



# International Baccalaureate Form 6/FISCS

## Film cover sheet: independent study

SUBMIT TO: EXAMINER ARRIVAL DATE: 30 APR (30 OCT) SESSION: April 2008

SCHOOL CODE: SCHOOL NAME:

- Type or write legibly using black ink and retain a copy of this form.
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SUBJECT: Film LEVEL: Standard

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### Instructions to candidates

Please tick/check to show you have included:

- Rationale
- Script
- List of sources

Number of script pages (HL 12-15, SL 8-10): 10

Title: Back In Black: The Noir City in Dystopian  
Science Fiction

Cultures examined	Films studied
German	Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" (1927)
American	Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner" (1982)

I confirm that this independent study is my own work.

Candidate's signature:

Date: 13/4/08

I confirm that, to the best of my knowledge, the material submitted is the authentic work of the candidate.

Teacher's name:

Date: 18/4/08

Teacher's signature:

**April 2008**  
**Film**  
**Standard Level**  
**Independent Study**

# **BACK IN BLACK**

**The Noir City in Dystopian Science  
Fiction**

## BACK IN BLACK

### **Synopsis:**

This documentary will investigate the 'city' in classic Film Noir and its similarity with urban representations in dystopian Science Fiction. I trace the origins of the noir city to German Expressionism and look at the recurrence in neo-noirs. I will look at Fritz Lang's Metropolis (1927) as an example of German cinema influencing both genres and will assess how the elements of the noir city are re-created in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982). The documentary will attempt to explain why there is an affinity in urban portrayal between the two genres.

## Visual

Establishing shot of Cloud city at sunset in Star wars: The Empire Strikes Back

Long shot of the 2274 oasis city of Logan's Run

Street-car ride from beginning of Pickup on South Street with neurotic glances between fellow passengers

Fade into establishing tracking shot of Los Angeles street then Joe Gillis's apartment from Sunset Boulevard

Rapid montage: Establishing shot of glider entering the dark skyscrapers in Escape From New York, Johnson in trench coat looking in to starkly lit modernist buildings from dark rainy outside in Alphaville, carnage from car explosion in Robocop. Inter-cut to music with flashing words in red on black screen "Isolation", "Violence", "Social Division", "Alienation", "Corruption", "Crime"

Long shot tracking towards Narrator walking towards camera on New York street at night.

MCU of narrator

Shots of Metropolis cityscape with subtitle "Fritz Lang's Metropolis (1927)"

Blade Runner cityscape with subtitle: "Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982)"

Metropolis: Fredersen in office.  
Blade Runner: Deckard in police station. Infra-red track across Venetian blinds.

## Audio

Narrator VO: Science Fiction is a genre focused on the city..

The 1940s and 50s genre Film Noir..

...is likewise, situated for the most-part in urban settings..

These two genres often converge when portraying the city.

[Music: Back in Black by AC DC start loud then fades into background when narrator starts]

Narrator: Hello, I'm Ben Arscott and I'm going to talk to you about the distrusting or fearful representations of the city in these two..

... cinematic genres. Two particular films warrant reference.

Narrator VO: Fritz Lang's Metropolis..

...and Ridley Scott's Blade Runner are both examples of science fiction films using elements we appreciate as noir

Narrator VO: These films show how the 'noir city' is used in dystopian science fiction to express a fear of the future or critique upon the present.

Walter Neff showing paranoia by repeatedly looking in rear-view mirror in Double Indemnity

Johnny Morrison from the Blue Dahlia paying money in hotel then being beaten by two thugs as hotel worker watches on

Skip McCoy in Pickup on South Street entering his downtrodden accommodation in the city's industrial port

Philip Marlowe in The Big Sleep wearing trench coat in Gen. Sternwood's mansion with disgruntled looking butler.

Cawletti (MCU) talking head in front of bookshelves. Caption: "J.G. Cawletti: Author 'Adventure Mystery and Romance'"

Track away from the bright nightclub, The Blue Dahlia, into Eddie Harwood's office

Out of the Past: Shot-counter shot of Jeff and Whit in Whitt's luxurious but sinister rooms. High contrast lighting.

Narrator talking and walking with camera down busy New York streets

Narrator VO: Through analysing classic film-noir we see the genre radically changed the city's representation in US culture reflecting a contemporary psychological, sociological and political unease.

The Film Noir movement's establishment in the 1940s coincided with a more realistic and cynical view of life and what capitalism can provide in the United States of America.

The genre had roots in the hard-boiled pulp detective fiction and gangster's genre's look at the underside of the city.

This was built upon in Film Noir with lone wolf characters being able to transcend the shallow social strata to reveal the city's institutionalised corruption.

Cawletti: "When we step from the world of the classical detective formula into the milieu of the American Hard-boiled story, the vision of the city is almost reversed. Instead of the new Arabian nights..."

Cawletti (VO): "...we find empty modernity; corruption and death... The gangster movie dwells on [the city's] luxuries and spoils in a way which captures something of their allure;

...but in film noir the focus is on the seedy underside of the city: the casualties or crooks of capitalism. Where glamour and glitter are shown, there is typically a sense of alienation."

Narrator: Although there are exceptions, "The Postman Always Rings Twice" for example, Classic

Film Noirs occur within large cities most often Los Angeles or New York but the city itself is normally irrelevant. Urban spaces are thus, for the most part, the setting of Film Noir.

[Music: Paint it Black by The Rolling Stones]

Double Indemnity's Walter Neff in dark office with Venetian blinds disrupting light.

Narrator VO: The city however also provides the dark visual appearance and a hidden force, which isolates the protagonist.

Narrator OS interviewing MCU of Telotte. Caption: "J.P. Telotte: Author of *'Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film-Noir'*"

Narrator: What cinematic techniques were used to portray the sinister side of the noir city?

Telotte: "foregrounded oblique objects, unbalanced compositions, irregular spatial arrangements..

Narrator: So expressionist techniques?

Chiaroscuro lighting on Walter Neff at end of Double Indemnity as he ends his voice over. Shallow focus highlights the desk top-objects blurring the background.

Telotte VO: "chiaroscuro lighting with a heavy play on shadows, an emphasis on oblique and vertical, lines over the horizontal, and fascination with reflective surfaces"-

Shadow of the vampire on the staircase in Nosferatu.

Narrator VO: So we see the noir city is heavily influenced by German Expressionism. Technically but also through gaining..

Jagged rooftops from the Cabinet of Dr Caligari

...a psychological dimension.

End of Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Francis in mental asylum

The city isolates the protagonist and blurs the distinction between friend and foe. This is accentuated by the use of mirror's symbolising the duplicitous nature of the city and its inhabitants.

Pan from Joe Gillis and Betty Schaefer to street at night in Sunset Boulevard

Betty Schaeffer: "Look at this street, all cardboard, all hollow wall, all phoney, all done with mirrors"

Montage: Dole queues, soup kitchens, Hoovervilles, French troops in the Ruhr, hyperinflation...

View of Metropolis's cityscape.  
Caption: Fritz Lang's Metropolis 1927. Automobiles and planes weaving through skyscrapers. Joh Fredersen's New Tower of Babel appears on "reached."

Metropolis workers coming out of the lift for "Shift Change" and dejectedly marching.  
00:03:25-00:03:55

Split screen with workers continuing on lower screen and Joh Fredersen in his office on top screen.

Scrolling down subtitle from Metropolis  
"Deep Below  
The Earth's Surface  
Lay the worker's city"

Narrator walking and talking in front of WW1 memorials.

Montage: Slow zoom out of stills of; French troops in the Ruhr, hyperinflation, workers striking in Berlin. Caption: "Germany 1918-1923".

Followed by Tracking over stills of; Doll Queues...

soup kitchens...

Narrator VO: In the US perhaps this reflected Roosevelt's New Deal's inability to save the city whilst in its German precedent the turmoil Berlin and Munich experienced from political extremes after 1918.

Narrator VO: Metropolis, which pre-dates the classic noir period by more than a decade, was one of greatest thematic influences on noir and all cinema. Indeed Metropolis shows the greatest heights German Expressionism reached.

Metropolis, like the noir cities of the Big Sleep, The Blue Dahlia and Pickup on South Street, is in two parts: the decadently wealthy and the grim dark underworld.

Although one is clearly more attractive, the villainous characters with the most blood on their hands tend to dominate the glamorous casinos, nightclubs and mansions.

Metropolis effectively created the distinction with a very literal underground working class area of hard labour and desperation. This is contrasted with the spectacular skyscrapers of above ground.

Narrator: The socio-economic background of Metropolis was very different from the post-New Deal background on classic film noir.

However Metropolis's cinematic style was formed at the height of Germany's post-World War One turmoil, which was far more profound than anything the USA experienced after either war. With the growth of Nazism in Germany and higher salaries in Hollywood, the 1930s saw the German filmmakers emigrate bringing their filmic devices to the USA in time for the



Hoovervilles and large public work projects...

With subtitle reading "Depression and New Deal USA 1929-1939"

Thomas Elsasser talking head in front of bookcase with caption "Thomas Elsasser, Author of 'BFI Film Classics: Metropolis'"

Threatening claustrophobic street shots with huge billboards from Metropolis when Freder re-enters above-ground.

01:01:47-01:01:53

Montage from beginning of Metropolis of disconcerting gears and pistons overlaying views of skyscrapers and phallic architecture

00:02:20-00:03:10

Proletarians on the heart machine working increasingly quickly as the temperature rises. As Freder appears the machine explodes injuring the workers.

00:13:15-00:13:40

Title from Metropolis "Head and hands want to join together but they don't have the heart to do it... Oh Mediator show them the way to each other..." followed by Fredersen, Grot and Freder all holding hands

Narrator talking from the moving Geisha billboard on the side of skyscraper from Blade Runner

00:07:19-00:07:27

The flying tracking view of infinite

growth of Film Noir. Additionally both periods in both countries resulted in a cultural reassessment of capitalism and what it could achieve. Thus German expressionist devices could portray the city's conflict between labour and credit and disaffection with the consumerist society.

Thomas Elsasser: "The boldly outlandish sets of Metropolis's cityscape pulsate..."

Thomas Elsasser VO:... with consumerist life, compared to the contemporary stark modernist high-rises gone soulless and drab that once were its real-life contemporaries."

Narrator VO: In Film Noir this conflict is implicit through the protagonists cynical view of life and the clear contrasts between the mansions and casinos and the slums. In Metropolis the conflict between rich and poor is made explicit through the design of the city.

Narrator: While the rich prosper, the worker's suffer and work tirelessly in generic and hostile conditions.

The film's conclusion highlights the importance the city's conflict has on Metropolis and Film Noir. The main concern is trying to resolve the alienation that has resulted from the economic system the city typifies.

Narrator: Ridley Scott's Blade Runner managed to incorporate the two genres and maintain Film Noir's pessimism about city life.

Narrator VO: In fact Blade Runner reaches the logical conclusion of

2019 Los Angeles with flying cars and hellish flames moving towards the Tyrell building  
00:03:40-00:04:00

city life becoming all life. Nature appears to have been dismantled and in its place a sprawling San Angeles gives urbanism no limits. This apocalyptic post-modern vision has none of Lang's victorious skyscrapers. In place of Metropolis's tower of Babel is the more Noir-ish Mayan Pyramid, with its connotations of human sacrifice.

Nick Lacey talking head (MCU).  
Caption: "Nick Lacey: Author of 'Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies' 2000

Lacey: "the Mayan temple look is appropriate because it is associated with human sacrifice

A more detailed shot of the Tyrell 'pyramid' showing post-modern industrialised exterior detail  
00:04:10-00:04:15

Lacey VO:... which gives an ironic spin to Tyrell's motto of 'more human than human'."

Narrator talking to camera on set of Blade Runner's claustrophobic streets

Narrator: So Blade Runner takes noir paranoia about loss of identity in the city, to a literal level of being replaced.

More warmly lit shots of Deckard's first approach towards the Tyrell building  
00:16:15-00:16:45

Narrator VO: The 2019 Los Angeles is really more of a noir city than ever existed in the classic Film Noirs. The Tyrell building could not better illustrate the separation of power from society

Cluttered bar full of eccentrically dressed and made up punters  
00:47:25-00:47:30

The nightclub Zhora works at could not show more decadence...

Pris approaching Sebastian's house then covering herself with rubbish on street  
00:36:00-00:36:40

...And the garbage outside Sebastian's decrepit house shows complete disregard even for skilled labour."

Deckard sitting alone reading paper in busy high street. He looks up to see a dark mass of cables and buildings and a advertising blimp  
00:08:25-00:08:30

The city's role on the narrative is also classically noir: Deckard in his Philip Marlowe trench coat is lonely and isolated by the metropolis he inhabits, despite it being more claustrophobic and busy than Pickup On South Street's street-car ride.

Deckard and Rachel talk in his dark apartment as advertising lights over-

Narrator VO: Stylistically Blade Runner's city is also a noir city.

expose screen repetitively  
01:00:15-01:00:30

Deckard operating photo manipulation machine. Focusing on the mirror and looking at where the mirror could reflect, if not captured in two dimensions  
00:42:57-00:43:40

Bukatman MCU talking head.  
Caption: "Scott Bukatman; author of '*BFI Modern Classics: Blade Runner*' 2005"

Deckard's chase of Zhora with disregard to bystanders. Busy streets and Deckard's nervous POV trying to navigate and search for Zhora amongst chaos.

00:53:05-00:56:40

Deckard looking down at the splayed bloody corpse of Zhora

Narrator talking to camera in front of bookshelves (MCU)

Pris trapping Deckard between her legs in Blade Runner followed by Robot Maria wild in the riotous parties of the rich in Metropolis with subtitle: "The femme fatale challenging male dominance"

Venetian blinds provide chiaroscuro lighting and represent the bars imprisoning the noir hero. The blinds also fail to protect Deckard from the city's invasion into his apartment: the consumerist flying adverts protrude through windows.

Deckard: "Track 45 right... Stop, centre and right."

Narrator VO: The same Noir fascination with shiny surfaces is taken steps further with an ability to give mirrors more dimensions and playing tricks with reflective eyes.

Bukatman: "The city in *Blade Runner*, with its rain slicked Los Angeles streets, faux-forties fashions, private eye plot and world weary narration derives plenty from noir. This is a dark city of mean streets, moral ambiguities and an air of irresolution. (VO) *Blade Runner*'s Los Angeles exemplifies the failure of the rational city envisioned by urban planners and science fiction creators, and it recalls, by implication, the air of masculine crisis that undergirded film noir-witness Deckard's struggle to retain, or regain his humanity. If the Metropolis in noir was a dystopian purgatory, then in *Blade Runner*, with its flame-belching towers, it has become an almost literal Inferno."

Narrator: We can therefore see that there seems to be a correlation between Film Noir elements and science fiction.

Narrator (VO): Both *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner* are primarily Sci-Fi films, yet they dedicate huge importance to the noir cities they are set in. Even the psychoanalysis and treatment of women in both

films are similar if not identical to Film Noir's.

Kyle Reese in trench coat holding shotgun in front of club's sign "Tech Noir" in The Terminator

Johnson being attacked in bathroom as Beatrice bathes in Alphaville

Luke being threatened in the bar in Tatooine Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope

Han Solo lying beaten on the floor of Cloud City prison with noir-ish Ventian Blind shadows Star Wars, Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back

The elderly floating in their execution ceremony in Logan's Run

The "alien other's onslaught upon the city" in War of the Worlds 1953 and Them! 1954

Travis driving past a group of black youths who throw an egg at his taxi from Taxi driver

Julian Kay's desperate talk with Leon in darkened stairwell of his club in American Gigolo

Thus we must ask why do Science Fiction films utilise Film Noir for representations of urban space? Robocop, Escape from New York and Terminator are all Sci-Fi films situated in hostile noir cities. Everything from the philosophically cryptic Alphaville to nostalgic, commercially successful Sci-Fi like Star Wars have cities with noir elements. Anchorhead in Jabba's Tatooine is crime ridden, Cloud City entertains a double-cross and Coruscant is riddled with political corruption, ulterior motives and eventually the centre of Imperial power. Why does Sci-Fi see cities as so dangerous?

In US culture Eric Avila, author of "Dark City: White Flight and the Urban Science Fiction Film in Postwar America" argues the white-flight and black migration into industrial cores of cities gave inner cities a threatening connotation.

Avila VO: "Within this context the popularity of films about alien invasions suggests that mainstream white audiences may have viewed the movement of blacks and other racialised minorities into the cities as an invasion of what had previously been white space."

Narrator VO: This social explanation could also explain Noir's distrust of the inner city as historically it occurred at the same time. Sci-Fi also shares the concept of two cities in one, or multiple layers. Consequently double-dealings and elusive realities shattering perceived appearances permeate both genres.

In Film Noir and sci-fi like

Split screen from Robocop: Top right Bob Morton with prostitutes and cocaine, top left Emil Antonowsky looting, bottom left the board room, bottom right attempted rape in front of billboard of New Detroit

POV shot from Blade Runner of Deckard looking at photo of Rachel's supposed childhood. Shadows within photo move. 00:34:40-00:34:43

Intercutting between Freder working the 'clock machine' and robot Maria in the club

Caption: "Philip Strick: Author of *'The Metropolis Wars: The City as a character in Science Fiction Films'*"

Narrator on set of Logan's Run looking from nature to the modern imprisoning city

The Wife and the Man in countryside together in Sunrise: A Song of Two humans after title "They were so happy..."

Theo Faron walking down London street when the shop he just left explodes in Children of Men

The Woman From the city frantically persuading the husband to commit

Metropolis the division is rich and poor, in later sci-fi the conflict within the cities is often between humanity and a technological or alien other. Electric technology present in Blade Runner gives the sci-fi city an even more terrifying postindustrial virtual space.

The city's power to distance viewer from protagonist or protagonist from goals can be accentuated by a hidden digital world rendering our current understanding of space obsolete. Noir and Sci-fi use their respective cities as masks to hide their duplicity and menace.

Philip Strick VO: "Lang's weighty sets and magnificent model city, which conveniently dwarfed the elusive plausibility of his drama, implied a vaguely orgiastic future of riotous leisure. This would be brought at the cost of human toil until such times as machines and robots would administer its every need and "workers" would be unnecessary."

Narrator: The reason sci-fi and noir share the same cities is that both show uncertainty about the future and a ~~nostalgia~~ for a past that the ~~filmmakers~~ recognise cannot be regained.

Narrator VO: Science fiction is not predicting the future, it is commenting on the present and likewise noir cinema represented contemporary concerns. It just turns out those contemporary concerns seem to be universal rather than fixed in the ~~forties~~.

Hence neo-noir likes Children of Men and Sin City still see threatening anarchic cities.

Another German director, like Fritz Lang, who pre-dates Classic noir,

murder as fast moving trains and tracks of skyscrapers are superimposed behind her  
Subtitle reading "Sunrise: A Song for Two Humans"

The Husband and the Wife dancing together amongst the sophisticated city dwellers

Robot Maria being burnt at the stake by the worker's mob only to find when alight she is not a human, Metropolis

Blade Runner: Deckard on outside of decrepit building in rain. Clinging on to the wall to avoid the abyss. Batty comes out and re-starts the chase. 01:37:08-01:37:55

Deckard hanging into the abyss, then saved by Batty.  
01:40:00-

Batty talks smiling to a bloody and confused Deckard. A gleaming neon advert is behind him.

A Dove flies from Batty's hand past the industrial pipes into blue sky

F.W. Murnau showed the fast moving and ever changing city, seen in the tracks and continuous movement in Metropolis and Blade Runner, in "Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans". Although a murderous femme fatale represented the city it was also a place of joy for the married couple. Urban spaces are therefore perhaps more places of contradictions and ambiguities than dystopias.

The city might therefore not be hostile in itself, simply the battleground for modern humans to fight for their individuality.

"Batty: That hurt... That was irrational of you, not to mention unsportsmanlike"

Narrator VO: Metropolis and Blade Runner's Los Angeles, despite utopian aspirations, are such battlegrounds. Their respective flaws: the below-ground and the congestion, are preferable to losing physical space for individuals.

Batty: "How does it feel to live in fear, that's how it feels to be a slave"

Bukatman VO: "Because cities, at least images and stories of cities, continue to represent the human position within a still-increasingly technologised, commodified world."

Bat~~ty~~: "All those moments will be lost in time... like tears in the rain...Time to die"

## **Filmography**

- The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1920) Director: Robert Wiene
- Nosferatu (1922) Director: F.W. Murnau
- Sunrise: A song of Two Humans (1927). Director: F.W. Murnau
- Metropolis(1927). Director: Fritz Lang
- Double Indemnity (1944) Director: Billy Wilder
- The Big Sleep (1946) Director: Howard Hawks
- The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946) Director: Tay Garnett
- The Blue Dahlia (1946) Director: George Marshall
- Out of the Past (1947) Director: Jacques Tourneur
- Sunset Boulevard (1950) Director: Billy Wilder
- Pickup On South Street (1953) Director: Samuel Fuller
- Alphaville: une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution (1965)  
Director: Jean-Luc Goddard
- Taxi Driver (1976) Director: Martin Scorsese
- Logan's Run (1976) Director: Michael Anderson
- Star Wars: Episode IV- A New Hope (1977) Director: George Lucas
- American Gigolo (1979). Director: Paul Schrader
- Star Wars: Episode V- The Empire Strikes Back (1980)  
Director: Irvin Kershner
- Escape From New York (1981) Director: John Carpenter
- Blade Runner (1982) Director: Ridley Scott
- The Terminator (1984) Director: James Cameron
- Robocop (1987) Director: Paul Verhoeven
- Children of Men (2006) Director: Alfonso Cuarón

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Avila's interpretation of the city's danger page 88

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Bukatman's explanation of noir elements in *Blade Runner* page 50  
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Sobchack, Vivian "Cities on the Edge of Time: The Urban Science Fiction Film" from "Liquid Metal: the science fiction film reader" London: Wallflower Press, 2004  
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Strick's views on *Metropolis* page 43