

## Setting

6. Discuss the significance of the setting in the opening scene. Does the setting provide a metaphor for the central characters condition?

In the opening of 1993 film, *Falling Down*, the lead character D FENS. a divorced, unemployed worker for a US defense contractor sits uneasily in his 1977 Chevette, gridlocked on the Santa Monica freeway. The air conditioning doesn't work and the window cranks are stripped. Tense sweating and quavering, DFENS (as he is known by the name on his vanity license plate) is the classic industrial strength white Anglo nerd circa 1965. He has a bad crew cut and geeky glasses. He wears a too tight short sleeve white dress shirt, adorned with black and white pocket protector. DEFENS and his Chevette form a contiguous symbol of the economic decline of a white male Anglicized U.S industrial apparatus. Together they are simultaneously going nowhere (gridlocked on the freeway) and have nowhere to go (to work) Physically imploding D-FENS lurches out of his inert steamy car into the open air. When asked, by another stalled motorist, in the opening lines of the movie "hey where do you think your going?" D-FENS replies "I'm going home"

Fosters confinement in his car, stalled on the freeway presents the audience with a metaphor of his life. He is estranged from his wife and child, unemployed and living with his mother. He is marginalized and disengaged from his former life.

The spoken word home, verbal and visual referents of home and various ideas and sites of home crop up dozens of times in the film. D-FESN obsessively moves through the city's territorialized, militarized spaces in a futile bid to reassert his (stereotypically mythical) notion of home as the site of patriarchal nuclear family. His quest, even as it escalates into a series of events marked by a violent desperation cannot fail but to come face to face with the reality of his downwardly mobile economic status

Settings are highly significant in *Falling Down* that comment on the demise of American society

The Korean Grocery Store: Hispanic Gang Territory: The Fast food outlet: The Park: The urban streetscape: The Golf course: The War surplus Store: Venice Beach - what significance do these settings have in context to the narrative taking place? How do they convey themes and subplots contained in the film?

## More Notes on Setting

### Story Element

Part of the mise en scene, setting provides a location for the action of a narrative to take place Settings may be constructed sets, painted or digitally composed sets or natural locations. The setting of a film not only provides a place for a narrative to develop it can become part of the

narrative itself through the manner in which it contains and constrains on screen action

Settings can contribute to audience reading of character motivation and action. The setting can introduce, develop, reinforce or change the way in which an audience views a character by suggesting that the character is at home and comfortable whilst moving through the setting or by placing a character in a setting that is at odds with how the audience reads the character. By staging action in a setting that dwarfs characters, a filmmaker can suggest that these characters are insignificant or unable to complete the tasks required of them.



Conversely a cramped setting may suggest that the character is too big for the action or that they are emotionally constrained. Characters framed in doorways are a classic film noir element of setting and composition where characters appear somewhat trapped or confined in such a composition.

The Setting of a fictional film narrative refers to the location and the historical period in which the story takes place

The setting of a narrative helps tell a story because the audience already has an understanding of settings and their context with film genre.

Setting can help the director to engage the audience into a particular feeling or emotion within the story

In film genres the science fiction audience puts aside logic and knowledge of the real world to accept the science fiction reality of Blade Runner. In the film noir style the audience understands that the main protagonist is a cynical often-flawed character who is faced with moral choices that are often complicated by a beautiful but ultimately selfish and manipulative woman.

The setting can also help to develop character. When the audience is introduced to Deckard like Foster is alone in the frame. A sense of alienation is evident when he orders food at the café. Clearly he is uncomfortable and isolated within this setting.



Notes on **Setting** in Blade Runner

Blade Runner immediately conveys futuristic settings.

After the scrolling prologue information at the beginning of Blade Runner and the place and date given as Los Angeles, November 2019, the opening shots present a city filmed from above. It is nighttime. City lights twinkle in the blackness and three large furnaces blast flames into the night sky.



A space vehicle flies above the city and straight towards the camera. There is a bolt of lightning and another vehicle flies away from the camera. A large eye is superimposed on the city scene and then the shot changes to the sparkling, monolithic Tyrell building filmed from below. It is presented as a temple of technology.

Los Angeles in 2019 is presented as dark, grimy and polluted in Blade Runner. It appears that those who can have migrated to a better life on the Off-World colonies.

## **SECTOR FOUR: "FIERY THE ANGELS FELL"**

November 2019. A gigantic blimp is hovering over the dark streets of Los Angeles, shouting to the crowds:

A new life awaits you in the Off-world colonies. The chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure. New climate, recreational facilities... absolutely free. Use your new friend as a personal body servant or a tireless field hand: the custom tailored, genetically engineered, humanoid replicant designed especially for your needs. So come on America, let's put our team up there...

Whether the "New World" really is a paradise or not is uncertain, but the "Old World" is a living hell for sure. Earth is in a state of irreversible decay and everyone who can is fleeing Off-world. The environment has been exhausted by war, pollution and overpopulation. The weather is hot and damp due to global warming.

Urbanisation has reached new levels and The City of Angels has become a monstrous metropolis. The sun can barely be seen on the dirty sky, where the ever-present police cars are flying by with twinkling navigation lights. The buildings are stretching 400 stories up in the sky, forming artificial canyons. On street level, the over-crowded alleys are bathed in gloomy light from neon signs and video billboards with ever-smiling geishas.

The colonisation programme, the chance to escape the dying Earth, is dependent on the replicant labour cadres and the Tyrell Corporation is the main manufacturer.

In the Tyrell headquarters in Los Angeles, the Tyrell Pyramid, experienced blade runner Dave Holden is running Voight-Kampff tests on the employees; there is a possibility a group of escaped replicants might try to infiltrate the corporation. A routine session with a certain Leon Kowalski ends unexpectedly:

Most street scenes in Blade Runner are grim. When Pris hides outside J.F. Sebastian's apartment block, she does so under a pile of litter.



Sebastian's apartment block is dark, deserted and run down. The city environment is presented as a sunless world in which nature has lost its vital spark. There are no signs of natural plant life and the few animals seen are caged, tethered or artificial.

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The dark urban landscape of futuristic Los Angeles is covered in blinking and neon lights. These blinking lights denote the existence of unknown machines or forms of technology that exist in the depths of the city. The city itself is depicted as being almost alive. It is impossible for the human figure to take command in this complex and busy urban landscape. The human characters are literally fighting to stay ahead of this seemingly out of control technology. This visual setup of a world overrun by technology creates the premise for the entire plot of the film.



Both characters live alone in very dark apartments. Deckard's apartment is littered with empty liquor bottles and he is surrounded by the technology that he feels so oppressed by.



Sebastian lives in a wet, dilapidated, and abandoned building. His door is covered in large locks, which is a further indicator of his fear and paranoia of the technology he lives amongst and helps to create. The most telling visual element of Sebastian's environment is his group of "friends" that he has genetically engineered.



He has designed them to keep him company. Unlike the replicants who are physically indistinguishable from humans these "friends" of Sebastian take on an entirely non-human look. They are all very short with exaggerated features. Their visual appearance sets them in an inferior position when regarded next to a human. Thus Sebastian is able to take comfort in their presence rather than feeling threatened by their superiority as he does by the replicants.

Blade Runner's strongest impact has without any doubt been visual. The director, the Englishman Ridley Scott, is famous for his obsessive richness of detail. Before Blade Runner, the future had never looked so worn-down, dirty, gloomy, oppressive and — perhaps above all — so convincing and plausible. The movie simply set a whole new standard for science fiction, just like the silent movie Metropolis did in 1926. Two decades have passed, but Blade Runner's F/X effects have aged amazingly well; it is even questionable if the movie could have looked better had it been made today.