a sense of overall richness, runs in parallel with the way “Reaganites dismissed concerns about the skewed distribution of wealth by pointing the wealthier society overall” (Gill 226). The camera cranes further down until it reaches a rain-washed, crowded street where tacky neon lights and junk food stalls dominate the space. In opposition to the previous long shots depicting a technological apogee, subsequent scenes enhance a sense of structural poverty that underpins the entirety of the zero level. We encounter, throughout the plot, homeless people warming themselves up near re buckets, extreme pollution and overpopulation, crumbling infrastructures, abandoned buildings, and unhealthy living conditions, an urban landscape that have much more in common with the ingrained poverty of the world of favelas in City of God (2002) than with any other cinematic portrait we have ever seen of Los Angeles. its visual emphasis on the clash between the empowered macro-perspective and the decadent micro-perspective of the shadow city starts indicating the real consequences of the Reaganite praxis:

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The film positions itself as (counter)narrative of Reagan’s discourse on wealth and prosperity. Whenever the camera zeroes in on the impoverished city ground or when it shows Deckard’s car being almost dismantled in the street, the lm refutes the “American miracle” proclaimed by Reagan as well as his idea of how supply-side theory made “economy bloomed like a plant that had been cut back and could now grow quicker and stronger”. It is not surprising that the macro-perspective is controlled by huge advertisements of Coca Cola or Pan-An. But as pointed out previously, the power and solidity of big business is not matched, in turn, with a well-established average consumer as the abundant images of poverty on the ground level certify. By means of presenting an economic landscape totally subjected to big business, powerful enough to become an enormous material part of the city, the discourse of the film validates the argument asserting that “Reaganomics is based, in large part, on the belief that only the large corporations can revitalize the American economy”  Moreover, along with the very materiality of the city, the film makes explicit the Reaganite narrative by leaving any form of government totally absent and unnamed

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What are the characteristics of the environment Deckard has to put up with? Scott’s nightmare vision leaves not much room for Los Angeles as we know it. Sunshine has been replaced by rain, light has been exchanged for constant darkness. Science fiction meets film-noir in this city of noise and danger. With his picture of the population, Scott obviously alludes to the fear of many Americans of Asians taking over not only Los Angeles but also the

rest of the west. Bicycle-riding, food-selling and fast-talking immigrants crowd the streets, always eager to display what western society assumes to be their characteristic attributes. They seem to be the only ones who have adjusted perfectly, working for the sake of future generations who hopefully will be able to live in one of the dream-worlds advertised by flying billboards: “A new life awaits you in the off-world colony, the chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure”. The icons of advanced capitalism are omnipresent. By giving us glimpses at familiar products (Coca-Cola, Jim Beam, Atari, Michelob), the director provides us with something we can relate to and at the same time signals the survival of huge corporations. While the city appears to be on the brink of total chaos and destruction, advertisements shine bright, symbolizing the invincibility of market forces. This is where Blade Runner’s outlook on the future development obviously meets the era of Ronald Reagan.

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In his first inaugural speech, Reagan offered one of his most famous lines: “[G]overnment is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” is head-on statement was not merely an ostentatious claim. It prefigured the economic management that was to predominate in the ensuing years, that is, transferring agency and influence from federal government to the markets. is anti-government position is examined in the lm in rather negative terms. e narration renders, in visual terms, an oppressive sense of corporate culture. As opposed to Reagan’s glorification of free enterprise, in Blade Runner the corporate apparatus seems claustrophobically omnipresent, literalized on the walls of the cityscape as well as on the acoustic spaces through various advertisements. Corporations appropriate the city’s architecture and atmosphere while government is apparently absent.

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On the grounds that only large corporations and big business would reignite national economy, and provided with wide scale relief, wealthy tax-payers employed the advantages granted by Reaganomics “for conspicuous consumption (such as expensive foreign cars) or for stock exchange speculation rather than productive investment” (Kemp 221) as wealth distribution kept growing disparate. During the decade, for “those in the top 1 percent of the income bracket, capital gains grew by 112 percent and salary income grew by 81 percent, whereas for those in the bottom 90 percent of the income distribution, a whole decade of work yielded only a 3.9 percent wage increase” (Edsall, Edsall 196). Reagan’s Morning in America was, after all, hidebound by a class-oriented nature. Attuned to this, the Off World of Blade Runner is beyond the majority’s means. The first hint of this is the extreme overpopulation of the city (and the subsequent lack of decent living conditions) and the poverty that strikes most of the citizens is demographic and social reality seems strange given the fact that a “golden land of opportunity” such as the Off World is supposedly available for the entire population. The structural forces that shape this situation are brought to the fore when the film introduces us to J.F. Sebastian, a genetic designer living in an almost abandoned building who suffers a degenerative disease:

Pris:What’syourproblem?
Sebastian:Methuselahsyndrome.
Pris:What’sthat?
Sebastian: My glands, they grow old too fast. Pris: Is that why you’re still on Earth? Sebastian: Yeah. I couldn’t pass the medical.

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Echoing the sadly famous “preexisting conditions” that insurance companies use for refusing to provide medical coverage, the scene manifests the real nature of the Off World and its implicit class-bound discourse. In elucidating the agency of spaces as ensuring the hegemonic status, David Harvey sketches an idea paramount for both the Off World and, implicitly, for Reagan’s Morning in America: “[o]ne of the principal tasks of the capitalist state is to locate power in the spaces which the bourgeoisie controls, and disempower those spaces which oppositional movements have the greatest potentiality to command” . Blade Runner’s dystopia conforms to this description right down to very last detail. With its polarized spaces, the ground level has become an enormous inner city, alienated and undercut, and most importantly, conveniently fortified (those affected by illness are to remain in the zero level), while the outer space colonies appears as a “golden opportunity” targeted for everybody but achievable for those who can afford it or are physically fit. When the flying advertisement at the onset of the lm portraits the Off World as a “chance to begin again”, we ignored its actual status as a privatopia. Similarly, American population at large remained unaware of how Reagan’s economic policies of freeing the markets and lowering taxes turned the United States into the most economically stratified society of the first world and the world’s largest debtor

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In the film, government is not mentioned. However, we see forceful structural drives at play when there is any sign of danger for the system. Expansion towards outer space is a staple for the economic sca olding of America in the late 2010s. As much as large governmental institutions remain invisible in Blade Runner, these are not inexistent. Framed in a subtle sense of Orwellian surveillance, structural forces are put to work in order to eradicate any deviance that may destabilize the hegemonic power. is is best exempli ed in the way authorities function when dealing with the main event of the narration (the four replicants’ scape from the O World). e replicants, created and exploited by and for the system, mobilize to transcend their deterministic roles and thus achieve better life standards. Trying to overcome the status assigned by the system will be too great a danger for the latter. Firstly, Deckard’s murderous quest is an example of hegemonic exploitation. As a replicant who ignores his real nature, he is being utilized to preserve the same system that has him subjugated by means of arti cial memory implants which provide him with a sense of “humanity”. And secondly, and most significantly, his mission is nothing but a systemic procedure aimed to wipe out an uprising that challenges social stratification. The invisible yet expeditious system of Blade Runner operates under the same premises of Reagan’s anti-interventionism, that is, a form of government that apparently does not intend to interfere in social life but which, implicitly, engages in conguring material conditions in ways it privileges certain sectors of society.

As a consequence of its market-centered policies, Reaganomics reduced investment in welfare. Aid for the poor and the unemployed was terribly damaged as billions of dollars were taken from such programs and re-directed to military spending.

The depiction of the underclass in Blade Runner is multifaceted even though the replicants must face the most inescapable ill-fated destiny. ey are, none- theless, a perfected version of the worker from a corporative perspective (and, therefore, from the stance of Reaganomics). eir extremely short lifespan provides a four-year disposable worker with, allegedly, no emotional responses that may problematize the tasks imposed. ey are the most suitable units for the ultimate capitalist state and, implicitly, for Reaganomics: “most work schedules are extremely tightly ordered, and the intensity and speed of production have largely been organized in ways that favour capital rather than labour [...] all part and parcel of a daily work rhythm xed by pro t-making rather than by the construction of humane work schedules” (Harvey 231). Due to the strict temporal trajectory they are subject to, the replicants become metaphors of the type of worker demanded by supply-side theory: de-unionized, rapidly and easily interchange- able for other, and left adrift in the market to be used by large companies. Echoing the macro/micro duality explicated earlier, this sense of dominance underpins the rst indoors sequence of the lm, where “waste disposal” replicant Leon has his humanity tested. Pure sci- as it is, the sequence has strong connections with the emergence of stringent methods of control on the part of employers: “[i]n the 1980s the union proclivities of workers are increasingly monitored in elaborate pre and postemployment screening and data collection. Employers commonly rely on psychological examinations, polygraph tests, and (in a return to more traditional methods), direct surveillance of the shop oor” (Fantasia 67). Interviewed by an arrogant white collar, Leon ends up shooting him. e dialogue is plunged into a rari ed atmosphere of surveillance. Machinery in the form of cameras permeates the visual construction of the scene, interfering in eye-line matches of the editing. e subtext of the sequence will resonate in the entirety of the lm: the lowest sectors of society are to be constantly scrutinized and chased by larger structures of power.

 Nowadays audiences are more than used to see films from the past being re-made and re-released.  Although it is clear that its numerous re-edits respond to a pro t-oriented strategy on the part of the studio, there is virtually no other re-edited lm as culturally eloquent and politically meaningful as Blade Runner: e Final Cut. Apart from the complex and engaging questions it poses about what constitutes being human, the lm forces the viewer to re-consider critically what do we understand by anti-government positions and to what extent is the narrative of free market and non-interventionism really deprived of constraints and very precise class-based intentions. e examination of Reaganism in the lm under these premises, and the far-reaching consequences of the current economic crisis further strengthen the idea that the (economic, social, and cultural) narrative of deregulation must be always

under scrutiny and critical revision since it is built up upon quite contradictory terms that represent its polar- izing aims as an individualist quest towards freedom. In the 2010’s this may come as too self-evident for many. However, Blade Runner discusses these problems and o ers a very critical conclusion as early as 1992. is discourse, as the dying Roy Batty said, should not be “lost in time, like tears in rain”.

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Source : Extracts from RIDLEY SCOTT’S DYSTOPIA MEETS RONALD REAGAN’S AMERICA: CLASS CONFLICT AND POLITICAL DISCLOSURE IN BLADE RUNNER: THE FINAL CUT Fabián Orán Llarena