UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

The Aesthetics of Enclosure: Dystopia and Dispossession in the 1980s Hollywood Science-Fiction Film

by

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
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As an increasing body of historical and economic scholarship attests, the processes Marx placed under the heading of 'primitive accumulation', and which he saw as the precondition of capitalism, continue today in a particularly intense form. If Marx's main example in *Capital*, Volume 1 (1867) was the enclosure of English land from the late fifteenth century, now scholars can point to the expansion of intellectual property rights, the privatisation of water and other public services, the sale of the US national forests, the imposition of 'structural adjustment programmes', and the war in Afghanistan as so many 'new enclosures'—efforts to bring ever greater zones of human activity within the ambit of capitalist production. Yet what remains unexamined in this still-growing literature is how the new enclosures have been represented in the sphere of culture. Have cultural forms been able to register these new expropriations? If so, how have they depicted a process that is pervasive, but whose forms of appearance are so diverse? This thesis endeavours to answer such questions through the analysis of five major Hollywood science-fiction films of the 1980s: Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and *Blade Runner* (1982), David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), and Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* (1987) and *Total Recall* (1990). It argues that, taken together, these films develop an 'aesthetic of enclosure': a series of representational strategies that make enclosure visible. Typically understood by scholars as a critical and historicising genre, the science-fiction film is well positioned to detect, examine, and challenge capitalism's renewed efforts to privatise and dispossess.

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Academic Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

I, HARRY WARWICK, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

THE AESTHETICS OF ENCLOSURE: DYSTOPIA AND DISPOSSESSION IN THE 1980s HOLLYWOOD SCIENCE-FICTION FILM

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
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7. None of this work has been published before submission.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Enclosure and the 1980s Hollywood Science-Fiction Film

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle.
— GUY DEBORD[1]

1.1 Overview

Privatisation, separation, dispossession: the master processes of social reality in the 1980s became the major preoccupation of its science-fiction films, which projected images of interplanetary expropriation, of rootless migrants swirling around Los Angeles, of the privatisation of public order, of worlds where even oxygen has been commodified—all catastrophic extrapolations of their present. The 1980s produced a speculative consciousness for which the dystopian vision seemed more appropriate than the utopian one, and which found in science fiction the generic raw material for its own depictions, its own engagement with capital's renewed assault on the working class. In these films, the future—2019 for *Blade Runner* (1982), 2084 in *Total Recall*'s (1990) case, or the twenty-second century in *Alien* (1979), say—extends not beyond, but down into the present. They penetrate the surface of things to reveal a new and violent turn in contemporary capitalism.

[1] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2004), para. 25.

Such violence is best understood as a form of *enclosure*, this thesis contends. Enclosure features in Marx's work primarily as an example of the 'primitive accumulation' of capital, one of whose starting points was the fencing off of English fields in the fifteenth century. In this early and literal sense, enclosure throws people off their land, separating them from their means of subsistence and production, and compels them to sell their labour-power merely to survive. Enclosure thus forms a major part of the prehistory of the capitalist mode of production. Yet from the 1970s, in the wake of the global crisis, we find that capitalism must repeat its originary processes, bolstering its foundations, preparing the ground for further accumulation. The kinds of dispossession and separation operative in this late twentieth-century moment appear quite different to the 'primitive' ones, but in them the concept of enclosure gathers new significance. Processes apparently as diverse as the privatisation of water and other public services, the expansion of intellectual property rights, the pillaging of national forests, the International Monetary Fund's 'structural adjustment programmes', and the United States invasion of Afghanistan discover a hidden unity in their shared function as new means of expropriation, *new enclosures*. Isabelle Stengers puts it most forcefully: 'If, today, the reference to enclosure matters, it is because the contemporary mode of extension of capitalism has given it all its actuality.'[2]

This thesis argues that the Hollywood science-fiction films of the 1980s are occupied at their heart with the new enclosures, and thus with capital's assault on the working class after the 1970s economic crisis. This is not to claim that enclosure is their only concern, or that the wealth of existing scholarship on these films has lost its way. My approach here is generally to try to recontextualise such readings, to show how body horror in *Alien*, or the postmodern inclinations of *Blade Runner*, or the identity politics of *Total Recall*, to give just a few examples, themselves evoke a situation of heightened enclosure. But it is also sometimes the case that these films engage overtly with dispossession and separation, such that we need only recapitulate basic plot points to clarify the link. *RoboCop*'s (1987) narrative pretext is the privatisation of the police force (and it literally references other privatisations: of medicine, the prison system, and space exploration), for instance, while *Total Recall* imagines a planet whose air has been enclosed. The different ways that these films engage with enclosure, and the varying degrees of explicitness with which they do so, are central concerns of this thesis.

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[2] Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), p. 80.

To put this all another way, the films analysed here were written, shot, and distributed in the twilight of the same oppositional consciousness that the new enclosures would extinguish. Mark Fisher theorises the eventual eclipse of that consciousness in the 1990s with the term 'capitalist realism'. Characterising this new moment, Fisher recalls the phrase, often attributed to Fredric Jameson, that it has become easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.[3] But such a dystopian vision, which cannot even imagine systemic change, is qualitatively distinct from the dystopia of the 1980s science-fiction film, where the dim light of utopian thinking still flickers. In *Blade Runner*'s gloomy, sprawling metropolis, the private eye embodies the ideal of unalienated work. In *RoboCop*'s equally dismal image of Detroit, subjectivity persists despite automation. The alien itself in *Alien* marks the limits of corporate control. At the end of the decade, at the moment of transition, *Total Recall* depicts Douglas Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger) freeing the oppressed populace of Mars, but his character cannot help wondering whether this is all a dream, whether a better world really *is* possible now. Quaid's vision of a liberated Mars is the culminating delirium of the 1980s science-fiction film.

While my primary texts are examined chronologically, their order broadly corresponds to the explicitness of their treatment of enclosure, as though the latter came into sharper focus in the course of the decade. In the second chapter, I discern only hints of this new moment in Ridley Scott's *Alien*, which refers to enclosure by proxy, as it were, depicting a situation in which a faceless corporation obsessively manages its employees' movement and knowledge. The third chapter turns to Scott's *Blade Runner*, which imagines enclosure as an urban and a spatial process, and engages with it insofar as it hinders the individual's ability to navigate the city. The fourth chapter argues that David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983) both registers the enclosure of the Canadian airwaves from the mid-twentieth century and depicts the reified world consequent on enclosure. In Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* and *Total Recall*, the objects of analysis in the fifth and sixth chapters, enclosure finds its most explicit articulation, *RoboCop* being premised on the privatisation of a public service, *Total Recall* depicting a planet where commodification has indeed become total.

As for this introduction, it proceeds in three parts, and seeks to elaborate the contextual and generic background of these films. The first section examines enclosure itself. It begins by considering the role of English enclosures in Marx's analysis of capitalism—namely, as a key instance of the 'primitive accumulation' of capital and labour. Because the films (and

[3] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), p. 2.

contexts) I discuss are primarily North American, I also provide an overview of the original enclosure of North America. I then turn to the new enclosures operative in the United States (and Global North more generally) since 1970: expanding intellectual property rights, intensified logging in national forests, privatisation of water and housing, and increased enclosure of the airwaves, to name just a few. The purpose of these enclosures is slightly different to the purpose of the old ones, and I suggest that David Harvey's explanation for their return (or persistence, depending on how one sees it) can be synthesised with the apparently discrepant explanations offered by the autonomist tradition of Marxism. The section concludes with a brief discussion of enclosure's theoretical cognates—alienation, commodification, fetishism, and reification—since we shall have reason to refer to them often in the following chapters.

The second section turns to science fiction. It begins with a short statement on method and argues for the utility of a dialectical framework in the analysis of the 1980s science-fiction film in particular. Then, drawing from Guy Debord's classic text *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), it develops what we might call a Debordian theory of science fiction. Debord's work on historical temporalities, on the spectacle, and on the primacy of the visual allows us to clarify both the material preconditions of science fiction and the distinctive social function of the science-fiction film. Elaborating on Debord's analysis of capitalist time, I try to argue two propositions: first, that science fiction's extrapolations assert the persistence of 'irreversible time', and second, that the genre's use of special effects thematises a contradictory temporality, 'pseudo-cyclical time'. Hence I argue that extrapolation, on the one hand, and special effect, on the other, are the main critical resources of the science-fiction film. I conclude the section with a discussion of secondary genres that appear in the films I analyse (specifically, action, horror, and noir).

The third section begins by focusing more precisely on the 1980s Hollywood science-fiction film. It locates such films in a longer trajectory of Hollywood science fiction, which (according to most accounts) starts with Georges Méliès in the early twentieth century, peaks in the 1930s and in the 1950s, and is revived once again in the 1980s in the wake of *Star Wars* (1977). Yet what must be added is that all the films I examine here incorporate extra-Hollywood influences to some degree. No doubt this partly has to do with their directors' foreignness, Verhoeven hailing from the Netherlands, Scott from England, and Cronenberg from Canada. They are all only ambiguously 'Hollywood' films. From here I proceed to analyse the most profound textual source of these films' foreignness: their utopianism. I argue, first, that utopias are by nature anti-enclosure—that a certain opposition to enclosure is

intrinsic to utopianism as such—and second, that these films' dystopias serve paradoxically to throw into relief their utopian opposition to enclosure. The final section of the introduction contains an overview of the content of the ensuing chapters, each of which offers a close reading of one of my primary texts.

1.2 Enclosures, Old and New

1.2.1 The Prehistory of Capital

For the analyst, capital accumulation always seems to begin *in medias res*. Marx observes that '[t]he accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value; surplus-value presupposes capitalist production; capitalist production presupposes the availability of considerable masses of capital and labour-power in the hands of commodity producers'.[4] That is, the endless accumulation of capital requires that capitalists make a certain surplus from the sale of goods, which they can then reinvest in their businesses (a process Marx calls 'expanded reproduction'). This demands capitalist production, which extends the working day beyond what is necessary to create the value of an employee's wages and thereby produces the surplus: 'surplus-value'. This in turn requires an initial reserve of capital—raw materials intended for use in the production process—and 'free' workers, whose labour-power, sold for a certain value, can be used to create value in excess of that. Yet how does one acquire capital and labour-power (a commodity in its own right) prior to the existence of capitalism itself? It would appear that capitalism depends on the existence of certain conditions that are produced as a result of its own action. 'The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn around in a never-ending circle.'[5]

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[4] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes and David Fernbach, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 1976-81), I, 873.

[5] Marx, *Capital*, I, 873. This intention to peer beneath capitalist production, to locate its real historical origin, appears in the young Marx, too: 'Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property. It does not explain it. It grasps the *material* basis of private property, the process through which it actually passes, in general and abstract formulae which it then takes as *laws*. It does not *comprehend* these laws, i.e. it does not show how they arise from the nature of private property. Political economy fails to explain the reason for the division between labour and capital, between capital and land. For instance, when it defines the relation of wages to profit it takes the interests of the capitalists as the basis of its analysis; i.e. it

Where shall we find the real source of the capitalist mode of production, then? What process, or group of processes, places the aforementioned masses of capital and labour-power in the hands of the would-be capitalist? Marx imagines a primal scene in which two very different kinds of commodity-owner come face-to-face:

> on the one hand, owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to valorize the sum of values they have appropriated by buying the labour-power of others; on the other hand, free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and thus the sellers of labour. Free workers, in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietors. The free workers are therefore free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own.[6]

This division between capitalist and worker, Marx continues, itself requires the separation of the worker from the means of production and subsistence. The vast majority of the population must cease to have direct access to food, clothing, shelter, and so on, as well as the raw materials they would require for their work. Hence we arrive at the definition of primitive accumulation: 'the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production.'[7] It is only when people have been thrown off their land, separated from their means of production, that they become labourers, and that those who now own such things become capitalists. 'With the polarization of the commodity-market into these two classes,' Marx argues, 'the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are present.'[8]

To locate the historical origin of this division, Marx returns to late fifteenth-century England, to the stirrings of the capital-relation in the English countryside, where commoners were being removed from their land and had begun to form a small, 'free' labour force.[9] This process was known as 'enclosure', and it involved, in its most basic sense, abolishing individuals' right of access to their means of subsistence and production.[10] Enclosure effected

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assumes what it is supposed to explain' (Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', trans. by Gregor Benton, in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975), pp. 279-400 (pp. 322-3)).

[6] Marx, *Capital*, I, 874.

[7] Marx, *Capital*, I, 875.

[8] Marx, *Capital*, I, 874.

[9] Marx, *Capital*, I, 878-90.

[10] As J. A. Yelling notes, 'the problem is that the term "enclosure" refers both to the whole process, and to physical enclosure, which is not its most important part' (*Common Field and Enclosure in England 1450-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 6). 'Common right', meanwhile, is to be distinguished from

what we would now recognise as the privatisation of property, a shift from common to individual ownership. At first the lord of the feudal manor was likely to be the primary agent of enclosure, but enclosure by general agreement (that is, agreement of the majority of landholders) came to predominate.[11] In contradistinction to 'piecemeal' enclosures (where parts of a parish, say, would be enclosed prior to others), these 'general' enclosures were usually large-scale, sweeping up whole settlements, and could be ratified by a Chancery Decree. One prominent effect of enclosure during the Tudor and Stuart periods was the slow conversion of arable land into pasture, hence the rapacity of Thomas More's sheep, as depicted in *Utopia* (1516): 'Sheep are normally such tame and undemanding animals; yet they're beginning (so it's reported) to get so greedy and fierce that they're even devouring people and turning countryside, dwellings and towns into desolate wastelands.'[12] Thus, among the measures introduced in the sixteenth century to regulate enclosure was legislation designed to prevent the keeping of large numbers of sheep.[13]

The decisive shift in the history of English enclosures occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, when parliament became the chief enclosing agent, legally sanctioning the expropriation of the peasantry (though we ought to note that the first bills of enclosure were passed as early as 1621).[14] 'Gone was the slow, negotiated process of piecemeal enclosure in which closes or woods were taken out of the system and common rights were abated by general agreement,' J. M. Neeson observes. 'In its place came a process that

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ownership, as J. M. Neeson reminds us: 'The soil itself, the land, was not a commoner's, but use of it was. That use, what the law called *profit à prendre*, was common right' (*Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 1).

[11] Yelling, p. 20.

[12] As Rafael Contrasenso, More's traveller who criticises enclosure, continues: 'It takes just one man of insatiable greed—deadly blight on the nation!—to decide to join up his fields and build a single fence around thousands of hectares; then his smallholders are evicted, some cheated or forced out of their property, some so worn down by harassment that they're driven to sell. […] What proceeds there are they spend in a brief period of homelessness, then there's nothing left for them but to steal and (under the law as it is) to be hanged' (Thomas More, *Utopia; or, The Island of Nowhere*, trans. by Roger Clarke (Richmond: Alma Books, 2017), pp. 21-2). Yelling observes that depopulation sometimes had causes other than enclosure—say, a farmer overstocking the commons (Yelling, p. 24).

[13] Yelling, pp. 20-1. In his discussion of the rise of the market economy, Karl Polanyi argues that the Tudors' and Stuarts' efforts to slow the pace of enclosure allowed England to '[withstand] without great damage the calamity of the enclosures' (*The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 37-8).

[14] Carolyn Lesjak, '1750 to the Present: Acts of Enclosure and Their Afterlife', *BRANCH* [n.d.] <http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=carolyn-lesjak-1750-to-the-present-acts-of-enclosure-and-their-afterlife> [accessed 14 June 2018] (para. 5 of 13).

dispensed with the need for much agreement and enclosed an entire parish in eight to ten years, and when it was done all common right had gone.'[15] Between 1750 and 1830, more than 4000 acts of enclosure came into effect,[16] though this period requires its own internal discriminations. After a sharp rise in the 1760s and 1770s, parliamentary enclosure dropped in the 1780s. It returned to previous levels in the mid-1790s, and another peak followed between 1810 and 1815, after which time almost all common land had been enclosed.[17] 'By the nineteenth century,' Marx thus notes, 'the very memory of the connection between the agricultural labourer and communal property had […] vanished.'[18]

Enclosure proved a key factor in the transformation of English relations of production. Farmers' frequent opposition to activities such as gleaning and turbary, and to common right in general, often explicitly on the grounds that this latter made labour insubordinate, attests to the role enclosure would play in disciplining the work force.[19] Of course, enclosure was not the only element in this shift; many peasants were already at least partly dependent on the wage prior to losing their land. Thus enclosure is best understood as a way of turning *semi*-proletarian households into proletarian ones. 'If proletarianization is seen as a process of gradual elimination of sources of family subsistence other than wages,' Jane Humphries writes, 'a causal link between the loss of common rights and wage dependence is reestablished.'[20] Neeson accords: for her too, the abolition of common right 'played a large part in turning the last of the English peasantry into the rural working class'.[21] These new, capitalist relations of production, we ought to note, were gendered as well as classed.[22] Women undertook much of the communal, non-waged work in the commons; enclosure

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[15] Neeson, p. 187.
[16] Ellen Rosenman, 'On Enclosure Acts and the Commons', *BRANCH* [n.d.] <http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=ellen-rosenman-on-enclosure-acts-and-the-commons> [accessed 14 June 2018] (para. 6 of 13).
[17] Yelling, pp. 15-16.
[18] Marx, *Capital*, I, 889.
[19] Jane Humphries, 'Enclosures, Common Rights, and Women: The Proletarianization of Women in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *The Journal of Economic History*, 50 (1990), 17-42 (pp. 21-35).
[20] Humphries, p. 19.
[21] Neeson, p. 12.
[22] On the witch hunt as a specifically gendered figure of primitive accumulation, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004).

therefore made them 'more readily available for domestic, proto-industrial, and industrial work', and the same could be said of children.[23]

England offers the textbook case of enclosure, but it is also worth considering the enclosure of North America, which offers instructive contrasts, not least because of its infringement on native sovereignty. As Charles Geisler puts it, the dispossession of the indigenous population of North America from the sixteenth century was 'the mother of all enclosures'.[24] Initially, settlers came into ownership of land as much by the imposition of their own commons, which then rivalled indigenous commons, as by formal means of enclosure. In New Spain (to take just one example), the indigenous population was formally granted equal right to the lands on which colonial livestock ranged.[25] However, grazing utterly changed the landscape, infringing on native ways of life, and feral cattle and horses pushed the indigenous population further north, forcing them into congregated settlements. This opened the way for the development of haciendas; the granting of individual property

[23] Humphries, p. 41. To Humphries's work on the gendered aspects of enclosure we might add Nancy Fraser's recent analysis of expropriation as an intrinsically racialised process. See her 'Roepke Lecture in Economic Geography—From Exploitation to Expropriation: Historic Geographies of Racialized Capitalism', *Economic Geography*, 94 (2018), 1-17. While Fraser's thesis is obviously true on some level, her argument relies on a distinction between the fully proletarian worker, who is then 'protected, at least in theory, from (further) expropriation', and 'those whose labor, property, and/or persons are still subject to confiscations on the part of capital', often black or indigenous populations. But is it not this latter group that is more emblematic of the proletarian subject? If the 'fully proletarian' worker is protected from further expropriation, they are not yet fully proletarian; their dependence on capital is not yet complete. When Fraser later reformulates this distinction as one between a '*free exploitable citizen/worker*' and a '*dependent expropriable subject*', the false dichotomy is clear: workers are exploitable precisely insofar as they are dependent, as Marx suggests in the passage I cited at the beginning of this section. Fraser's ambiguity here seems to derive from a conflation in her text between 'freedom' in this strictly formal sense identified by Marx (free from means of production, and free to sell their labour-power to whomever they like) and freedom in the more conventional, politico-legal sense (enjoying civic and personal freedoms, say). In capitalism, it is the black subject who is likely to be freer in the first, negative sense—freer to be exploited *and* expropriated—and the white subject who will typically find themselves freer in the second, positive sense.

[24] Charles Geisler, 'Disowned by the Ownership Society: How Native Americans Lost Their Land', *Rural Sociology*, 79 (2014), 56-78 (p. 56).

[25] Allan Greer, 'Commons and Enclosure in the Colonization of North America', *The American Historical Review*, 117 (2012), 365-86 (pp. 376-80). Ben Maddison makes a similar point (about the colonial function of commons) in the context of Australia: 'Rules of commons that defined commoners by residence and property-owning status meant the de facto exclusion of indigenous people' ('Radical Commons Discourse and the Challenges of Colonialism', *Radical History Review*, 108 (2010), 29-48 (p. 43)). Together these studies suggest that nostalgia for the commons is not in itself an effective antidote to pro-enclosure discourse. As Maddison notes, the commons as a truly universal and egalitarian concept begins only (in England at least) with the Diggers in the mid-seventeenth century (Maddison, pp. 34-8).

rights, sometimes on indigenous land; and the consequent demarcation of landed property.[26] Here and elsewhere in North America, since livestock was considered private property, settlers let them graze on the indigenous commons, effecting enclosure by other means. As Allan Greer puts it, '[o]ver the centuries, indigenous peoples over a broad and ever-moving front would feel the effects of the advent of four-legged invaders even before the two-legged variety became a settled presence'.[27] In North America, the advance of the colonial commons laid the foundations for colonial enclosure.[28]

At the end of the eighteenth century, when the English parliament was passing ever more acts of enclosure, Washington was using treaties to challenge Indian title. These treaties 'accounted for the majority of land cessions from Indian to non-Indian people', Geisler notes—'an estimated half billion acres'.[29] Mass evictions accelerated the process, as 50,000 indigenous people had to migrate from the Southeast to the West. Thousands more, forced to leave the Northwest territories, had their land surveyed and plotted by white settlers.[30] Later, in 1887, the Dawes Act intensified the enclosure of the native population: by dividing Indian land into parcels, and changing its status from common to private property, the act opened up new means of dispossession, such as defaulted mortgages and tax forfeiture sales, as David A. Chang points out.[31] Thus, between 1887 and 1934, the Indians lost more than half their total landholdings. This 'allotment' of Indian land also challenged native sovereignty, as federal government could begin to impose its rule on the new allotments, removing tribal

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[26] What can only euphemistically be called 'depopulation' also allowed settlers to take control of land: 'Somewhere between 2 and 20 million aboriginals in North America in the sixteenth century were reduced to 530,000 individuals by 1900, giving heft to the Euro-American claim that Native homelands were vacant and awaiting homesteader "improvement"' (Geisler, p. 61).

[27] Greer, p. 383. This was not without its own equivalent back in England, where, in the absence of formal methods of enclosure, farmers could overstock and overgraze the commons, making it useless to others who held common right (Neeson, pp. 87-9). In both cases, livestock served as an instrument of *de facto* enclosure.

[28] The exception to this narrative, Greer notes, is New France, where a number of conditions limited the expansion of the colonial commons: cold winters meant livestock was stall-fed, there was a small market for meat and dairy because of the low population, and thick coniferous forest was unattractive to domestic herbivores (Greer, pp. 383-4).

[29] Geisler, p. 64.

[30] Geisler, p. 63.

[31] David A. Chang, 'Enclosures of Land and Sovereignty: The Allotment of American Indian Lands', *Radical History Review*, 109 (2011), 108-19 (p. 108). Nancy Shoemaker likewise discusses the relationship between the Dawes Act, privatisation, and native sovereignty in *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 19-23.

authorities as mediators between government and individual.[32] In short, as the colonising population spread inland, 'their government enclosed these commons, sequestered surviving Indians onto reservations, and extinguished all but the remnants of aboriginal life and title'.[33]

The remains an irony in using these intertwined histories of enclosure to complete a history of capitalism, for, as Carolyn Lesjak has observed, enclosure poses its own challenges to narrative historicisation. What Lesjak calls the '*longue durée*' of enclosure—its persistence from the late fifteenth century to the early nineteenth (and indeed longer, through to the present, as I shall argue)—'defies commonsense understandings of historical events as discrete, locatable, and terminal'.[34] In his study of the English enclosures, J. A. Yelling likewise suggests that the enclosure movement 'presents a classic example of the problem of causal explanation', it being difficult to explain the patterns that form when one traces the history and location of enclosure.[35] Within a region, Yelling notes, 'neighbouring parishes might be enclosed at very varying dates; perhaps one in the early eighteenth century and another in the early nineteenth, both set against a third in which enclosure had already occurred before the Acts began'. Enclosure is both too vast and too local; it demands the most abstract possible explanation (it is the origin of a new kind of social relation and a whole new mode of production) and the most concrete (individual enclosures often being the result of local negotiations and agreements). Or—to translate that into the terms of a different, if related, binary opposition—enclosure belongs to neither the base nor the superstructure alone: it serves as a kind of productive force, modifying society's fundamental relations of production, and yet its development also depends on state power—which, as we have seen, accelerated the enclosure movement in England from the late eighteenth century—and the existence of an appropriate legal apparatus (Chancery Decrees, parliamentary acts, treaties, to name just a few in the English and North American contexts).[36]

This all being said, the enclosure of land is not the only, or even the main, form of primitive accumulation. Marx also notes the role, in England, of the dissolution of the bands of feudal retainers, the Reformation, and the 'glorious Revolution' at the end of the

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[32] Chang, pp. 111-12.
[33] Geisler, p. 74.
[34] Lesjak, '1750 to the Present', para. 8 of 13.
[35] Yelling, p. 2.
[36] 'The state plays a decisive role in enclosure: its servants and warriors write the letters of blood and fire' (Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), p. 8).

seventeenth century;[37] in Scotland, of the Highland Clearances;[38] and in the imperialist context, of '[t]he discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins'.[39] A full account of these processes is outside our scope here, but suffice it to note that they all helped form, on the one hand, a landless proletariat, and on the other, a propertied capitalist class. They too were foundational moments in the development of capitalist society.

The use of the phrase 'new enclosures' to refer to certain processes in our own time therefore involves a double displacement. Enclosure is both generalised—no longer simply one means of founding the capital-relation, it encompasses them all—and recontextualised, lifted from its 'primitive' origins and applied to the 'mature' functioning of capitalism.[40] Indeed, virtually all recent scholarship on the new enclosures agrees that primitive accumulation is not a primitive phenomenon, that it has accompanied capitalism at every stage of its development. Views on how we ought to periodise this persistence, on what images or metaphors we should use, differ, and often depend on the scholar's basic understanding why enclosure would persist in the first place.[41] We shall examine some of these proposed reasons later, but for now, let us simply note that the advantage of using the

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[37] Marx, *Capital*, I, 878, 881-3, and 884.

[38] Marx, *Capital*, I, 890-5.

[39] Marx, *Capital*, I, 915.

[40] This allows us to avoid the definitional perils noted above (that is, that enclosure refers both to a process (the process of abolishing common right) and to a thing (the parcels of land themselves)). In our sense, enclosure refers simply to the separation of people from the means of production and subsistence, in whatever form. We are generalising the *process* of enclosure, not the *thing*. Thus, for example, the privatisation of water, which has almost nothing to do with hedging, becomes comprehensible as a new enclosure.

[41] Peter Linebaugh argues that enclosure has proceeded in three waves: the first 'at the sixteenth-century birth of the aggressive European nation-state', the second 'led by Parliament in the eighteenth century', and the third 'beginning in the late twentieth century' (Linebaugh, p. 4). Massimo De Angelis suggests that enclosure 'acquires a continuous character dependent on the inherent continuity of social conflict within capitalist production' (*The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 141). David Harvey conceptualises enclosure as a response to periodic crises of overaccumulation; he therefore implies that enclosure is as cyclical as crises themselves (*The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 149-52). The Midnight Notes Collective initially seems to make a binary distinction between 'old' and 'new' enclosures, but goes on to argue that enclosure is 'a regular return on the path of accumulation and a structural component of class struggle', which suggests that the 'new' form of enclosure is, in fact, quite old ('Introduction to the New Enclosures', *Midnight Notes*, 10 (1990) <http://www.midnightnotes.org/pdfnewenc1.pdf> [accessed 14 June 2018], 1-9 (p. 1)).

term ‘enclosure’ in this expanded sense is that it does not consign primitive accumulation to the prehistory of capital (as even Marx seems to do, at times).[42] ‘Enclosure’ for us denotes simply a process that further divorces people from their means of production and subsistence—whenever, historically, that might occur. My use of the term also has a practical purpose: much of the relevant scholarly literature on the forms of expropriation I shall discuss refers to them as ‘new enclosures’. The concept of enclosure hence serves a link, not only to Marx’s corpus, but to the live body of work developing on this theme—work from which I draw throughout the next section.

1.2.2 The New Enclosures of North America

What forms does enclosure take at the end of the twentieth century? To begin this section, I shall try to give a sense of the new enclosures through a survey of some major examples, especially those operative in the United States since 1970, the broad production context of my primary materials.[43] While intellectual property law has served as an enclosing mechanism since the origins of capitalism—as Vandana Shiva points out, the patent system was essential to the development of English manufacture in the fourteenth and fifteenth

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[42] In Michael Perelman’s charitable interpretation, Marx downplays the continuity of capitalist expropriation in *Capital* because he wants to emphasise the form of domination intrinsic to the labour process: exploitation (*The Invention of Capitalism*: *Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 27-33). That Marx does not embrace the implications of the phrase ‘primitive accumulation’—namely, that such accumulation occurs only prior to the existence of capitalism, as a transitional step—ought to be clear, however, from his qualification ‘*sogennante*’, rendered in English as ‘so-called’, such that section eight of *Capital*, Volume 1 (1867) introduces the concept as ‘so-called primitive accumulation’. Ellen Meiksins Wood stresses that Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation is quite different to the political economists’: ‘a decisive break with the classic model [of the transition to capitalism] came with Marx’s critique of political economy and its notion of “primitive accumulation”, his definition of capital not simply as wealth or profit but also as a social relation, and his emphasis on the transformation of social property relations as the *real* “primitive accumulation”’ (*The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2017), p. 31).

[43] Because of its focus on the United States and the Global North, my summary does not give a sense of the truly global scope of the new enclosures, which also include (to take just a few examples) the continued expulsion of the agricultural population from their land, the war in Afghanistan, and the ‘structural adjustment programmes’ of the IMF. Both Fraser (‘From Exploitation to Expropriation’, pp. 12-13) and Saskia Sassen (‘A Savage Sorting of Winners and Losers: Contemporary Versions of Primitive Accumulation’, *Globalizations*, 7 (2010), 23-50 (pp. 27-30)) note the particular importance of debt in compelling these neo-imperial expropriations.

centuries[44]—its expansion from the 1980s is a distinctive feature of the present wave of enclosure.[45] Examples abound, but the increasing privatisation of organic life itself is both striking and symptomatic. In 1980, during the landmark case *Diamond v. Chakrabarty*, the United States Supreme Court interpreted the genetic engineering of a microorganism as 'manufacture' and granted the first patent on life.[46] The first mammalian patent followed eight years later, when US conglomerate DuPont modified a mouse's genes to increase its susceptibility to cancer and then claimed ownership of the animal.[47] Today, patients with rare genetic diseases have tried to patent their own genomes as a defensive manoeuvre, before companies seek to own them.[48] Isolated populations in Tonga and Iceland have already sold exclusive rights to their gene pool. 'Unlike the land enclosures Marx and Polanyi wrote about,' Nancy Fraser observes, 'which "merely" marketized existing natural phenomena, the new enclosures penetrate deep "inside" nature, altering its internal grammar.'[49] We might add that, in the case of patents on life, it is precisely *by* altering nature that individuals and companies have enclosed it.

The enclosure of other natural domains also accelerated at the end of the twentieth century. Even water is now widely defined as a commodity, a good whose exchange-value holds precedence over its use-value. The recent privatisation of the world's water supply replaces a system—practised in both the Global North and the Global South—of small-scale trading between farmers, who treated water as a common resource.[50] US citizens have also seen their national forests ravaged by the advance of capital. Vast forest reserves were brought under the protection of the US Forest Service in 1891, whose stewardship was intended to preserve the forests' 'multiple use'—not just logging, that is, but recreation, hunting, wildlife activity, and so on. However, increased demand for timber after the Second World War forced the industry to change its priorities, such that, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the national forests' non-market values became subordinate to

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[44] Vandana Shiva, *Protect or Plunder?: Understanding Intellectual Property Rights* (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 15.
[45] For a discussion of the recent expansion of intellectual property rights, see James Boyle, *The Public Domain: Enclosing the Commons of the Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 42-53.
[46] Shiva, p. 41.
[47] Shiva, pp. 1-2.
[48] David Bollier, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 81.
[49] Nancy Fraser, 'Behind Marx's Hidden Abode', *New Left Review*, 86 (2014), 55-72 (p. 64).
[50] Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, *Blue Gold: The Battle Against Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2002), p. 73.

logging and other commercial functions. As Paul W. Hirt argues, most foresters 'came to believe that their overriding purpose was not so much to protect the national forests but rather to develop their resources to meet the material needs of the American public'.[51] Logging continued at unsustainable levels through the 1960s and 1970s. Even when the overall Forest Service budget fell during Reagan's tenure, funding for the timber programme remained robust.[52]

The continued enclosure of the sphere of reproduction is evident in changes to the housing market. Although state-subsidised housing in the United States has always been marginal, Nixon began to roll back the modest increase in public housing since 1949 with his 1974 Housing and Community Development Act.[53] The destruction of public housing was later formalised in the 1992 HOPE VI programme, which does not oblige authorities to replace the housing units they remove, and which has therefore caused widespread displacement and dispossession.[54] The concomitant expansion of gated communities—such that, in San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles, demand for a house in a gated community outstrips demand for other dwellings by three to one[55]—has produced 'a tightly meshed and prisonlike geography punctuated by protective enclosures and overseen by ubiquitous watchful eyes', as Edward Soja puts it.[56] The homeless and vagrant of Los Angeles meanwhile find themselves contained in Skid Row: 'The police, lobbied by Downtown merchants and developers, have broken up every attempt by the homeless and their allies to create safe havens or self-organized encampments,' notes Mike Davis.[57]

Needless to say, women have disproportionately felt the effects of the enclosure of social reproduction. In her critique of the United Nations's 'Sustainable Development Goals'

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[51] Paul W. Hirt, *A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests since World War Two* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. xxii.
[52] Hirt, p. 268.
[53] Jason Hackworth, 'Destroyed by HOPE: Public Housing, Neoliberalism and Progressive Housing Activism in the US', in *Where the Other Half Lives: Lower Income Housing in a Neoliberal World*, ed. by Sarah Glynn (London: Pluto Press, 2009), pp. 232-56 (p. 237).
[54] Hackworth, pp. 239-41. In the context of the United Kingdom, Stuart Hodkinson argues that the 'Right to Buy' scheme (inaugurated under Thatcher in 1980, where social housing is sold to tenants at a reduced price) constitutes part of the 'new urban enclosures' ('The New *Urban* Enclosures', *City*, 16 (2008), 500-18). Imogen Tyler draws attention to the forced dispossession of Gypsy and Traveller communities in the United Kingdom, though she also notes that enclosure has been diminishing their traditional ways of life—making them dependent on the wage and on capitalist exploitation—for centuries (*Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013), pp. 125-52).
[55] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 246.
[56] Edward Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 43.
[57] Davis, p. 234.

(adopted in 2015), Friederike Beier suggests that efforts to 'empower' women by integrating them into the formal, waged workforce, on the one hand, and to commodify the reproductive activities thereby vacated (such as housework), on the other, represent a 'double enclosure'.[58] Similarly, looking back to the 1970s, Fraser argues that our era of financialised capitalism has brought into being 'a new, dualized organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot, as some in the second category provide carework in return for (low) wages for those in the first'.[59] The 'care gap' is displaced from Global North to Global South, and the work of social reproduction takes on an increasingly racialised character.[60] In this context, it is unsurprising that the concept of a continuous primitive accumulation first asserted itself Marxist feminism. Tove Soiland notes that feminist thinkers involved in the housework debates of the 1970s were already beginning to conceptualise housework as a continuous form of capitalist expropriation.[61] As Claudia von Werlhof argued, for instance, capital's free appropriation of the housewife's unpaid work, cheapening the cost of labour-power, is itself a mode of primitive accumulation, 'which is characteristically the same whether it concerns the macro-relation First World/Third World or the micro-relation man/women'.[62] On this view, even prior to the

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[58] Friederike Beier, 'Marxist Perspectives on the Global Enclosures of Social Reproduction', *tripleC*, 16 (2018), 546-61.

[59] Nancy Fraser, 'Contradictions of Capital and Care', *New Left Review*, 100 (2016), 99-117 (p. 112).

[60] Fraser, 'Contradictions of Capital and Care', p. 114.

[61] Tove Soiland, 'A Feminist Approach to Primitive Accumulation', in *Rosa Luxemburg: A Permanent Challenge for Political Economy*, ed. by Judith Dellheim and Frieder Otto Wolf (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 185-217 (p. 187). Of course, as Soiland goes on to note, the first theorist of an ongoing primitive accumulation was Rosa Luxemburg, whose *Accumulation of Capital* (1913) posited that '[e]ach new colonial expansion is accompanied, as a matter of course, by a relentless battle of capital against the social and economic ties of the natives, who are also forcibly robbed of their means of production and their labour power' (*The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. by Agnes Schwarzchild (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 370.)

[62] Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Claudia von Werlhof, *Women: The Last Colony* (London: Zed Books, 1988), p. 16. We ought then to distinguish between the kind of enclosure theorised by Beier—where previously unwaged activities are turned into waged ones, and the woman becomes an active wage-labourer—and this earlier formulation by von Werlhof—according to which women's unwaged housework is a free gift appropriated by capital in the form of *the man's* healthy wage-labour, and is thus structurally equivalent to a land grab or the very cheap sale of a public asset. The first case involves the freeing up of women *qua* labour; the second involves the cheapening of the object of women's labour (the reproduction of the man's labour-power) *qua* capital. The question implicit here is why capital has recently found it more useful to appropriate women's work through the formal wage-labour mechanism rather than indirectly, through her cheapening of the man's labour-power. Soiland notes the contradiction inherent in this shift: 'the conversion of unpaid labour previously performed by women into wage labour under capitalist conditions has the paradoxical effect that the demand for unpaid labour

woman's integration in the active workforce, her chores have begun to serve as raw material for capital.

The pressure to intensify enclosure also manifests itself in the growing appetite for privatisation in American public life. Although the Reagan administration considered the prospects of privatising programmes and assets in its first term, it was not until early 1987 that the first major privatisation project took place: the government's sale of its 85 per cent stake in Conrail, a freight rail service.[63] Reagan established his Presidential Commission on Privatisation shortly after, in September 1987, and its 1988 report proposed to expand privatisation into low-income housing, air traffic control, education, and the postal service, among others, sometimes in a piecemeal fashion, through the use of vouchers, or more comprehensively, as in its recommendation that the Naval Petroleum Reserves be completely privatised. Prior to Reagan's administration, the United States government had frequently expressed its wish to contract public services out to the private sector, but in the Commission's view, this intention had 'not been applied effectively'.[64] Thus it was only with Reagan that the theory of privatisation, on the one side, and its practice, on the other, were consciously brought together.[65] Subsequently, experiments in using vouchers for schooling in the United States have found limited success, and the attempted privatisation of social security has run aground.[66]

A final example, and one that will have heightened meaning for us in our discussion of *Videodrome*, is the enclosure of the electromagnetic spectrum. As David Bollier points out, here in the context of the United States, '[t]he loss of the airwaves to market enclosure [was] first achieved through 1927 and 1934 legislation and significantly extended through sweeping deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s'.[67] The airwaves being part of the common inheritance of humanity, its enclosure exacerbates the unequal distribution of wealth ('wealth' here in the Marxist sense, as the sum of use-values) intrinsic to capitalism. Initially, Bollier notes,

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also rises, yet nobody is available to perform said unpaid labour under the adult worker model' (Soiland, p. 207).

[63] Jeffrey R. Henig, 'Privatization in the United States: Theory and Practice', *Political Science Quarterly*, 104 (1989-90), 649-70 (pp. 649-50).

[64] President's Commission on Privatization, *Privatization: Towards More Effective Government. Report of the President's Commission on Privatization* (Washington, DC: The Commission, 1988), p. 129.

[65] Henig, p. 663.

[66] Brian J. Glenn, 'Privatization as a Strategy in the United Kingdom, the United States and Beyond', in *Domestic Policy Discourse in the US and the UK in the 'New World Order'*, ed. by Lori Maguire (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 179-205 (pp. 189-200).

[67] Bollier, p. 148.

various public groups, including Congress, sought to create a system of 'common carriage', where the broadcaster would be required to sell airtime for the same price to anyone who wanted it.[68] But seeing this as an infringement on their editorial control, broadcasters pushed back, and in the end the 1934 bill prohibited common access. The broadcasters' compromise was that they would have to operate objectively and in the public interest, though this was rarely enforced in practice. In the 1990s, further deregulation bloated the definition of 'public interest' beyond recognition. 'A regulatory scheme based on broadcasters serving as conscientious stewards of the public interest had, by the 1990s, effectively morphed into outright ownership of the spectrum,' Bollier concludes.[69]

That enclosure remains a powerful force in American capitalism is clear, then, but why has it persisted? There are two dominant answers to this question. The first comes from David Harvey and his notion of 'accumulation by dispossession'.[70] For Harvey, the privatisations and dispossessions that have wracked the globe in the last forty years are best understood as a response to the 1970s economic crisis. This crisis being caused by overaccumulation—a situation where capitalists are unable to reinvest their surplus-value profitably, where they have too much capital and too few outlets for it—only the creation of new, cheap inputs can open up space for profitable investments.[71] The sale of public assets to

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[68] Bollier, p. 148.

[69] Bollier, p. 150. Many of the examples of enclosure I have given involve the privatisation of a public industry (say, the provision of water), and it might be argued—correctly—that these public industries already require a degree of enclosure. We still rely on our wages to pay the state for access to water, prior to this latter's privatisation. What matters is that, while the state *can* act as a capitalist, the corporation *must* act as a capitalist, if it is to survive. The corporation produces use-values only insofar as they bear exchange-value, and thus alienated labour; the state can, conceivably, produce use-values for their own sake. Though not all the new enclosures are a kind of *ex novo* separation, they do generally increase the *degree* of our dependence on capital. Hence Sassen frames our current wave of primitive accumulation as 'a deepening of advanced capitalism predicated on the destruction of more traditional forms of capitalism' (Sassen, p. 23). Harvey likewise regards 'the conversion of *various* forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into *exclusive* private property rights' as characteristic of the new enclosures (*The New Imperialism*, p. 145, emphases mine).

[70] For an overview, see Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, pp. 137-82.

[71] Harvey formulates this argument as part of a critique of Luxemburg and the 'underconsumptionist' school she represents, for whom the worker's immiseration, the downward pressure put on their wages, means that the capitalist's consumer goods go unsold, this being the root cause of economic crisis. For Harvey, on the other hand, capitalists can solve the problem (in the short term) by reinvesting or remobilising their dormant capital. Harvey divides these solutions into *temporal* displacements—'investment in long-term capital projects or social expenditures (such as education and research) that defer the re-entry of capital values into circulation into the future'—and *spatial* displacements—'opening up new markets, new production capacities, and new resource, social, and labour possibilities elsewhere' (*The New Imperialism*, p. 109). Harvey's argument here builds upon his earlier work on the relationship

private companies for a fraction of their market value—national forest timber in the United States, for example, was often sold at a loss[72]—seems a perfect example of what Harvey has in mind. As well as enclosures, however, Harvey argues that financialisation, regressive tax policy, and the artificial generation of local crises have also recently served as means of expropriation. Thus events as diverse as the Enron scandal, the IMF's devaluation of Jamaican currency, and the privatisation of the *ejido* in Mexico are collected together under Harvey's notion of accumulation by dispossession (a concept whose evident capaciousness has sometimes been criticised).[73]

In contrast to Harvey's analysis of the objective contradictions of capital, of blockages in the circuit of capital accumulation, Marxists working in the autonomist tradition have tended to interpret the new enclosures as a form of counterrevolution, a reactionary intervention in the class war. The 1990 essay in which the Midnight Notes Collective theorises the new enclosures is exemplary here. Between 1965 and 1975, they argue, 'proletarian initiatives transcended the limits of capital's historic possibilities', challenging capital to discipline its workers through enclosure.[74] Enclosure must then be understood in its concrete effects on the class war, which, they stress, 'does not happen on an abstract board toting up profit and loss', but rather 'needs a terrain'.[75] In the same vein, Massimo De Angelis argues that enclosure is a kind of 'disciplinary integration', a way of bringing into the ambit of capitalist production subjects whose 'value practices' fall outside of it.[76] Once integrated, workers may be played off against one another, as the livelihood of one group depends on their outcompeting rival groups, the workers' struggles for survival serving as a means for capital's self-expansion.

While Harvey's and the autonomists' explanations start from different premises and develop in quite different directions, they actually present us with a false dichotomy. They describe the same process but from opposite points of view. If, to resolve crises of overaccumulation, capitalists must open up new outlets for investment—by enclosing the commons, or privatising public property—then these resolutions require people to yield their

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between overaccumulation and blockages in the circulation of capital; see his discussion in *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), pp. 190-203.

[72] 96% of sales in the Rocky Mountain Region, 93% of sales in the Intermountain Region, and 60% of sales in the Northern Region lost money (Hirt, pp. 278-81).

[73] See, for instance, Robert Brenner's claim that accumulation by dispossession is 'a virtual grab bag of processes', many of which 'are quite normal aspects or by-products of the already well-established sway of capital' ('What Is, and What Is Not, Imperialism?', *Historical Materialism*, 14.4 (2006), 79-105 (p. 100)).

[74] Midnight Notes Collective, p. 3.

[75] Midnight Notes Collective, p. 6.

[76] De Angelis, pp. 79-81.

direct access to means of production or subsistence. But in such a situation, the people are not yet fully proletarianised—they maintain some bond to their means of production, which capital is presently trying to take from them—and thus the capital-relation also does not yet fully obtain. It follows that the effort to resolve crises of overaccumulation by enclosure is always, at the same time, an effort to complete the process of proletarianisation: 'disciplinary integration' is ultimately comprehensible as a strategy for resolving economic crisis. But we could also put this the other way around. Since the proletariat's class struggle aims to bring the means of production under common ownership, their victories deprive capitalists of the new, cheap outlets in which the latter would invest their overaccumulated capital. Proletarian struggle pushes capital towards economic crisis, while the resolution of those same crises is nothing but the reassertion of the capital-relation, quelling dissent. Economic crisis is immanent to the terrain of class struggle, and the choice between Harvey's and the autonomists' explanations is a false one.

1.2.3 Enclosure and its Cognates

All that remains for this discussion of enclosure is to clarify its relationship to the various cognate terms—alienation, commodification, fetishism, and reification—that I shall deploy in the course of my readings. Though closely related, these concepts are not synonyms, and our understanding of enclosure will benefit from their disentanglement. For instance, we might be tempted to use 'commodification' as a substitute for 'enclosure': much of the secondary literature I cite in the following chapters indeed prefers the former term as a descriptor of the economic tendencies of the 1980s. In its strict sense, commodification 'designates the structural tendency in capitalism whereby matters of value are transformed into objects with a price that can potentially be sold on the market'.[77] If a commodity is something 'produced intentionally for the purpose of exchange'[78]—an object destined, from the moment of its production, for the marketplace—commodification refers to the generalisation of that process, where fewer and fewer products are made for immediate consumption, their value in exchange more important to the producer than their value in use. The paradox of the commodity therefore consists in this: they are 'non-use-values for their owners, and use-

[77] Fredric Jameson, *Valencies of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 257.
[78] Marx, *Capital*, I, 182.

values for their non-owners'.[79] Commodification is the extension of this principle: objects are increasingly produced with their non-owners in mind.

Yet the expansion of exchange presupposes the existence of two kinds of person: someone who needs to use the market to acquire goods, and someone who will use their labour for the production of others' goods. These two abstract personae are combined in the figure of the proletarian: the individual who is separate from both their means of subsistence—which they now need to buy in the marketplace—and their means of production—such that they cannot work for themselves. As we have seen, these people must be 'free workers': 'in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietors.'[80] The dual separation from subsistence and production is the purpose of what Marx calls primitive accumulation and what we are now calling enclosure. Enclosure therefore establishes and renews the foundations of commodification: it makes the worker dependent on exchange and the market, and this in turn allows the production of ever more objects for the purpose of exchange. If commodification generalises the non-use-value, then enclosure generalises the non-owner.

This situation, where people must relate to each other through their labour—or, more specifically, through the products of their labour—is what Marx tries to capture with his concept of commodity fetishism. 'In order that these objects may enter into relation with one another as commodities,' Marx suggests, 'their guardians'—that is, their owners—'must place themselves in relation to one another as persons whose will resides in those objects.'[81] The commodity bears the social relation between independent producers; it is what connects the labour of one person to the labour of another. Humans and things, subjects and objects, appear to switch places; in capitalism, we have 'material relations between persons and social relations between things'.[82] Thus Marx finds it appropriate to draw a religious analogy: 'There [in religion] the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands.'[83] Fetishism

[79] Marx, *Capital*, I, 179.
[80] Marx, *Capital*, I, 874.
[81] Marx, *Capital*, I, 178.
[82] Marx, *Capital*, I, 166.
[83] Marx, *Capital*, I, 165.

designates a world where the primary social bonds between people are articulated vis-à-vis the commodity-form, where objects begin to incarnate human 'will'. Fetishism may then be said to proceed in tandem with commodification.

Marx's notion of fetishism, developed here in *Capital* (1867-83), bears strong resemblance to his 1848 writings on alienation. Yet if the two texts, and hence the two concepts (alienation and fetishism), nonetheless differ in their emphasis, it is partly because Marx develops them in the context of different theoretical concerns: in the earlier text, 'the division between labour and capital, and between capital and land',[84] and in the later one, the abstract distinction between exchange-value and use-value. That is, where Marx develops his concept of fetishism out of an analysis of the commodity-form, he develops his concept of alienation out of an analysis of private property. In the latter, Marx notes, first, that the worker is alienated from the product of their labour, since the goods they produce become objects of the capitalist's wealth and causes of the worker's privation.[85] Second, the worker is alienated from their own labour activity, since labour is something the worker must do to survive, rather than something they decide to do for their individual fulfilment. Third, the worker is alienated from the rest of their species, from what Marx calls their 'species-being', because they must now labour to acquire their own means of subsistence—they must work for themselves, for their own subsistence—rather than as a conscious, deliberate act of changing their environment. Hence, fourth, humans are alienated from each other. The crucial point to be noted is that, here, alienation is logically prior to private property: 'although private property appears as the basis and cause of alienated labour, it is in fact its consequence.'[86]

The concept of reification proposes to take Marx's analysis of alienation further still: it seeks to describe what the world looks like when the commodity 'has become the universal category of society as a whole', as Georg Lukács puts it in his seminal essay 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' (1923).[87] Lukács's study examines the impact of

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[84] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 322. It is clear, also, that Marx has very similar intentions in this passage as he does when he comes to discuss primitive accumulation at the end of *Capital*. Both sections start by criticising political economy for explaining 'the origin of evil by the fall of man', that is, by assuming 'as a fact in the form of history what it should explain' ('Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 323; compare with *Capital*, I, 873).

[85] For Marx's discussion of alienation, see 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 322-34.

[86] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 332.

[87] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), p. 86.

commodification on all areas of society: on the wider tendencies of abstraction, atomisation, calculation, fragmentation, and rationalisation that occur in economics, law, philosophy, and so on in capitalism. Taken together, these tendencies constitute reification. For example, Lukács suggests that the rational formalism of bureaucracy is an outgrowth of the 'scientific' management of the labour process; that journalism's pretension to objectivity, divorcing its viewpoint from the personality of the individual journalist, seems to originate in the worker's subjugation to impersonal machinery; and that marriage is now seen as a mutual possession of sexual organs.[88] Just as importantly, for Lukács, bourgeois philosophy finds itself imprisoned (most emblematically in Kant) in a series of binary oppositions—between form and content, noumena and phenomena, subject and object—which cannot be resolved without the thorough application of the dialectical method. 'The different forms of fragmentation'—the fragmentation of subject and object themselves, as well as of the categories of bourgeois philosophy—'are so many necessary phases on the road towards a reconstituted man but they dissolve into nothing when they come into a true relation with a grasped totality, i.e. when they become dialectical,' writes Lukács.[89] Only the dialectical method—only the ruthless historicisation of the categories of bourgeois thought—discloses the possibility of a world beyond reification.[90]

As this discussion implies, what is at stake in enclosure is ultimately the penetration of the value-form into new zones of our social world. Enclosure is more than fences, hedges, and walls; it is the alienation of humanity. Looking ahead, our readings must therefore attend, correspondingly, not only to explicit depictions of the new enclosures—to their engagements with privatisation, dispossession, and separation—but also to their portrayal of an increasingly alien and reified world. It will be my argument, for instance, that *Alien* uses the architecture of its spaceships to evoke alienation, that *Videodrome* portrays a society reified, and that *Total Recall* represents enclosure as a kind of spatial fetishism.

Yet there remains one further term, related to these foregoing concepts, that promises to shed light not merely on the content of particular films, but on the development of 1980s

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[88] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 99-100. While reification therefore seems as an effect of commodification, Fredric Jameson suggests that it also serves as the latter's condition of possibility: reification involves 'the imposition of the metaphysical object form on entities which are not naturally so organised' (Jameson, *Valencies of the Dialectic*, p. 258).

[89] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 141.

[90] Bourgeois philosophy 'did not manage to do more than provide a complete intellectual copy and the *a priori* deduction of bourgeois society. It is only the *manner* of this deduction, namely the dialectical method, that points beyond bourgeois society' (Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 148).

science-fiction in general. This is Debord's notion of the spectacle, a concept that seeks to describe the primary forms of alienation operative since the 1920s.[91] In the middle sections of this introduction, I shall argue that the science-fiction film in particular ought to be understood by its dual relationship to the spectacle—that it is one manifestation of the spectacle and that, at the same time, it challenges the logic of spectacular separation. Debord's writing on the spectacle also contains meditations on the development of two capitalist temporalities, irreversible time and pseudo-cyclical time, whose contradiction will illuminate the social and material preconditions of science fiction in general. As we shall see, this temporal antinomy is only the consequence of an increasingly commodified world, such that the contradiction between the two becomes particularly acute in the context of the new enclosures.

But before we can develop this Debordian theory of science fiction, it is necessary to sketch out the methodological and critical milieu in which we shall intervene. I shall suggest, first, that the dialectical method is the hermeneutic appropriate to the interpretation of science fiction, not least because the genre may itself be construed as dialectical. It is only the dialectic that promises to make the estranging material of the 1980s science-fiction film strange again. The next section will also survey the dominant critical approaches to the science-fiction film, which—appealing sometimes to brute facts of medium-specificity, sometimes to each medium's unique history—have tended to distinguish it from the science-fiction novel or short story. Perhaps scandalously in this context, I accept Darko Suvin's graphocentric definition of science fiction and postpone the question of its applicability to the cinema to a later point in my analysis.

1.3 Spectacular Separation and the Science-Fiction Film

1.3.1 Estrangement and Dialectics

[91] For a discussion of the similarities between Lukács and Debord, and of how Debord tries to extend some of Lukács's insights, see Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 19-31.

Today, the critic of the major Hollywood science-fiction films of the 1980s is confronted with a singular dilemma. Is it possible to read these films—well-known as they are, and the subjects of an almost unbearable weight of prior criticism—afresh, as if for the first time? Can we discuss *Blade Runner* now without recycling critical clichés about the indeterminate humanity of the Replicants or the film's relationship to postmodernism?[92] Is it possible to think past the human-machine dichotomy in *RoboCop*, too?[93] What about the theme of abjection in *Alien*, which pervades books and articles on the film, or the fetishism of the Schwarzenegger body in *Total Recall*?[94] *Videodrome*'s critics also seem to have agreed on a relatively unobjectionable list of the film's core themes, including its body horror and its McLuhanite portrayal of media.[95] This problem might inhere in the structure of postmodern mass culture itself: as Jameson has argued, such works appear to contain repetition as an immanent property. His prime example is the pop song, which cannot be heard without recalling prior auditions.[96] What if the science-fiction films I am dealing with here are likewise repetitious by their very nature? What chance would there be then of formulating new readings?

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[92] The classic analyses of *Blade Runner*'s postmodernism are David Harvey, 'Time and Space in the Postmodern Cinema', in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 308-23; and Giuliana Bruno, 'Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 183-95. On the human and non-human, see, for instance, Andrew Norris, '"How Can It Not Know What It Is?": Self and Other in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*', *Film-Philosophy*, 17 (2013), 19-50.

[93] On the relationship between humans and machines in *RoboCop*, see Rob Wilson, 'Cyborg America: Policing the Social Sublime in *RoboCop* and *RoboCop 2*', in *Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism, and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Richard Burt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 289-306. The classic text on the figure of the cyborg is Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), pp. 149-81.

[94] On *Alien*'s abjection, see Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Oxon: Routledge, 1993), pp. 16-30; and Catherine Constable, 'Becoming the Mother's Mother: Morphologies of Identity in the *Alien* series', in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 173-202. On Schwarzenegger's fetishism in *Total Recall*, see Jeff Goldberg, 'Recalling Totalities: The Mirrored Stages of Arnold Schwarzenegger', *Differences*, 4.1 (1992), 172-204; and Linda Mizejewski, 'Total Recoil: The Schwarzenegger Body on Postmodern Mars', *Post Script*, 12.3 (1993), 25-34.

[95] For a classic statement on Cronenberg's body horror, see Steven Shaviro, 'Bodies of Fear: The Films of David Cronenberg', in *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 127-57. I discuss the relationship between Cronenberg and McLuhan in Chapter 4.

[96] Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Mass Culture', in *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 9-24 (p. 20).

But this leaves us with a paradox, for if (as we shall see shortly) science fiction is to be understood as a fundamentally *estranging* genre, challenging our commonsense perceptions of the world, this is at odds with the domesticating, re-familiarising function of postmodern mass culture itself, which comes to us, Jameson suggests, as if already read. Implicit in this problem is, however, the hermeneutic principle that forms its solution: our readings must aim to make the science-fictional text itself strange, to effect a kind of second-degree estrangement, breaking our interpretive habits and throwing new light on old problems. And this, in turn, is the purpose of the dialectical method, which seeks precisely to break through the deadlocks of reified thought—to show how even the most basic or immutable categories are in fact historical and contingent. For dialectical reason, Lukács writes, 'history now intrudes, illogically but inescapably into the structure of those very spheres which according to the system were supposed to lie beyond its range'.[97] Just as, for Lukács, the dialectic promises to abolish the antinomies of bourgeois philosophy, so, in our context, the 1980s science-fiction film, a dialectical approach to mass culture will aim to break through *its* antinomies: the opposition between subject and object in *Alien*, between humans and androids in *Blade Runner* and *RoboCop*, between mind and body in *Videodrome*, and between one's true self and one's performative identity in *Total Recall*.

In this Lukácsian conception, dialectics involves above all reintroducing content and history to the formal and ahistorical antinomies of reified thought. So it is that I have not ignored or rebutted the existing readings of my primary material (which often have ample textual justification) so much as historicised them using the repository of concepts found in Marx's work: concepts like the mode of production, class struggle, ideology, and of course, enclosure.[98] My effort has been to show how the alien's abjection in *Alien*, or Ridley Scott's use of noir in *Blade Runner*, or Schwarzenegger's fetishism in *Total Recall* (to give just a few examples) all belong to a distinct historical situation, one in which capital faces the problem of its own overaccumulation and seeks to solve it by means of enclosure. In this sense dialectics serves as a kind of methodological anti-method, not only because it subsumes these other approaches under itself, but because it rejects the latent formalism of the concept of

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[97] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 147.

[98] The advantage of dialectical criticism, at least for Jameson, is precisely that it is able to 'subsume' the findings of apparently rival paradigms, 'assigning them an undoubted sectoral validity within itself, and thus at once canceling and preserving them' (*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. x). For a more recent defence of dialectical reading, see Carolyn Lesjak, 'Reading Dialectically', *Criticism*, 55 (2013), 233-77.

method as such.[99] Thus, as I have already suggested, dialectics estranges us from these other approaches and protocols, these more habitual modes of reading.[100]

The crucial point to be made here—and one that brings us directly to the nature of the genre—is that science fiction may itself be characterised as a critical, dialectical, even historicising form. This is the import of Darko Suvin's seminal (and graphocentric) definition of science fiction as 'the *literature of cognitive estrangement*'.[101] For Suvin, science fiction takes the underlying processes of social reality and teases out their implications, the possible futures latent in them, often by means of imaginative extrapolation.[102] This mechanism may be characterised as 'cognitive' because it 'shares with naturalistic literature, naturalistic science, and naturalistic or materialist philosophy a common sophisticated, dialectical, and cognitive *epistemé*'—because its approach to reality is, in short, scientific and dialectical, not metaphysical.[103] And science fiction causes 'estrangement' because it uses this cognitive approach to render reality, not in close naturalistic detail, but through imagining a 'different

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[99] That is, traditional critical theoretical readings have perpetuated what Neil Larsen calls 'the fallacy of application': treating the text and the method as antinomies, as two externally related and opposed objects whose interaction cannot be but haphazard and accidental. Larsen argues that such a fallacy is itself a consequence of reification—more specifically, of a failure to comprehend texts as mimetic subject-objects, moments where society achieves its self-recognition. This places the literary at odds with value (in the Marxist sense), which, for Larsen, blocks precisely this recognition. Mimesis is thus to be understood as a holdover from precapitalist social formations: they must objectify themselves in narrative to guarantee their cohesion and reproduction, while, in capitalism, the commodity-form serves that purpose. See Larsen, 'Literature, Immanent Critique, and the Problem of Standpoint', *Mediations*, 24.2 (2009), 48-65.

[100] A brief but evocative passage in Jameson's discussion of dialectics at the end of *Marxism and Form* captures this estranging function of dialectical reason: 'There is a breathlessness about this shift from the normal object-oriented activity of the mind to such dialectical self-consciousness—something of the sickening shudder we feel in an elevator's fall or in the sudden dip of an airliner. That recalls us to our bodies much as this recalls us to our mental positions as thinkers and observers. The shock indeed is basic, and constitutive of the dialectic as such: without this transformational moment, without this initial conscious transcendence of an older, more naïve position, there can be no genuinely dialectical coming to consciousness' (*Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 308).

[101] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 15.

[102] Later, Suvin suggests that extrapolation is actually a subspecies of analogy, and that analogy is cognitive process par excellence of science fiction (*Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 92-5). However, the force of Suvin's criticism is directed not against the analysis of science fiction as extrapolation per se, but rather against the misinterpretation of science-fictional extrapolations as predictions, as devices for futurology, rather than as reflexive comments on the present. Bearing this warning in mind, I shall continue to use the term 'extrapolation' here, not least because the films I analyse do generally employ analogy in its extrapolative form. The exception is *Videodrome*, where literalisation seems to serve as its chief analogic function, as I discuss at the end of Chapter 4.

[103] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 33.

space/time location or central characters for the fable, unverifiable by common sense'.[104] What this implies is that science fiction is essentially concerned, not with the future, but with the present; it uses its speculative future as a means of shedding light on its producer's milieu. As Suvin points out, Edward Bellamy's and William Morris's visions of the twenty-first century (in *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888) and *News From Nowhere* (1890), respectively) are concerned with the 1880s, while George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* are really about 1948 and 1968.[105] Science fiction thereby distances us from our already-alien world and forces us—like Quaid surveying the new atmosphere of Mars at the end of *Total Recall*—to see it from some fresh, unfamiliar perspective.[106]

The next section of this introduction will develop Suvin's definition in the context of science-fiction film in general and the 1980s science-fiction film in particular. Yet while his conceptual work therefore serves as the starting point for my own understanding of science fiction, we must also note that many other critics have paid greater attention than Suvin to the specificities of the film medium. For instance, Brooks Landon argues that the science-fiction film is appreciably different to science-fiction literature: it privileges the image over the concept; it relates to uniquely cinematic genres (such as the Western); and it has an ambivalent attitude towards the genre's typical issues.[107] Christine Cornea responds that

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[104] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 32.

[105] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 93. As Carl Freedman puts it, 'science fiction is of all genres the one most devoted to historical concreteness' (*Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), p. 17).

[106] Freedman argues that Suvin's notion of cognition places the power of generic discrimination in the hands of scientists, whose expertise would now be required to discern between the texts that are properly cognitive and scientific and those that are not. Reclaiming such powers for literary studies, Freedman argues that what matters is not that the text is objectively cognitive, but that it regards itself to be so: 'The crucial issue for generic discrimination is not any epistemological judgement external to the text itself on the rationality or irrationality of the latter's imaginings, but rather […] the attitude of the *text itself* to the kind of estrangements being performed' (*Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 18). However, Freedman's criticism betrays a misunderstanding of Suvin's definition of 'science', which has as much to do with the practice of human sciences as natural ones. Indeed, for Suvin, '[t]hese "soft sciences" can therefore most probably better serve as a basis for SF than the "hard" natural sciences; and they *have* in fact been the basis of all better works in SF' (*Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 84). Suvin's emphasis is on what we might now call the 'multidisciplinarity' of science fiction, whose cognition takes its content from any number of subjects (perhaps several at one time, as Suvin implies). For Suvin, dialectical reasoning is a central aspect of cognition; as such, critical theorists are as able to pass generic judgement on science fiction as are physicists or biologists.

[107] Brooks Landon, *The Aesthetics of Ambivalence: Rethinking Science Fiction Film in the Age of Electronic (Re)Production* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 3-25.

Landon makes too much of the differences between the literature and film of science fiction; she points out that science fiction has been consumed in many different media since at least the 1930s.[108] Cornea herself conceptualises the science-fiction film through its relation to other 'fantasy genres' such as the musical and the horror film, though her vague definition of the genre (science fiction is located 'in between fantasy and reality') seems to illustrate, by virtue of its absence, the precision and utility of the Suvinian framework.[109]

Vivian Sobchack offers a historical explanation for the general differences in tone and approach between science-fiction novels and films. She notes that the science-fiction film as a recognised genre comes into being only after Hiroshima, and that this accounts for its customary scepticism towards the natural sciences.[110] The science-fiction film is not necessarily anti-science, therefore. Yet Sobchack also accommodates magic and superstition in her definition of the genre: 'The SF film is a film genre which emphasizes actual, extrapolative, or speculative science and the empirical method, interacting in a social context with the lesser emphasized, but still present, transcendentalism of magic and religion, in an attempt to reconcile man with the unknown.'[111] We might note two differences with Suvin: the openness to non-cognitive (that is, magical or superstitious) thinking and the absence of any notion of estrangement (replaced in fact by its opposite: reconciliation). If I prefer Suvin's attempt in the following pages, it is in part because of this second substitution. The notion of estrangement will come to seem a more apt description of the function of science fiction in an alienated and enclosed world.

More concerning for the present study is Carl Freedman's suggestion, in a reading of *2001*, that the science-fiction film is impossible. Freedman argues that science-fiction cinema reaches its apotheosis in the special effect, which, by drawing metacinematic attention to the mechanics of representation, 'actually *enact*[*s*], on one level, the technological marvels that

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[108] Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 5.

[109] Cornea, p. 4. Cornea turns to Tzvetan Todorov's account of fantasy in this passage because, in her view, it accounts for the bizarreness and irrationality of much science fiction better than Suvin's material does. J. P. Telotte also mobilises Todorov's distinctions between the uncanny, the fantastic, and the marvellous to theorise the science-fiction film; see his *Science Fiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 10-16.

[110] Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, 2nd edn (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 21. Telotte likewise notes that, 'far more than is the case in science fiction *literature*, our films have consistently linked science and technology to the disastrous' (*Replications: A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 3).

[111] Sobchack, *Screening Space*, p. 63.

the typical science-fiction film thematizes on a different level'.[112] The special effect synthesises content and form, the explicit concerns of science fiction with the almost science-fictional character of cutting-edge filmic technology. Yet, Freedman adds, the perfection of the special effect is inimical to cognition, and thus to science fiction in the Suvinian sense.[113] *2001* exemplifies this perfectly: its conspicuous special effects block out whatever profound conceptual content the film might otherwise have contained. The twist here is that *2001* succeeds in breaking the deadlock, because Kubrick makes banality and vacuity the primary object of his narrative, thematising the problem itself, raising it to a new level.[114] This solution is unavailable to other science-fiction films, which must suffer one of two fates: either enrich the cognitive function at the expense of specifically cinematic form of science fiction (*Alien* and *Blade Runner*) or succumb to the banalising tendency of special effects (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *Star Wars*). Owing to the uniqueness of its solution, *2001* is 'the first and the last great monument of science-fiction cinema'.[115]

On Freedman's view, implicitly, it matters very much that Suvin refers to the 'literature' of cognitive estrangement. Where the science-fiction film is judged by Suvin's criteria, he suggests, we will find it is no longer truly science fiction. Yet Freedman's argument here relies on a subtle misreading of Suvin. As we have just seen, Freedman proposes that special effects are the specifically filmic form of science-fictional content: 'special effects […] propose a continuity between the film itself, as a product of cinematic technology, and the characteristic technological content of the genre.'[116] But while new filmic technologies, which might be startling and marvellous, even estranging, certainly share an affinity with the content of much science fiction, the link between technology and science fiction is at root a contingent and accidental one. If science fiction is defined by the conjunction of a method (cognitive or scientific) and an effect (estrangement), it is independent of any given kind of content. Suvin defines science fiction in such a way as to make no prescriptions about what objects should or should not appear in its content. Hence, though technology is the

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[112] Carl Freedman, 'Kubrick's *2001* and the Possibility of a Science-Fiction Cinema', *Science Fiction Studies*, 25 (1998), 300-18 (p. 307). For a similar argument about the relevance of special effects to the science-fiction cinema, see Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, pp. 24-30; and Barry Keith Grant, '"Sensuous Elaboration": Reason and the Visible in the Science Fiction Film', in *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Reader*, ed. by Sean Redmond (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), pp. 17-23.

[113] The general idea that the science-fiction film is less conceptually sophisticated or rich than literary science-fiction has been widespread (see Sobchack, *Screening Space*, pp. 24-6).

[114] Freedman, 'Kubrick's *2001* and the Possibility of a Science-Fiction Cinema', p. 314.

[115] Freedman, 'Kubrick's *2001* and the Possibility of a Science-Fiction Cinema', p. 315.

[116] Freedman, 'Kubrick's *2001* and the Possibility of a Science-Fiction Cinema', p. 307.

'characteristic' content of science fiction, it is not its necessary content. Science fiction need not represent technology to be science fiction, on Suvin's view. It follows that the marvels of cinematic technology, too, are neither consonant nor dissonant with science fiction per se.

The next section will extrapolate from Suvin's definition to suggest what science fiction really *is* about. Here we rejoin the narrative, begun in the opening sections of this introduction, of the commodity-form's expansion, its penetration into new areas of our social world, a process that Lukács understood as reification and that, as we shall see presently, Debord develops further still under the label of 'spectacular separation'. I shall argue that the science-fiction film is by nature concerned with the society of the spectacle—more specifically, that its two core devices, extrapolation and the special effect, respond to the uneven temporalities native to such a society. This will position us to defend and justify a proposition that, at this stage in the argument, can only be asserted: that despite Suvin's apparent indifference to the specificities of science-fiction film, the genre is best defined in his own terms as the *cinema of cognitive estrangement*.

1.3.2 The Twin Blades of the Science-Fiction Film

One of the key implications of the foregoing discussion is that Marxism and science fiction are not to be contrasted merely as method on the one hand, primary material on the other. As Freedman argues, science fiction is a privileged genre for Marxism because it shares the latter's concern with historicity and critique.[117] Ewa Mazierska and Alfredo Suppia add that the two find common ground in their interest in the future of mankind, their concern with the dynamics of transformation, their valorisation of science, their implicit transnationalism, and their drive to explore the contradictions of capitalism.[118] But most important for us—and serving as the point of departure for this section—is Suvin's emphasis on the estranging nature of science fiction. What now ought to be noted is that estrangement finds its true vocation only in the context of an alienated society: for Ernst Bloch, estrangement is 'the

[117] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 86.
[118] Ewa Mazierska and Alfredo Suppia, 'Introduction: Marxism and Science Fiction Cinema', in *Red Alert: Marxist Approaches to Science-Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Ewa Mazierska and Alfredo Suppia (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), pp. 1-24.

shortest route away from alienation and to self-confrontation'.[119] Science fiction hence takes as its point of departure the same extrinsic situation—the capitalist mode of production, the preponderance of alienation, the 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' of the commodity-form—as does Marx in his critique of political economy.

Yet I would suggest that we can specify the social function of science fiction *film* in particular by defining its context, not just as capitalism as such, but as what Guy Debord calls the society of the spectacle. For Debord, the spectacle properly begins in the 1920s, when human society has become so atomised and reified that images begin to serve as our primary means of social interrelation.[120] The spectacle in Debord's expansive sense is not identical with mass media, then—the latter is only the spectacle's 'most glaring superficial manifestation'[121]—but refers more broadly to the progressive alienation of humanity. In fact, 'the spectacle's social function is the concrete manufacture of alienation' itself, according to Debord.[122] This shift from Suvin to Debord allows us, as a first step, to translate the former's definition of science fiction into the latter's conceptual milieu: if estrangement is a response to alienation, science-fiction films may be said to open up or revolutionise the spectacle from within. They form a part of mass culture, and thus part of the spectacle, but equally seek to generate an active oppositional site within it.

It is possible to be more precise than this, however, and to show in more detail how and why science fiction responds to the spectacle. Debord's work on temporality points the way forward here. Taking a grand historical view, Debord suggests that nomadic populations lived a kind of 'cyclical time' in which the 'periodic return to similar places […] becomes the pure return of time in the same place, the repetition of a sequence of activities'.[123] Cyclical time reaches its apex with the agricultural mode of production, 'governed by the rhythm of the seasons'. The succeeding form of time, 'irreversible time', originates with the rise of

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[119] Bloch writes this in an article on Brecht's use of 'alienation' and 'estrangement', which Suvin co-translates and from which he explicitly draws: '*Entfremdung*, *Verfremdung*: Alienation, Estrangement', trans. by Anne Halley and Darko Suvin, *The Drama Review*, 15.1 (1970), 120-5 (p. 125).

[120] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 4. The spectacle moves quickly, he writes, 'for in 1967 it had barely forty years behind it; though it had used them to the full' (*Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (Verso: London, 1990), p. 3).

[121] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 24.

[122] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 32. See also: 'The fetishism of the commodity—the domination of society by "intangible as well as tangible things"—attains its ultimate fulfilment in the spectacle, where the real world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of history' (*Society of the Spectacle*, para. 36).

[123] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 127.

political power, where history begins to take on a specific momentum and direction. Initially irreversible time belongs only to the powerful; it is they who first experience time as a chronicled succession of events.[124] It begins to undermine cyclical time more broadly in the Middle Ages, when an 'element of irreversible time is recognised in the successive stages of each individual's life',[125] and reaches its climax in the 'historical time' of bourgeois society. Now the workers, not the rulers, are the ones who transform conditions and propel history (the bourgeoisie makes 'the progress of labour the measure of its own progress').[126] At last, cyclical time gives way to the relentless onward march of capitalism. 'All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify', as Marx and Engels put it.[127] The experience of time is standardised with capitalism's expansion across the world: 'This unified irreversible time belongs to the *global market*, and thus also to the global spectacle.'[128]

Yet if capitalism democratises the experience of history, and of irreversible time, it also produces a conflicting temporality: what Debord calls 'pseudo-cyclical' time. Crucially for us, this second temporality begins with enclosure: 'In order to force the workers into the status of "free" producers and consumers of commodified time, it was first necessary to *violently expropriate their time*. The imposition of the new spectacular form of time became possible only after this initial dispossession of the producers.'[129] The concept of pseudo-cyclical time denotes, in part, the reinvention of natural rhythms of cyclical time proper as day and night, work and free time, and the recurrence of holidays.[130] It divides irreversible

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[124] 'But this history develops and perishes separately, leaving the underlying society unchanged, because it remains separated from the common reality. […] As the masters played the role of mythically guaranteeing the permanence of cyclical time (as in the seasonal rites performed by the Chinese emperors), they themselves achieved a relative liberation from cyclical time' (Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 132).

[125] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 137.

[126] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 140.

[127] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. by Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 223.

[128] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 145.

[129] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 159.

[130] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 150. Jameson observes the intensification of these pseudo-rhythms in postmodernity: 'What then dawns is the realization that no society has ever been so standardized as this one, and that the stream of human, social, and historical temporality has never flowed quite so homogeneously. Even the great boredom and ennui of classical modernism required some vantage point or fantasy subject position outside of the system; yet our seasons are of the post-natural and postastronomical television or media variety, triumphantly artificial by way of the power of their National Geographic or Weather Channel images: so that their great rotations—in sports, new model cars, fashion,

time into units, which may then be filled by individual commodities and acts of consumption. Certain commodities depend on this parcelisation of time—they are produced to occupy definite parts in the day—a process that reaches its apotheosis in the service industry, where, as Debord notes, 'everything's included', from holiday resorts to meetings with celebrities, for a fixed period.[131] Pseudo-cyclical time thus works counter to the linearity of irreversible time. It suppresses the radical, transformative potential implicit in the notion of history by dividing and subdividing it, turning irreversibility into the recurrence of so many empty pseudo-events.[132] The spectacle represents, in the end, 'a *false consciousness of time*'.[133]

My contention here is that science fiction's social purpose is comprehensible only in this context—only in terms of the contradiction between irreversible and pseudo-cyclical time. As we have seen, science fiction functions by taking what Suvin calls 'future-bearing elements from the empirical environment' and drawing them out.[134] It turns the clock forward, depicting a future that, however dystopian or horrific, logically extrapolates from the core elements of the present. So it is that science fiction thematises irreversible time itself: its extrapolations serve to remind us that epochal change remains possible, that history persists beneath the various pseudo-rhythms of spectacular cyclical time. Such a transformation need not be presented as good. What matters is only that, in works of science fiction, we once again become conscious of ourselves as agents and subjects of history. Jameson puts it thus: science fiction's 'multiple mock futures serve the […] function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come'.[135] Extrapolation is therefore the first means by which science fiction responds to the ascendency of pseudo-cyclical time.

The relevance of the special effect to the science-fiction film must now be understood in this context, as the complementary operation: it makes us conscious of the second temporality, pseudo-cyclical time. We have seen Freedman's claim that the special effect draws attention to the means of representation, to the various technologies required to create

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television, the school year or *rentrée*, etc.—simulate formerly natural rhythms for commercial convenience and reinvent such archaic categories as the week, the month, the year imperceptibly, without any of the freshness and violence of, say, the innovations of the French revolutionary calendar' (*The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 17).

[131] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 152.

[132] '[T]he pseudo-cyclical consumption of developed economies contradicts the abstract irreversible time implicit in their system of production' (Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 155).

[133] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 158.

[134] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 19-20.

[135] Fredric Jameson, 'Progress versus Utopia: Or, Can We Imagine the Future?', *Science Fiction Studies*, 9 (1982), 147-58 (p. 152).

that effect, as though the cinematic apparatus were itself a product of the speculative imagination. But I want to offer an alternative view, according to which the special effect replaces our attention to plot, character, themes, ideology, and so on—the other components of a narrative film—not so much with a recognition of filmic technology as with a sense of *visuality itself*, of the visual in its own right. The ultimate focus of the special effect is not cinematic technology, but the apparatus of human perception. *2001*'s special effects support this interpretation at least as well as they support Freedman's. In the famous Star Gate sequence—where David Bowman (Keir Dullea), having been ejected from Discovery One, plunges into a vortex—we oscillate between two shots: one of Bowman's face and eyes, one of what he sees. In these latter shots, brilliant streams of light and weird shapes seem to evoke a sense of dimension, depth, and form without content. They express space as pure space, as a void, the lights remaining abstract and amorphous, never settling into something that could be identified as an object. These shots strive to imagine vision stripped of its object, vision as merely an activity of the subject. It is not enough to show Bowman's eye, since the eye is itself too much an object. The Star Gate sequence imagines some primordial meeting of space and light, the raw materials of vision interacting before they crystallise into an object.

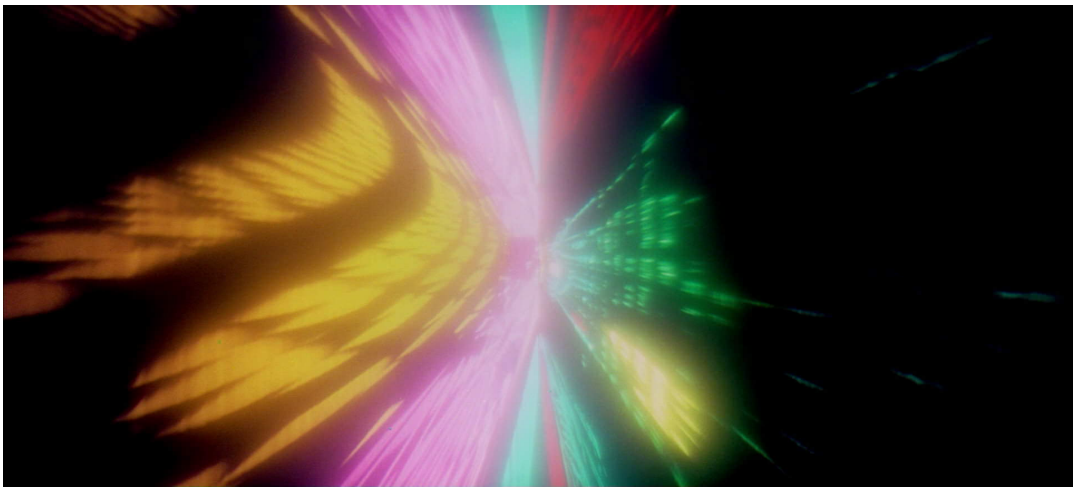

Figure 1: Extrapolation or special effect?

The crucial point is that this focus on vision comes at the expense of the film's temporal flow; the special effect prioritises the spatial quality of the cinema over its narrative quality.

Or, to put that back in Debordian terms, it places its emphasis on the image, the raw material of the spectacle, and reduces time to space thereby. It is as though irreversible time is chopped up, parcelised: as Debord puts it, pseudo-cyclical time 'manifests itself as a succession of pseudo-individualized moments'.[136] The extrapolative aspect of the science-fiction narrative is therefore briefly eclipsed in the astonishment of the special effect (the Star Gate sequence, in our example, substitutes the fascination with shape, form, and space for the temporal aspects of Bowman's travel). The metacinematic attention that the special effect directs towards the image itself turns out to be a means of isolating pseudo-cyclical time, of showing it in its contradiction with the irreversible temporality of narrative. Extrapolation stresses the persistence of history, but the special effect enacts the division of time into discrete, repeating units, akin to so many individual cinematic frames. It thematises that division. Extrapolation and special effect are therefore to be understood as the twin blades of the science-fiction film, slicing through the spectacle.

Now that we have established the underlying connection between the spectacle and science fiction, we can be more precise still, and examine how that relationship is articulated in the 1980s. To do so, we have to attend to the specific situation of its social and economic base. For Debord, the spectacle is now at its apex: it attains its highest development in the 1970s, when it engulfs reality entirely and ceases to have an exterior (Debord calls this the 'integrated spectacle').[137] 'The spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life,' he suggests. 'Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity.'[138] Jameson's analysis of postmodernism, we should note, equally designates as the former's economic basis 'a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas'.[139] Jameson and Debord see the social world of the 1980s as one of total closure and reification, where the

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[136] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 149. The spatialisation or segmentation of time that Debord implicitly associates with pseudo-cyclical time was first observed by Lukács in his essay on reification: '[capitalism] reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space' (*History and Class Consciousness*, p. 89).

[137] Debord also distinguishes between different forms of the spectacle: the 'concentrated spectacle' (associated with bureaucratic capitalism and its autocrats, such as Stalin and Hitler), the 'diffuse spectacle' (which resembles the Fordist incarnation of capitalism in the United States), and the 'integrated spectacle' (combining both concentrated and diffuse, and representing the total integration of reality into the spectacle) (*Comments*, pp. 8-9). Our context is then not just the society of the spectacle, but the society of the *integrated* spectacle, the point where no reference to reality outside or beyond the spectacle is possible.

[138] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 42.

[139] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 36.

commodity has stamped its form on all aspects of life. Yet what they both omit to mention is *how* commodification might have come to reach this maximal point. In Jameson's and Debord's works—as well as in Lukács's seminal essay on reification, which heavily influences both—commodification seems to proceed all by itself, as though its completion were simply capitalism's *telos*, with no countervailing forces at work.[140]

This image of late capitalism or of the integrated spectacle as a world of increasingly complete commodification has not gone unchallenged. As Nancy Fraser argues, capitalism requires certain background conditions that remain outside the sphere of commodity production. In this Fraser includes, among other things, the work of social reproduction or caregiving and nature's life-supporting and self-renewing capabilities.[141] Where commodification exists, 'it depends for its very existence on zones of non-commodification. Social, ecological and political, these non-commodified zones do not simply mirror the commodity logic, but embody distinctive normative and ontological grammars of their own'.[142] Hence Fraser sets herself against Lukács's nightmarish vision of total reification.[143] Harvey similarly argues that 'capitalism necessarily and always creates its own "other"'.[144] When that 'other' vanishes—whether it be a relative surplus population, noncapitalist markets, or uncommodified zones—capitalism will no longer find the means to still its inner contradictions. It is just such an exterior that capitalism requires at moments of economic

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[140] Debord suggests that each individual commodity 'fights for itself', that it 'avoids acknowledging the others and strives to impose itself everywhere as if it were the only one in existence. […] In this blind struggle each commodity, by pursuing its own passion, unconsciously generates something beyond itself: the globalisation of the commodity (which also amounts to the commodification of the globe). Thus, as a result of the *cunning of the commodity*, while each *particular* manifestation of the commodity eventually falls in battle, the general commodity-form continues onward toward its absolute realization' (*Society of the Spectacle*, para. 66). While this is a very suggestive paragraph, the underlying motivation for each commodity's struggle for primacy ('cunning'? 'passion'?) remains enigmatic. As for Lukács, we learn only that the expansion of the commodity-form develops in a bootstrapping fashion with the abstraction of labour (*History and Class Consciousness*, p. 87).

[141] Fraser, 'Behind Marx's Hidden Abode', pp. 60-6.

[142] Fraser, 'Behind Marx's Hidden Abode', p. 66.

[143] Fraser's essay seeks to argue that capitalism is not so much an economic process as 'an institutionalized social order on a par with, say, feudalism' ('Behind Marx's Hidden Abode', p. 67), and thus that our conception of capitalism should be expanded. The irony of her criticism of Lukács is then that his own work on reification is also explicitly an effort to show how commodification impacts all zones and levels of social reality in capitalism, hence that this latter cannot be construed as merely a form of economic organisation. As Lukács puts it himself, 'the problem of commodities must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects' (*History and Class Consciousness*, p. 89). While Lukács is Fraser's explicit antagonist, he is also her implicit ally.

[144] Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 141.

crisis, when, as we have seen, it deploys enclosure to create new opportunities for investment. Commodification proceeds not merely through capital's self-expansion, through the separation intrinsic to the labour process, but also through a kind of auxiliary separation: what we have been calling the new enclosures.

We are finally poised to specify the infrastructural object and *modus operandi* of the 1980s science-fiction film. We have seen that enclosure intensifies the dynamics of alienation already at work in capitalist society, that it separates people still further from their means of subsistence and production. Enclosure subordinates them both to the market and to the labour process—to what Debord identifies as the rhythms of pseudo-cyclical time. It is therefore to be expected that the 1980s science-fiction film will take an increasingly enclosed society as one of its core preoccupations. Because science fiction emerges within and responds to the spectacle, these films cannot fail to register the quickened beat of commodification. Indeed, they do not merely depict our spectacular society: they seek to estrange us from it. They blow up and extrapolate the enclosures of their own time (of public space, airwaves, housing, forests, ideas) into images of interplanetary extraction (*Alien*), a burgeoning city (*Blade Runner*), pirate broadcasting (*Videodrome*), mass privatisation (*RoboCop*), and a totally commodified Mars (*Total Recall*).

Our engagement with Debord has allowed us to locate the two main operations of the science-fiction film: first, extrapolation, which asserts the persistence of history and of irreversible time beneath the spectacle; and second, the special effect, which draws our attention to the pseudo-events of pseudo-cyclical time. Now, having clarified the nature of the science-fiction film itself, we can proceed to consider the relationship between science fiction—which forms a dominant strain in the films under consideration here—and the other, subordinate generic codes that they incorporate, including horror, action, and noir. My suggestion in the next section is that science fiction actually exceeds the model of hybridity usually associated with the contemporary Hollywood film—that it is in fact *doubly* hybrid, marked by generic alterity in its very structure.

1.3.3 Hybridity and Sedimentation

In his commentary on Suvin's work, Freedman suggests that the principle of cognitive estrangement leads to a series of unhappy generic discriminations: Suvin's definition '[denies] the title of science fiction to most of the pulp tradition while granting it to works

produced very far from the influence of the latter'.[145] Freedman tries to solve the problem by noting that, because cognition and estrangement are properties of all literary artefacts, what matters is that they are 'dominant' generic tendencies in science fiction. Whether this kind of criticism of a generic definition—that it fails to embrace a pre-given corpus of texts—is valid in the first place is one question (is the definition too narrow, we might ask, or is our corpus actually too broad?). But the manoeuvre is somewhat redundant here in any case, as Suvin already makes the same qualification: 'SF is distinguished by the narrative *dominance or hegemony* of a fictional "novum" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic.'[146]

Thus, as Freedman suggests, science fiction is present in many texts that we might not initially classify as such. And the converse is true: we often find the trace of many other genres in texts that are unequivocal science fiction. In fact, for Freedman, the pure science-fiction text cannot be written. Because science fiction is oriented towards the future, he reasons, it serves as a privileged vehicle for the utopian vision. The utopias of More and Morris are precursors to science fiction, which can only come into being with the full-blown development of capitalism, on the one hand, and the emergence of the novel, on the other.[147] Yet if science fiction is therefore the culmination of utopia, it suffers from the same paradox as this latter:

> A purely science-fictional text would not only estrange our empirical environment absolutely but would do so in such a perfectly cognitive fashion that the utopian alternative to actuality would not merely be suggested but delineated in complete and precise detail. The project of composing such a text is thus impossible not only in the sense that no asymptote can ever be actually attained (as in the case of the purely realistic text), but also in the sense that such a project is inherently self-contradictory […] For the perfected knowledge of utopia required to compose a purely science-fictional text could only be obtained by the kind of residence *in* utopia that would leave one without a nonutopian actuality to be estranged.[148]

In Freedman's view, one cannot produce a perfect utopia while living in a society where such a utopia would be estranging or unfamiliar. The ideal science-fiction text must itself remain utopian, unrealisable.

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[145] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 19.
[146] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 79 (emphasis mine).
[147] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, pp. 80-3.
[148] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 72.

Freedman's argument here is more radical than the thesis, widely recognised in film studies, that texts tend to be multiply generic or hybrid.[149] Freedman is suggesting that science fiction is *necessarily* hybrid, that the perfect novum or estrangement by nature cannot exist. It will of course have been noted that this argument—which pertains, more or less explicitly, to science fiction as a literary form, hence its valorisation of the novel—echoes, indeed repeats, Freedman's earlier suggestion that the science-fiction *film* in particular cannot exist, albeit for different reasons. Freedman's claim that science fiction and utopia reach their apotheosis in the novel reaffirms that earlier position and consigns the science-fiction film to a double impossibility. Yet one unobserved advantage of Suvin's definition of science fiction is that neither of its constituent terms is medium-specific. As we have already seen, 'cognition' refers to the scientific and dialectical approach, and 'estrangement' refers to the effects of that approach. The definition therefore carefully sidesteps the question of qualitative differences between media. Suvin's own description of science fiction as the 'literature' of cognitive estrangement seems, on this basis, somewhat arbitrary.

We shall return to the question of medium specificity shortly. In the meantime, we ought to note that Suvin remains an indispensable source for thinking about the science-fiction film's hybridity (whether such hybridity is necessary or not), for it turns out that the standards of cognition and estrangement can be used to distinguish a number of genres. For Suvin, cognition is not the only means of creating estrangement, and not all cognitive works of art are estranging. Hence, while I have designated the two as approach and effect, theirs is not a strong causal relationship; cognition is not sufficient for estrangement. Suvin proceeds to fill in his grid thus: non-cognitive and non-estranging texts are the 'sub-literature of realism'; cognitive and non-estranging texts are properly realist; non-cognitive and estranged texts are 'metaphysical' genres such as myth, folktale, and fantasy; and the cognitive and estranging genres are science fiction and the pastoral.[150] The implication of Suvin's grid for the notion of hybridity is that the coexistence of two genres cannot usually be seen as passive or non-antagonistic. If fantasy and science fiction are said to coincide in a single text, then, in

[149] As Steve Neale puts it, 'many Hollywood films—and many Hollywood genres—are hybrid and multi-generic. This is as true of the feature film as it is of an obvious hybrid like musical comedy' (*Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 51). Neale also suggests that critics have tended to overstate the relationship between hybridity and the New Hollywood system (*Genre and Hollywood*, pp. 248-51). On the other hand, Rick Altman notes that Hollywood tends to promote its films as multiply generic, while critics have an interest in reducing such multiplicity (*Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 123-43).

[150] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 33.

a sense, the text is neither fantasy nor science fiction—too cognitive for the first, not cognitive enough for the second.[151]

Perhaps the genre most frequently combined, or confused, with the science fiction film is the horror film. Though Sobchack acknowledges that the two frequently overlap, she locates the principle of their differentiation in the nature of each genre's monster. Thus, where the monster of the horror film has interiority, and elicits our sympathy, the monster of the science-fiction film is totally depersonalised.[152] Sobchack's distinction has the merit, for our own purposes, of affirming *Alien*'s place within the science-fiction canon. Its creature is notable precisely because it has no scruples, no empathy, no morality; it has evolved simply to colonise and reproduce. On such a view, *Alien* is not even a limit case between horror and science fiction: its monstrosity is science fictional. That the alien is explicitly the product of the evolutionary process (the 'perfect organism', as the Nostromo's science officer, Ash (Ian Holm), puts it), that it seems to stand as an analogue for the indifference of evolution itself to the fate of any particular organism or species, makes this film a clear exemplar of Suvinian cognition, of a scientific estrangement. The metaphysical or ethical aspect of the horror film's monster—read by Sobchack as a manifestation of the beast within, of a dark side to humanity—is antagonistic to cognition in this sense.

The following chapters also engage with film noir, a genre less likely to be confused with science fiction, though the two are increasingly combined in the 1970s. This is not the place to rehearse the interminable debates over the definition of noir, or the doubts about whether noir properly speaking exists at all.[153] What matters for us is only that the 1980s science-fiction film finds in noir (or our stereotype of it) valuable generic raw material to supplement its own explorations of alienation and enclosure. I shall argue that the noir paradigm in this sense serves *Blade Runner* and *Videodrome* particularly as a means of exploring the possibilities of movement in an enclosed city. This was already in part the theme of *Chinatown* (1974), where the hardboiled plot is a pretext for dramatising Jake Gitties's (Jack Nicholson's) transgressions of private space, such as the Oak Pass Reservoir.

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[151] It is for this reason that I find myself at odds with definitions such as Telotte's and Cornea's (noted above) that, drawing from Todorov, equate science fiction with the fantastic. What is missing from fantasy is precisely the cognitive approach distinctive to science fiction.

[152] Sobchack, *Screening Space*, pp. 30-8.

[153] For a seminal discussion of the genre, see Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1991). Neale summarises many of the critical disputes around noir in *Genre and Hollywood*, pp. 151-78. For essays on neo-noir in particular, see *Neo-Noir*, ed. by Mark Bould, Kathrina Glitre, and Greg Tuck (London: Wallflower Press, 2009).

The central trope of 'Chinatown', the secret at the heart of the narrative, revealed at the film's denouement, is itself the secret of the city's surplus population, subsequently reimagined in *Blade Runner*. *Taxi Driver* (1976) is another important precedent in this regard, as Travis Bickle's (Robert De Niro's) motorised flânerie permits a virtual itemisation of the different spaces of the city: the office, the cinema, the street, the flat, and so on.

Yvonne Tasker has meanwhile noted the hybridity of the action film, which became established as a genre in its own right only with the development of the blockbuster and the 'New Hollywood' paradigm (an industrial shift that affected science fiction, too, as we shall see).[154] Though the action film therefore manifests itself in different guises, leaving its trace in many other genres (the Western, the crime thriller, and horror, to name just a few), Tasker does identify a number of typical, if not necessary, elements: 'the hero's ability to use his/her body in overcoming enemies or obstacles', as well as 'physical conflicts or challenge, whether battling human or alien opponents or even hostile natural environments'.[155] The action film is closely intertwined with a number of other forms, then, but there may be reason to suggest that it has a special kinship with the science-fiction film. As Barry Keith Grant has suggested, '[b]ecause of the science fiction film's emphasis on special effects, the genre's primary appeal has been the kinetic excitement of action'.[156] This all being said, our primary interest in the action film will come in our discussion of *Total Recall*, which employs the conventions of the action film (and its iconography: Schwarzenegger's body) in order to parody them, science fiction turning against the genre with which it is so often combined.[157]

These abovementioned genres will be seen to coexist to a greater or lesser degree with the science-fiction film in the following chapters. But there remains one further point to be made about hybridity here; I want to stress a second sense in which it operates in works of science fiction (and perhaps in other genres too). Jameson suggests that genre ought to be imagined as a form of 'sedimentation', as a layering of older generic codes, which are reworked and reappropriated in the present for new ends.[158] Old forms may be taken up anew, their seemingly defunct structures reactivated for novel purposes, such that the older ideological contents of the genre carry into the present. Jameson's primary example is the

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[154] Yvonne Tasker, *The Hollywood Action and Adventure Film* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 2.
[155] Tasker, *The Hollywood Action and Adventure Film*, p. 3.
[156] Grant, p. 20.
[157] The irony here is that, as Tasker notes, 'self-reflexivity has for decades been an important element in a genre [the action film] that routinely recycles its own history, drawing on the conventions of other genres from horror to imperial adventure' (*The Hollywood Action and Adventure Film*, p. 9.)
[158] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 126-8.

romance paradigm, which begins as a means of exploring the conflict between good and evil, develops in the eighteenth century to take non-magical contents (theology, psychology, and the dramatic metaphor, according to Jameson), and is finally refashioned in our own time to express the absence of the sacred.[159] It is on this basis—on the view that genres are always sedimented, archaic forms and ideologies buried within themselves—that, as Jameson puts it, 'genre theory must always in one way or another project a model of the coexistence or tension between several generic modes or strands'.[160]

The theory of sedimentation has particular relevance to us because, in a separate essay, and without saying so explicitly, Jameson appears to apply this model to the development of science fiction—which, in his view, begins properly with Jules Verne and H. G. Wells in the late nineteenth century:

> The moment of Flaubert, which Lukács saw as the beginning of this process [the loss of a sense of historicity], and the moment in which the historical novel as a genre ceases to be functional, is also the moment of Jules Verne. We are therefore entitled to complete Lukács' account of the historical novel with the counter-panel of its opposite number, the emergence of the new genre of SF as a form which now registers some nascent sense of the future, and does so in the space on which a sense of the past had once been inscribed.[161]

This is the basis of Jameson's argument that, because we have lost a sense of history, science fiction finds its utopian function in 'transforming our present into the determinate past of something yet to come'.[162] Science fiction is what becomes of the historical novel when we have lost the ability to think historically (or, to use Debord's terms, when pseudo-cyclical overwhelms irreversible time): it responds to the impossibility of that form by inverting it, by making our present analogous to its past. Paradoxical though it might sound, realism nestles at the heart of science fiction.

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[159] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 120-2.
[160] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 128.
[161] Jameson, 'Progress versus Utopia', p. 150. Of course, several different chronologies of science fiction exist. One could begin earlier, with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818), or earlier still, with More's *Utopia*, if you accept Suvin's suggestion that utopia is a subgenre of science fiction (a point we shall discuss in the next section). It ought to be noted at this stage that Jameson's account of realism draws heavily from Lukács's pioneering work, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1969).
[162] Jameson, 'Progress versus Utopia', p. 152.

But this argument raises once again the spectre of medium specificity, for if science fiction develops out of the historical novel, to what degree can the structure of the latter persist in the film medium? Can the form of Walter Scott's or Leo Tolstoy's fiction, say, really be embedded in 1980s Hollywood? I want to argue that this initial generic shift—from realism to science fiction—is only completed when science fiction itself emerges in cinematic form, as though the logic of the generic mutation required, even compelled, a correlative change in medium. We have seen that science fiction's characteristic estrangements respond to the reifying and alienating conditions of capitalism, which nullify our sense of history and conceal irreversible time beneath pseudo-cyclical time. We have also seen that, for Debord, the image becomes the dominant form of this alienation from around 1920. It follows that, film being a visual medium, science-fiction cinema is best able to respond to the spectacular image—best positioned to open it up from within (in a kind of Situationist *détournement*) and make us conscious of the pseudo-cyclical time that the image instantiates.[163] To the strategy of extrapolation, available to science fiction in all media, the film adds the potentiality of the special effect, which thematises the act of seeing itself. This is why the shift from the historical novel to science fiction reaches its fulfilment in the cinema: the genre had to become cinematic to realise its *raison d'être*, the critique of the spectacle. I posited earlier that Suvin's criteria of cognition and estrangement give us no reason to define science fiction as the literature of cognitive estrangement, but now we can go further. Insofar as science fiction responds to alienation, and that alienation reaches its own apex in the spectacular image, the dual aspects of cognition and estrangement are themselves privileged in the medium of film—specifically, in the special effect.[164]

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[163] On *détournement* (which translates into English as 'rerouting'), see Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, paras 206-9; and Guy Debord and Gil J. Wilson, 'A User's Guide to Détournement' (1956) <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/usersguide.html> [accessed 14 June 2018].

[164] If critics have missed this vocation of special effects, it is because of their tendency to posit technology as the ultimate concern of science fiction. Thus, as Telotte puts it, 'the genre to a degree almost inevitably seems to be *about* the movies precisely because of the ways in which its reliance on special effects implicates both the technology of film and the typical concern of most popular narratives with achieving a transparent realism' (*Science Fiction Film*, p. 25). For a Marxist, however, the question of technology cannot be posed in this ahistorical manner—that is, without consideration of what, at a given moment, drives technological development. In our own time (indeed, in the entire period in which science fiction has been produced, from Wells down to the present), this primary motive force is capital accumulation. If science fiction appears to fixate on technology in particular, this is only because, in capitalism, machines are the most direct instantiation of the alienation that permeates our social world. The machine is dead labour—congealed alien labour—confronting living labour in its most immediate form.

Hence we can speak of science fiction as being doubly hybrid: first, in the sense that it is often (perhaps necessarily) combined with other genres (particularly horror, the action film, and noir); second, in the sense that it carries within itself the structure of the historical novel, inverted to the degree that it finds itself at home in a whole new medium: film. If, meanwhile, I have given surprisingly little attention to the relationship between science fiction and utopia, this is partly because I do not see utopia as a genre, or at least as a genre in the sense that horror, noir, the musical, and the western, say, are genres. But it is also because the question of utopia returns us, even more directly, to the core issue of this project: the relationship between enclosure and cultural form. Specifically, I shall argue, utopias are by nature anti-enclosure; they were formed in the crucible of the English enclosures of the sixteenth century and remain comprehensible only in the context of renewed pressures to enclose.

Before turning to utopia, however, it is necessary to provide an overview of the production context of the 1980s Hollywood science-fiction film. I suggest that the growing distinction between Hollywood blockbusters and independent films in that decade is displaced or externalised into Cronenberg's, Scott's, and Verhoeven's own foreignness to Hollywood, such that their films cannot be seen as totally or unproblematically internal to the Hollywood system. My discussion of utopia—the ultimate source of these films' foreignness—ensues, and then the introduction concludes with an overview of the following chapters. These will argue at the level of close textual analysis that the 1980s science-fiction film is deeply concerned with the new enclosures.

1.4 The 1980s Hollywood Science-Fiction Film

1.4.1 Science Fiction in Hollywood

Georges Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) often serves as the *terminus a quo* for histories of the Hollywood science-fiction film. Though Méliès's film (which narrates the eventful journey of a group of astronomers to the moon and back) also foregrounds elements of the fantastic and the horrific, his special effects and use of spatio-temporal displacement generate, in miniature, the general formula of the science-fiction film. The 1930s saw the

production of hybrid science-fiction-horror films, such as *Just Imagine* (1930), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *The Invisible Ray* (1936). It was the task of these films to express both the interest in new scientific and technological developments (the so-called 'Machine Age') and the pessimism of the Depression.[165] The next wave of Hollywood science-fiction films came in the 1950s with the release of a huge number of disaster films, interpreted most famously by Susan Sontag as responses to nuclear anxieties and the threat of dehumanisation.[166] *The Thing* (1951), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) stand as some of the most emblematic films of the decade. But this is not to say that science fiction was absent from Hollywood in the intervening period: as J. P. Telotte notes, elements of the genre lingered in the serials of the 1930s and 1940s, most clearly in *Flash Gordon* (1936) and *Buck Rogers* (1939).[167]

The production of science-fiction films in Hollywood continued through the 1960s and 1970s, but the next event in the genre's development came in 1977 with the release of *Star Wars* and the emergence of the science-fiction blockbuster. As Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska argue, science fiction is well suited to the blockbuster, in part because it lends itself to the production of spectacle, in part because its content is easily repackaged as action figures, computer games, or theme park rides—crucial extra sources of revenue in the New Hollywood system.[168] This is one, strictly industrial explanation for the new wave of science-fiction films produced in Hollywood after *Star Wars*. But Freedman points out that another kind of science-fiction film, less reliant on special effects, also emerged in the 1980s: films 'that have been widely credited with a high level of artistic and conceptual complexity and that have been analyzed in terms comparable to those familiar in the study of the best literary science fiction'.[169] Freedman's chief examples of this second strand of science-fiction film are *Alien* and *Blade Runner*.

Yet the contradiction that we here observe internal to the science-fiction film was in fact a broader feature of Hollywood in the 1980s, a decade that gave rise both to the Hollywood

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[165] Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, p. 90. Though it is not a Hollywood film, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) also exerted a major influence on the future of Hollywood science fiction, as the sprawling cityscape of *Blade Runner* attests.

[166] Susan Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster', in *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 209-25.

[167] Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, pp. 90-4.

[168] Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace* (London: Wallflower, 2000), pp. 60-3.

[169] Freedman, 'Kubrick's *2001* and the Possibility of a Science-Fiction Cinema', pp. 301-2.

blockbuster and to the expansion of independent filmmaking.[170] In 1980, major studios released 134 films and others released only 57; in 1985, however, the majors released 138 films and independents released 251. Stephen Prince argues that 'the decade's most significant directors […] worked apart from the blockbusters': he picks out Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, David Lynch, Ridley Scott, and others in this respect.[171] The other key industrial development of the 1980s was the rise of home video. Though it was feared that video recordings would bring film theatres to the ground (an anxiety embodied in the malevolent videotapes of *Videodrome*), video in fact generated extra demand for film product. Thus, in a textbook example of the dialectical reversal, video boosted Hollywood production and propelled the construction of new theatres.[172]

However, the films I discuss here displace this antagonism (between the blockbuster and the independent film) onto a new level. For while they are not all independent works per se, they are marked by their directors' foreignness, hence by a certain distance from Hollywood. Verhoeven's turn to science fiction in *RoboCop* and *Total Recall* was, he claims, a way of compensating for his unfamiliarity: 'my lack of knowledge about [American] cultural mores, and other things, would not be perceptible to an audience, because the style was anyhow "futuristic", extremely "over-the-top", "stylised", which science fiction is of course to a large degree'.[173] Scott has likewise attested to the creative role of his foreignness in the American context.[174] It will be suggested that the difference between *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *RoboCop*, and *Total Recall* and Cronenberg's early work, including *Videodrome*, is that Canadian dollars funded the latter's production. Yet *Videodrome* also inhabits a peripheral space in the Hollywood system, since Cronenberg quite conspicuously employs American actors in the two major roles: James Woods as Max Renn and Debbie Harry as Nicki Brand.[175] Universal also distributed the film in the United States in 1983, where it grossed more than two billion

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[170] Stephen Prince, 'Introduction: Movies and the 1980s', in *American Cinema of the 1980s*, ed. by Stephen Prince (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 1-21 (pp. 1-8).
[171] Prince, p. 4.
[172] Prince, p. 4.
[173] Cornea, p. 135.
[174] Paul M. Sammon, *Ridley Scott: The Making of His Movies* (London: Orion, 1999), p. 101.
[175] Mark A. McCutcheon makes this point in 'The Medium is … the Monster?: Global Aftermathematics in Canadian Articulations of Frankenstein', in *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities: Ecocritical Perspectives on the New English Literatures*, ed. by Laurenz Volkmann and others (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 205-22 (p. 214).

dollars.[176] The irony is that, from the Canadian perspective, Cronenberg has been associated with Hollywood from the outset, hence the reclamations of Cronenberg as a distinctively Canadian filmmaker by various Canadian scholars.[177] In any case, to the argument that *Videodrome* is not a Hollywood film, I would respond that neither, really, are *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *RoboCop*, and *Total Recall*. They all hold some eccentric position vis-à-vis Hollywood—neither totally inside the system nor totally outside of it.

What matters for us, anyhow, is less the degree to which these films may be considered products of Hollywood, more that they were made in the context of the new enclosures. Yet this raises a practical problem, for is the primacy I accord to them not then arbitrary? Have I not argued that the new enclosures are pervasive, operative in both the Global North and South? Why choose these North American science-fiction films from the 1980s? First, as I have already suggested, science fiction is by nature attuned to alienation, to the expropriation of human time. We would therefore expect such works to register the return of enclosure. Second, my selection of films is polemical: if it is possible to show that critics have overlooked this context in their many analyses of *Blade Runner*, then they almost certainly will have in less widely studied texts, too.[178] Third, as the following chapters will show, these films all relate to or express the new enclosures in different ways: from the oblique and implicit (*Alien*) to the overt and explicit (*Total Recall*). Some depict really existing new enclosures (the ownership of the airwaves, in *Videodrome*, and the privatisation of public services, in *RoboCop*), while *Blade Runner* deals with enclosure merely as a narrative problem. Though similar, then, these films allow us to demonstrate the different kinds of relationship obtaining between text and context. Fourth, in my chronology, the 1980s is a crucial decade: the new enclosures have been in place for long enough that the films can

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[176] 'Videodrome', *Box Office Mojo* <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=videodrome.htm> [accessed 14 June 2018].

[177] See, for example, Gaile McGregor, 'Grounding the Countertext: David Cronenberg and the Ethnospecificity of Horror', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 2.1 (1992), 43-62. I discuss Cronenberg's Canadian context in more detail in Chapter 4. It is worth noting that *Videodrome* precedes by three years Cronenberg's release of *The Fly* (1986), usually considered his first Hollywood film. *Videodrome* may then be seen as the beginning of a moment of transition—one that also includes *The Dead Zone* (1983), adapted from a Stephen King novel—from the Canadian production context to the Hollywood one.

[178] Altman criticises genre theorists for this very manoeuvre: reducing the sheer mass and diversity of texts in a genre to a few pure cases (Altman, p. 24). But the practice of isolating a genre's most typical films serves the purpose of analytic efficiency. The features of such typical works, identified through close analysis, may be speculatively extrapolated to the rest of the field, in a way that many of the impure cases may not. Such is my aim here: to suggest, by my analysis of these particular science-fiction films, the *general* function of the Hollywood science-fiction film of the 1980s.

begin to recognise them as a transformative force, but not so long that the enclosures have come to seem unremarkable features of our society. These texts antedate capitalist realism, the total naturalisation of capitalist relations, in Fisher's specific sense of the term: 'In the 1980s, when Jameson first advanced his thesis about postmodernism, there were still, in name at least, political alternatives to capitalism. What we are dealing with now [in the twenty-first century], however, is a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility.'[179]

I have noted that these films develop out of the industrial conditions of Hollywood in the 1980s, which saw the expansion of independent filmmaking alongside the birth of the blockbuster. I have also argued that they lift this contradiction to a new level, insofar as they bear witness to a certain foreignness, an estrangement from the norms of American culture itself. Yet there remains one further twist in our examination of these films' national context, indeed of their socio-historical context in general: their relationship to the island that More named 'Utopia'. If these texts do indeed have some strange or estranging relationship to their context, it is because they are utopian. What this means, and how utopianism as such relates to the science-fiction film, form the object of the next, penultimate, section.

1.4.2 New Enclosures, New Utopias

Suvin's claim that 'utopia is not a genre but the *sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*' (albeit one that precedes science fiction proper) often serves critics as a point of departure for discussing the relationship between utopia and science fiction.[180] Yet Suvin's position seems more equivocal if one quotes the following sentence, only a few lines down the page: 'For all its adventure, romance, popularization, and wondrousness, SF can be written only between the utopian and anti-utopian horizons.' And the meaning of utopia expands further still when, shortly after, Suvin approvingly cites Bloch's view that utopia is 'a horizon within which humanity its irrevocably collocated'.[181] It seems as though, in the space of a page, and in

[179] Fisher, p. 7.
[180] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 76. Suvin also discusses utopia in 'Theses on Utopia 2001', in *Dark Horizons: Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. by Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 187-201, whose conclusions remain broadly consistent with *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.
[181] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 76-7.

spite of Suvin's insistence that utopia is primarily a verbal construct, utopia opens out from a minor subgenre, 'englobed' by science fiction, into a fundamental structuring axis of human experience. We find a similar ambivalence in Jameson's oeuvre on the question of utopia. For instance, in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), Jameson assents with Suvin's description of utopia as a subgenre of science fiction, but then adds that 'our discussion will be complicated by the existence, alongside the Utopian genre or text as such, of a Utopian impulse which infuses much else, in daily life as well as in its texts'.[182] And perhaps we detect the same hesitation in Freedman, for whom, as we have seen, utopia is a precursor to science fiction, thus a literary genre. However, Freedman's argument, quoted earlier, that the author of perfect science fiction would have to reside in utopia implicitly defines utopia in extra-textual terms as a mode of social organisation.

Scholars within the field of utopian studies itself have, however, challenged Suvin's construal of utopia as a literary subgenre. In a foundational statement on the matter of definition, Lyman Tower Sargent enumerates three kinds of utopia: utopian literature, communitarianism, and utopian social theory.[183] Hence, while Sargent generally accepts Suvin's understanding of utopia as a sort of estrangement, he rejects the view that utopias are only a subgenre of science fiction. Sargent also clarifies the useful distinction between utopia and utopianism: he defines the former as 'a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space' and the latter, quite simply, as 'social dreaming'.[184] Utopianism far exceeds the written utterance, though certainly utopian fiction bears witness to the existence of such dreaming. Finally, like Suvin, Sargent avoids using 'perfect' and 'perfection' in his definitions of utopia, partly because the authors of utopias very rarely actually believe them to be perfect, and partly because opponents of utopia often see the pursuit of perfection as dangerous.[185]

Ruth Levitas's equally fundamental work, *The Concept of Utopia* (1990), also offers an extra-literary definition of utopia: 'desire for a different, better way of being.'[186] For Levitas, utopia cannot be defined too narrowly in terms of its form, content, or function: such definitions are bound to be exclusionary, omitting either the variety of utopian forms, the

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[182] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso: London, 2005), p. xiv.
[183] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies*, 5.1 (1994), 1-37 (p. 4).
[184] Sargent, p. 9.
[185] Sargent, pp. 9-10.
[186] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 2nd edn (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 209.

range of utopian visions, or the many purposes to which such utopias are turned.[187] Levitas's rejection of formalism in particular is antithetical to Suvin's definition of utopia as a literary and a generic structure;[188] yet Levitas may not herself be spared such a charge, since 'desire' in her sense *is* a kind of form, an affective investment that can be applied to all different kinds of content. Levitas's willingness to include neoliberal and neoconservative utopias in the category of utopia proper—her own indifference, that is, to qualitative distinctions in content—betrays this latent formalism of her definition.[189] One cannot reject definitions in terms of both content and form, and given the choice, Levitas opts for form. If right-wing material is to be considered utopian, I shall argue shortly, this is because it represses—and therefore conceals within itself—something fundamentally antagonistic to its own conservative content.

The irony is that Suvin's definition, though explicitly concerned with genre, is actually more closely attuned to matters of content than is Levitas's. In Suvin's view, the world portrayed by utopian fiction is not merely 'better' or 'different', but *'radically different in respect of sociopolitical conditions* from the author's historical environment'.[190] For Suvin, implicitly, there is an important difference between a neoliberal utopia only superficially different from the present and a communist one that would require a 'radical' transformation. Indeed, it is only because of this radical difference—what Suvin also calls a 'novum', or narrative innovation—that utopias are estranging.[191] Crucial to the definition of utopia is a notion of change in kind, not merely in degree. And from the Marxist perspective offered

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[187] Levitas, pp. 207-9.

[188] Levitas also criticises Suvin for the functionalism of his definition, which links utopia to the production of estrangement (Levitas, p. 208).

[189] Levitas, pp. 215-19. Ultimately, I find myself at odds with Levitas's suggestion that the political question of what is utopian is different from the analytic (and implicitly apolitical) question of what scholars ought to consider utopian (Levitas, pp. 230-1). For instance, her own claim that neoconservative utopias promote change to the same extent that socialist utopias do effaces the core difference between the two: that socialism entails a change in kind, not merely in degree; that socialism must surpass capitalism, not work within it. That effacement is, of course, political. Political tendency cannot be so easily exorcised from the study of utopia.

[190] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 54-5.

[191] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 68. For a review of Suvin's concept of the novum, see Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 45-50. Moylan himself defines utopia as 'the socio-political drive that moves the human project for emancipation and fulfilment beyond the limits of the current system' (*Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, p. 65). The definition of utopia as a 'drive' echoes both Ernst Bloch's equally Freudian 'hope principle' (analogous to Freud's reality and pleasure principles; see Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 63, n. 29) and Levitas's 'desire'.

here, this can only mean a change in the mode of production, in the forms of social relationship that structure our world.

But we can be still more specific than Suvin, and his notion that utopia requires a radical difference. I want to suggest that utopianism is distinguished by the impulse to imagine a non-enclosed state of affairs, that utopianism is necessarily anti-enclosure.[192] My argument is genealogical: the state of Utopia in More's text (which gives us the first use of the word, punning on the Greek *eu-topos* ('good place') and *ou-topos* ('no place')) is founded on the negation of private property. We have already seen that Rafael criticises enclosure for its depopulation, but more relevant for the present discussion is his analysis of our resistance to utopian thinking:

> Now suppose I were to talk about the ideas that Plato advanced in his *Republic* or about the ones that the people of Utopia have put into practice in theirs. Commendable as these ideas may be (and indeed they are), they could seem outlandish, because in our society individuals possess private property, while there everything is held in common.[193]

Rafael proceeds to criticise societies based on private ownership of property:

> All this convinces me that there's no way that property can be distributed in a fair and just manner nor that people's happiness here on earth can be achieved, unless private property ownership has been abolished: for as long as it continues, a distressing and inescapable burden of poverty and toil will continue to afflict what's by far the greatest and worthiest segment of humanity.[194]

Placing Utopia firmly outside the nascent sphere of capitalism, Rafael concludes that this state is incompatible with money and generalised exchange (these themselves consequences of the division of property into individually-owned parcels).[195] The difference between

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[192] At times Suvin comes close to this view, for instance in his claim that utopia places on its head 'an already topsy-turvy or alienated world, which thus becomes dealienated or truly normal when measures not by ephemeral historical norms of a particular civilization but by "species-specific" human norms' (*Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 68-9). In this sentence we of course hear the echo of the concept of species-being, whose alienation (at least in Marx's early writing) manifests itself in the institution of private property.

[193] More, pp. 42-3.

[194] More, p. 45.

[195] More, p. 129.

Rafael and the young Marx concerns only the source of enclosure: pride for the former, alienation for the latter.[196]

Applying Jameson's theory of sedimentation to utopian literature, then, we ought to expect to find this central and original property of More's Utopia—anti-enclosure—embedded in all such utopian texts (if not also in utopian praxis, such as communitarianism, too). Even where the utopia appears to be right-wing or pro-capitalist, the ideology of More's material remains latent, ready to be reactivated at any moment. Of course, one such moment is our own, the 1980s, when the new enclosures penetrate deeper into our social world and prompt our return to a form originally fashioned in the context of separation and dispossession, in what Marx calls the 'blood and fire' of primitive accumulation.[197] This is the reason not only for the explosion of Hollywood science-fiction films in that decade, but for their commitment to a certain form of the utopian project.

But what, precisely, is this form? The utopianism of these science-fiction films is clearly not like More's; parallels between *Blade Runner*'s nightmarish metropolis and the peaceful island of Utopia will be found wanting. What survives in these films, I would suggest, are merely utopian impulses, anticipations of some unalienated world, rather than blueprints, full-blown images of the better place to come.[198] Utopia's founder digs a trench to separate his state from the others,[199] but the utopian content of these science fictions is woven into the dense, dystopian social fabric, and may only be extracted by means of slow critical scrutiny. For instance, it is only when we come to consider Scott's alien as symbolically ambivalent—as a symbol not only for capital, but for the resistance of the working class—that we finally encounter *Alien*'s utopianism. The utopianism of *Blade Runner* meanwhile manifests itself in the superficially dystopian figures of the blade runner (the state hunter) and the Replicant (a slave), whose goal-oriented activity contrasts with the waste and detritus preponderant in its city. The flânerie of Max Renn embodies a similar utopian impulse to Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) in this respect. I argue that *RoboCop* uses its machinic reverie as a utopian symbol, and that Quaid's (or Schwarzenegger's) hard body carries in its muscle and sinew the utopian content of *Total Recall*.

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[196] More, p. 130.

[197] Marx, *Capital*, I, 875.

[198] See, on the distinction between impulse and blueprint, Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 1-9.

[199] This act of separation is virtually requisite to the utopian programme. To give another example, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), the eponymous society becomes a utopia only when a mountain pathway, leading to the sea, is blocked by a volcanic explosion, isolating the survivors from the rest of humankind.

All this is to say that the *dystopia*—the image of a radically less perfect society[200]—becomes the dominant form of utopianism in the era of the new enclosures. If such enclosures respond, in part, to the utopian energies of the late 1960s (as Midnight Notes suggests), then dystopia is the utopians' own rejoinder. The purpose of the dystopia, at least in the films I consider here, is to act as a kind of negative or backdrop that makes the aforementioned utopian content more visible. In conditions where we have become more sceptical of the possibility of structural change, the dystopia allows us to articulate such radical changes at a much smaller level—the ability to stroll the city freely, say, or a hint of subjectivity in the apparatus of the robot—rather than as a new blueprint, a total image of a near-perfect society, because such small utopian acts stand out better against the dystopian background. Indeed, as Suvin argues, the novum or innovation characteristic of science fiction (and utopia) need not be a wholesale change in setting or time: one new 'gadget, technique, phenomenon, [or] relationship' can suffice.[201] Dystopia ought therefore to be understood as a strategy for smuggling utopian content into a text in a period in which anti-utopianism—itself caused by the new enclosures, quashing social struggle—once again becomes ascendant. Dystopia is a kind of anti-anti-utopia, a dialectical negation of the negation, continuing the utopian project by other means.[202]

Tom Moylan similarly sees the 'critical dystopian' literature of the 1980s (found paradigmatically in the work of Kim Stanley Robinson, Octavia Butler, and Marge Piercy) as a form of utopianism. 'Considered in terms of the continuum of utopian and anti-utopian pessimism,' Moylan suggests, '[the critical dystopias] tend to express an emancipatory, militant, critical utopian position.'[203] As such, these texts 'dialectically transcend even the moment of poststructuralist critique and identity-based micropolitics'.[204] In the context of Hollywood film, Constance Penley identifies James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) as a critical dystopia, 'inasmuch as it tends to suggest causes rather than merely reveal symptoms' (though, Penley adds, '*The Terminator* limits itself to solutions that are either individualist or

[200] Sargent's authoritative definition of dystopia is as follows: 'a non-existent society usually described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived' (Sargent, p. 9).
[201] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 80.
[202] Here I am drawing from Sargent's distinction between the anti-utopia, which criticises or challenges utopianism, and the dystopia, which is simply an alternative form of utopian expression (Sargent, p. 8).
[203] Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, p. 199.
[204] Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, p. 190.

bound to a romanticized notion of guerrilla-like small-group resistance').[205] Peter Fitting offers a similar suggestion why such films ought to be considered 'critical': they include 'an explanation of how the dystopian situation came about as much as what should be done about it'.[206] But he also suggests (implicitly against Penley) that *The Terminator* does not belong in this category: Cameron's film uses the dystopian future for its 'narrative advantages' rather than for socio-economic diagnosis.[207] Most importantly for us, the films I analyse in this thesis do indeed attend to the causes of our particular social malaise. They dramatise impasses in capital accumulation and register the presence of the new enclosures. Hence, in Fitting and Penley's sense, they fall under the ambit of the critical dystopia.

The final point to be made is that my argument here—that utopianism is organically linked to enclosure—is in fact requisite to what I have already posited about science-fiction—that it finds its *raison d'être* in the critique of an alien and a reified social world. Science fiction comes about when pseudo-cyclical time begins to contradict irreversible time, but as Debord himself notes, this is possible only when workers have lost control of their time, only when their life-process has been subordinated to the routines of work and consumption. The temporal contradiction at the heart of science fiction is therefore the corollary of enclosure, which strips people of their access to subsistence, throws them onto the labour market, and makes their survival contingent on the sale of their labour-power. 'Science fiction' is the name for the generic mutation that textual utopias undergo when the commodity becomes, in Lukács's words, 'the universal category of society as a whole'—when enclosure has proceeded far enough that we may be said to live in the capitalist mode of production.[208] One merit of this formulation is that it negates the hierarchy implicit in Suvin's definition of the literary utopia as a 'subgenre' of science fiction. We now see that science fiction is what the utopian text turns into when we reach a certain stage in the enclosure of humanity. Crucially, however, the original utopian structure lingers at the core of science fiction, hence why the science-fiction films of the 1980s were able to mobilise a particular utopian energy (albeit in the guise of dystopia) in the context of the new

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[205] Constance Penley, 'Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia', in *Alien Zone*, pp. 116-27 (p. 117).

[206] Peter Fitting, 'Unmasking the Real? Critique and Utopia in Recent SF Films', in *Dark Horizons*, pp. 155-66 (p. 156).

[207] Fitting, p. 156.

[208] This is not, of course, the same as saying that everything has become commodified: it merely names a point where the tendency to commodify becomes more dominant than contrastive tendencies, of the sort Fraser mentions in 'Behind Marx's Hidden Abode'.

enclosures. This framework can also account for the return of the literary utopia in the 1970s, when social unrest and economic crisis threatened the position of the commodity as the 'universal category', and when science fiction correspondingly peeled back to reveal the utopianism, the oppositional spirit latent in its core.

The arguments present in this and the preceding sections imply a historical narrative, which can now be summarised as follows. More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, is formed largely in response to enclosure and the emergence of capitalism; it establishes the originary link between dispossession and the utopian form. This form dovetails with the historical novel and turns into science fiction near the end of the nineteenth century in Bellamy's, Morris's, and Wells's texts, by which time the commodity has indeed become the structuring category of Western society. The early twentieth century sees the corollary development of the society of the spectacle—with the bureaucratic capitalism of Stalin and Hitler on the one hand, and the diffuse capitalism of the United States on the other—and thus the transfer of science fiction onto the silver screen, whence it is better able to criticise the spectacle. The social movements of the 1960s and the crisis of the 1970s reactivate the utopian potential always implicit in science fiction, so much so that we see the flourishing of a new era of what Moylan calls 'critical utopias'.[209] As the new enclosures begin to still capitalism's contradictions, preparing the ground for further accumulation, dystopia takes over as the primary outlet of utopian and science-fictional expression. Products of that context, the Hollywood science-fiction films of the 1980s form another stage in the long march of the utopian form towards utopia itself.

1.4.3 Chapter Outline

'Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle.'[210] Debord's remark, from the first chapter of *Society of the Spectacle*, announces the intimate relationship between material processes of expropriation and the alienated social forms to which they give rise, a proposition that will be clarified and confirmed in our discussions of *Alien*, *Blade Runner*,

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[209] See Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986). Against Moylan, for whom these developments in utopian form—increasing contingency and self-reflexivity—are positive, Levitas suggests that the critical utopias exhibit such traits because they are 'disillusioned and unconfident' (Levitas, p. 227).

[210] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 25.

Videodrome, *RoboCop*, and *Total Recall*. The following chapters examine the impression of enclosure on these films—the ways that the particular science-fiction films of my period depict or register the new enclosures—but also the films' active and utopian response to this heightened state of enclosure and reification. My readings of these texts will support, in closer detail, what I have argued at the level of theory in the preceding sections: that the basic vocation of science fiction is to turn against alienation—to revolutionise the spectacle—and that, as such, they will be attuned to the new forms of commodification and enclosure creeping into our social world since the 1970s, in the wake of the global crisis of overaccumulation.

But while my analysis hitherto is indebted to Jameson's and Debord's work (and thus, by one remove, to the original Lukácsian problematic of reification), a further caveat must be made. Though the following chapters sometimes invoke notions such as 'the society of the spectacle' or 'postmodernism' in the course of analysis, their focus on enclosure equally separates them from Jameson's and Debord's work.[211] 'Enclosure' is not a concept like the spectacle or postmodernism, which are grand periodising categories, entailing their own metanarratives, and which subsume under themselves a number of individual processes (for Debord: the ubiquity of the commodity-form, the primacy of the image, the emergence of irreversible and pseudo-cyclical time; for Jameson: the waning of affect, the replacement of parody by pastiche, the generalisation of schizophrenia and of the simulacrum, the absence of historicity).[212] While I have admittedly tried to use enclosure in an expanded sense, and while

[211] The other classic Marxist study of postmodernism is Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, published in 1990, around the same time as Jameson's *Postmodernism*. For an analysis of the currency of the concept of postmodernism, see Nathan Brown, 'Postmodernity, Not Yet: Toward a New Periodisation', *Radical Philosophy*, 2.1 (2018), 11-27. Jameson has defended his own use of the term—and made a case for its continued pertinence—in 'The Aesthetics of Singularity', *New Left Review*, 92 (2015), 101-32.

[212] I would like to make a similar point about another related concept: neoliberalism. As Harvey argues, the new enclosures of the commons may be seen as part of neoliberalism. Harvey's notion of 'accumulation by dispossession' is fashioned in precisely this context, through his critique of neoliberalism (see in particular *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 159-65). However, neoliberalism is not itself a concept like enclosure: for Wendy Brown, neoliberalism is a 'political rationality' that underlies the material acts of dispossession discussed here (*Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2016), pp. 115-21), while for Philip Mirowski, neoliberalism is best defined by its epistemological commitments ('Postface: Defining Neoliberalism', in *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, ed. by Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 417-55). Thus my analysis of the relationship between science fiction and enclosure would form only one part of a hypothetically much larger project on the cultural forms of neoliberalism. It cannot be identified with that project *in toto*.

the notion of 'new' enclosures unsettles traditional periodisations of capitalism, the concept itself does not seek to provide the same explanatory richness and breadth as the concepts of postmodernism or the spectacle do. As I have argued above, enclosure is contained *within* these frameworks as their unstated presupposition, since it is one of the major wellsprings of commodification. It is precisely because enclosure is related to, but not identical with, the spectacle and postmodernism that the following chapters may aspire both to complement and to complicate Debord's and Jameson's work.

I shall present my analyses of the primary texts in the order the texts themselves were released, since this reflects a gradual coming-to-consciousness of enclosure (judging indeed by the evidence of these films) in the course of the 1980s. In Chapter 2, for instance, I discern only traces of the new enclosures in the narrative, iconography, and themes of *Alien*. First, I note that the film's background, its interstellar sphere of circulation, attests to the existence of crises of overaccumulation, which have forced capital to move outwards, to colonise the universe, in order to still its contradictions. While the Nostromo's property relations are not unambiguously capitalist (the workers earn shares, for instance), it is clear that the social relations associated with capitalism do indeed persist in this fictional universe. The alien's entry to the spacecraft seems to change that (the formal division of labour, for instance, breaks down), but it turns out that the alien is itself a symbol of capital *qua* enclosing, colonising force. The film's depiction of a kind of survival instinct, and its apparent interest in natural selection, must therefore equally be treated as symbols: the evolutionary process—decentring humanity in the natural world—evokes capital's indifference to human life, the domination of living labour by dead labour. Hence, while *Alien* does not depict any actually existing instances of enclosure, it belongs to a context where the capital-relation begins to be felt in new and as-yet uncommodified zones of our social world. The film is an allegory of that process.

Chapter 3 considers Scott's next film, *Blade Runner*, in which enclosure is more clearly on the agenda: witness, for example, the city's overstuffed parcels of land, whose finitude is expressed in the film's retrofitted architecture. Yet *Blade Runner* still approaches enclosure as a narrative problem, rather than as an external referent: the film examines, on a metacinematic level, what kinds of narrative are possible when a character's movement through space is restricted. The film distinguishes between 'little people'—whose lives are so repetitious, whose movement is so confined, that they cannot be used as the subjects of narrative—and 'cops'—who *can* be used as subjects, for the same reason. In turn, this helps us understand the reason for *Blade Runner*'s incorporation of noir tropes, which is not to be

dismissed or stigmatised as mere pastiche. Rather, noir comes readymade to us as a generic paradigm dealing with the problems of movement through the city, because the noir hero is itinerant, a stroller. It is precisely by invoking noir that *Blade Runner* cues us to the problems of mobility dramatised in its representational space.

Chapter 4 turns to Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, a film usually read through its relationship to mass media (especially television), on the one hand, and body horror, on the other. My analysis makes a double revision. It begins by restoring *Videodrome* in the context of the enclosure of the Canadian electromagnetic spectrum in the mid- to late twentieth century. It then proceeds to argue that, while *Videodrome* invokes a McLuhanite understanding of media, the television set also functions symbolically as a form of alienation. *Videodrome*'s society is close indeed to Debord's society of the spectacle, and it ought to be analysed in that light. Finally, the chapter notes the film's paradoxical use of melodrama: that its most emotionally-charged moments alienate us from the moral occult, rather than connect us to it. It is by such means that *Videodrome* dramatises the profanation of all that is holy (to paraphrase Marx) in the desacralised spaces of capitalism and the spectacle. Cronenberg's film makes us aware of the increasing unavailability of those other values as the economic value-form lodges itself in new areas of our social world.

RoboCop is the object of Chapter 5, and it offers us, perhaps more clearly that the films already discussed, an agent of enclosure: Omni Consumer Products (or 'OCP'), a giant corporation that is seeking contracts for many of Detroit's public industries. My argument here is that much of the humour and conflict in *RoboCop* derives from category errors brought about by enclosure. With OCP's privatisation of the police force, for instance, the police officers must begin to contemplate whether they are like other labourers, and hence can strike, or whether they stand apart from labour as such. Similarly, it is unclear whether RoboCop is a product, a machine, or a labourer: the drama of the film consists in his slippage between these different positions. I also argue that *RoboCop* contains a utopian moment: RoboCop's dream, when human subjectivity irrupts into the robotic apparatus. This irruption challenges OCP's control over RoboCop, and it prompts us to question the degree to which capital can discipline the labour force on which it relies. Thus, I suggest, *RoboCop* articulates a kind of rudimentary autonomism. Like Midnight Notes, but also like Hardt and Negri, it sees resistance as an essential property of the subject, whom RoboCop somewhat paradoxically comes to symbolise.

Chapter 6 looks at *Total Recall*, which offers us the most explicit treatment of enclosure. Mars serves the film as a kind of laboratory situation in which the enclosure of everything,

even air, is possible. Though the narrative is ostensibly about Douglas Quaid's effort to find his true identity and overthrow Vilos Cohaagen (Ronny Cox), this task requires the de-privatisation of the planet's air supply. Additionally, *Total Recall*'s conflict turns on the distinction between two kinds of body: the hard body of Quaid (and Schwarzenegger) and the soft bodies of the mutants. On the one hand, we have a body that remains the same across different contexts, that seems to exist in an ideal state beyond its material situation. On the other, we have a group of bodies that are marked by their contexts, their mutations evidence of their entrapment in Venusville. These mutants, I suggest, form a kind of 'surplus population' (much like the 'little people' of *Blade Runner*): a group of people who are structurally unemployed, who must remain extrinsic to the wage-relation. Their superfluity, bloating the labour supply, supresses wages to levels acceptable to the capitalist and thereby secures the capital-relation.

A concluding chapter points towards new questions raised by this study. It also reiterates the core argument of my thesis: that the Hollywood science-fiction films of the 1980s are centrally concerned with the new enclosures—the new forms of dispossession and separation underway in that period. *Alien*'s depictions of inorganic bodies, *Blade Runner*'s enclosed city, *Videodrome* images of piracy, *RoboCop*'s privatised industries, and *Total Recall*'s total commodification all affirm the indelible mark of the new enclosures on the science-fiction cinema of that decade. In fact, more than simply registering the enclosures, these texts reactivate the utopian elements latent in the science-fiction genre; they begin to articulate some kind of positive response to enclosure. The following chapters aim not only to give flesh to this, the skeleton of my argument, but also to prove the continuing vitality of the dialectical approach and the analytic value of Marx's concepts. That is, in fact, to put it mildly. My study ultimately proposes that a criticism inattentive to the rhythms of capital accumulation, to class struggle and to the utopian impulse, will be defanged, unprepared for the modes of cultural expression dominant in our time.

CHAPTER TWO

Spectres of Crisis: Class Struggle and Overaccumulation in *Alien*

2.1 Introduction

The theory of enclosure outlined in the introduction suggests that enclosure responds to a double condition: the necessary coexistence of crises of overaccumulation and of workers' revolt. Hence its return in the 1970s, in the wake of the global uprisings of 1968 and the recession triggered in 1973. Enclosure is immanent to the failures of capitalism; its return or intensification recalls the vulnerability, the precariousness of the capital-relation as much as it does the determined brutality of the capitalists who grab land, decimate national forests, and commodify even our basic means of subsistence. Were capitalism as effortlessly self-sustaining as its ideologists suggest, enclosure would lose its purpose, its reason for being. Dispossession would not once again be intruding at the level of daily experience—a fact to which the 1980s science-fiction film ardently attests.

Crucially, it is this negative underside of the new enclosures—the brute existence of overaccumulation and class struggle—that *Alien* takes as its object and preoccupation. *Alien* dramatises, within the confines of the Nostromo, the kind of precarious and contested socio-political milieu where enclosure would intervene. The film's diegetic universe is one in which the foundations of capitalism, and the terms of the capital-relation itself, are under question—one in which those terms have again become legitimate objects of debate. I shall show that *Alien*'s interstellar sphere of circulation implies a massive overaccumulation of capital; that the employees' disputes over their labour contracts recall the kinds of class

conflict that enclosure aims to suppress; and that the film's corporeal aesthetic evokes the uncoupling of the organic body and the inorganic body—concepts Marx employs to examine the separation of the human being from its means of subsistence. Finally, I shall suggest, the alien itself is comprehensible as a symbol of both capital's expansionary, colonising tendencies and of resistance to Weylan-Yutani's corporate rationality. As this summary already implies, enclosure in *Alien* exists mainly at the level of background or implication, in the pretext for its action and horror. Hence this film will serve as a standard against which to measure the explicitness of other science-fiction texts' treatment of enclosure.

2.2 Accumulation and Its Discontents

Sometime in the early twenty-second century, British-Japanese corporation Weylan-Yutani detects a distress signal from outer space and, presuming that the signal implies alien encounter of some kind, sends one of its commercial transport vehicles, the Nostromo, to investigate.[1] The company aims to contain an alien in the Nostromo and bring it back to Earth for analysis, possibly to deploy it as a weapon, a means of defending its economic interests in a now-interstellar sphere of commodity production and circulation. Of course, the process of capture is likely to kill or injure the crew, so it is important that the relevant employees remain unaware of the precise nature of their task. To keep them in the dark, Weylan-Yutani programs the Nostromo's mainframe, known as 'Mother', to hide the key details from its captain. It also swaps the crew's science officer for an android, Ash, whose job it is to inspect

[1] It is possible to glean this information from very fine details presented in the film. For instance, Brett (Harry Dean Stanton) wears an 'American Tricentennial' patch, which implies that the United States has existed for over 300 years, and which therefore places the action in the first few decades of the twenty-second century. 'Weylan-Yutani', meanwhile, is visible only on a beer can in the commissary scene. According to Ron Cobb, one of the film's designers, the designing team came to appreciate Scott's eye for detail when they discovered the company's name stencilled onto each character's underwear. The existence of Weylan-Yutani as a British-Japanese corporation was also Cobb's idea: 'Weylan-Yutani […] is almost a joke but not quite. I wanted to imply that poor old England is back on its feet and has united with the Japanese, who have taken over the building of spaceships the same way they have now with cars and super-tankers. In coming up with a strange company name I thought of British Leyland and Toyota, but we obviously couldn't use Leyland-Toyota in the film. Changing one letter gave me Weylan, and Yutani was a Japanese neighbour of mine.' This information is available in a portfolio entitled 'The Authorized Portfolio of Crew Insignias from the United States Commercial Spaceship Nostromo: Concepts and Derivations' (Los Angeles: The Thinking Cap Company, 1980).

the alien, but also (perhaps even more importantly) to ensure the crew's complicity. On examining the derelict spacecraft from which the signal emanates, Kane (John Hurt), one of the Nostromo's crew, is attacked, an alien embryo implanted in him. Shortly after Kane and the other explorers return to the ship, an alien bursts through Kane's stomach, grows into a horrifying creature, and hunts the rest of the crew. Only Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) survives: she blows up the ship and its cargo, ejects the alien into outer space, and escapes in the Nostromo's shuttle.

It is the sheer scale of the Nostromo's journey that first alerts us to the spectre of economic crisis hanging over *Alien*. Contrasting with the claustrophobic interior spaces of the Nostromo—which seem just too small for comfortable living—is an almost unimaginable expansion of the sphere of commodity circulation, whose interstellar exchanges dwarf today's mere international flows of global capital. The Nostromo's journey is so long, its trajectory so vast, that it is incommensurable with the scale of human experience (so as not to waste their entire lives in space, the crew of the Nostromo must enter 'stasis', a form of human hibernation, for months or years at a time). What is important for us is that this scalar extrapolation, this sheer fact of *distance*, is itself a symptom of capitalism's tendency to overaccumulate. As Harvey argues, drawing partly from Luxemburg, capitalism's crises force it to move outwards—to penetrate and enclose new regions, increase foreign trade, export itself—because it thereby generates more effective demand, renewing the conditions of further accumulation.[2] As such, the spatial dynamic of capitalism, its omnivorous tendency to expansion, ought to be understood as an attempt to neutralise capital's inherent limit, its need to realise ever more surplus-value. Similarly, the existence of Weylan-Yutani's weapons division, its willingness to capture an alien life form to use as a weapon, implies not just indifference towards human life (the Nostromo crew being expendable), but also the latent, background presence of blockages to capital accumulation. The existence of its weapons division, and the lengths the company is prepared to go to enhance it, suggests that accumulation must still be backed by force in this future world. The desire impelling the plot, the company's wish to obtain this unknown biological weapon, is comprehensible only in the context of persistent obstacles to the production and realisation of capital.

The status of the worker's ownership of the means of production and subsistence is indeterminate, however. The first thing to note is that the wage now seems to assume, at least

[2] David Harvey, 'The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation: A Reconstruction of the Marxian Theory', in *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 237-66 (pp. 241-2).

in part, the form of shares: the workers' 'bonus' is ownership of Weylan-Yutani. The crew appear to have some degree of control—even if it is minimal—over the use of the company's means of production. That being said, the social relations between the crew and the company remain deeply reminiscent of the capital-relation. That the company can threaten the 'total forfeiture of shares' (though it turns out to be a lie), that this threat ensures the workers' complicity, implies the existence of the quasi-objective structure of interdependence that Moishe Postone identifies with capitalism.[3] Also relevant here is Dallas's (Tom Skeritt's) jubilant announcement, after Kane's revival, that he is buying dinner. Taken literally, Dallas's offer implies that the food aboard the Nostromo is not communal, that each member usually buys their own portion. This would be a sign of heightened enclosure, the workers being so utterly separate from their subsistence that they must buy food even while aboard the spaceship, while in their place of production. It is also possible that Dallas is joking, however, and that Weylan-Yutani does provide the crew's means of subsistence. Capital exists in the representational space of *Alien* mainly as a social relation, only ambiguously as a property relation.

Yet *Alien* also depicts the instabilities of that social relation; it stages class conflict through its characters' debates on the labour contract. In the opening moments of the film, there is little to suggest division or seniority: we watch the crew wake up as if from birth, wearing identical clothes in identical hypersleep containers. We watch them sit around a circular table, a table with no head, and eat, talk, and joke as equals. This blissful, prelapsarian state ends shortly after, when Parker (Yaphet Kotto) and Brett, the ship's engineers, bring up the inequitable 'bonus situation' and claim their right to receive 'full shares'. Dallas responds, 'You get what you're contracted for, like everybody else.' The issue of the labour contract returns later when it transpires that the crew are unaware of their obligation to investigate the derelict spacecraft's help signal. Ash claims to Parker that failure to investigate entails a forfeiture of all shares, but after Parker attacks Ash, the crew learn that he lied, that they were not obliged, in fact. Ash lies simply to ensure that the crew follows the company's wishes. It becomes clear that the labour contract has been used, not as the basis of transparent understanding between two free individuals, but as the opposite: a form of

[3] See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

coercion, a means of exercising class power. The contract itself is irrelevant: its purported content merely serves as cover for the company's more sinister motives.[4]

The precariousness of the capital-relation itself is most visible in the low-level acts of worker resistance and disobedience in the Nostromo. The most compelling example is Parker and Brett's equivocation when the Nostromo breaks after landing. It becomes clear, at this moment, that capital depends upon the productive powers of labour, and that to this degree the workers can impose themselves as obstacles to, rather than levers of, accumulation. Having landed, Parker enumerates across the intercom the various faults with the Nostromo, and Dallas asks how long they need to mend it. Brett mutters to Parker, 'Seventeen hours, tell 'em,' but Parker claims they actually need 'at least twenty-five'. The conflict between the manual labourers and the senior crew then continues more or less implicitly throughout the film. For instance, when the crew search for the alien, Ripley says that she thought Parker and Brett had fixed 'twelve module'—an area in the Nostromo where the lights are not working. Brett replies, 'We did. I don't understand it,' and Parker suggests that the electric circuits 'must've burned out'. Of course, Ripley's comment is not to be taken at face value: she suspects that Parker and Brett have not fully carried out their duties. Although, as Dallas says, 'standard procedure is to do what the hell they [the company] tell you to do', *Alien* is replete with insubordination: crew members constantly threaten to transgress the formal division of labour, hence the repeated arguments about whose responsibility a given task is.

Yet the entry of the alien has a direct effect on the organisation of labour in the Nostromo: it abolishes it. Initially Dallas remains in control of the search operation; after his death, one level lower in the hierarchy, Ripley takes over; but the alien's success leads in the end to a complete levelling of the ship's social order, as the survival instinct overwhelms occupational and class differences. The culmination of this levelling process is the destruction of human society as such, Ripley being the sole surviving crew member. Unsure that the shuttle will be picked up, she can only hope for her return to humankind. Meanwhile, the reduction of human society to a single individual eliminates the possibility of its renewal: the alien's biological reproductive function—which kills the other humans, other potential

[4] Marx notes that, within the ethical horizon of capitalism, the capitalist is as entitled to claim surplus-value as the labourer is to demand full payment for their work. This is because the capitalist, having purchased the commodity labour-power, is able to use it for as long as they like, while the labourer, as the seller of that commodity, may just as reasonably demand that it be employed only for the length of a normal working day. 'There is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right'—Weylan-Yutani against the workers—'both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides' (Marx, *Capital*, I, 344).

mates—forecloses Ripley's too.[5] Such is then the overt narrative trajectory of *Alien*: it begins with human society arrested, frozen in the hypersleep chambers, and ends with a similar impasse in reproduction, as (in this microcosm) the species is reduced to a single individual. The film moves from the artificial 'rebirth', the Nostromo's awakening of the crew, to natural death—where death is defined as a by-product of 'natural selection'—which thereby supersedes artificial control over the human organism.[6] It demotes the human *qua* social being, or even 'species-being' (to use Marx's term), able to shape its own nature, to the human *qua* natural being, in which the destiny of *homo sapiens* is set indelibly in the laws of the universe.

So it is that, on the literal level, *Alien* represents the negation of economic imperatives by nature. The concerns of the company, and thus of capital generally, fade into the background as the immediate threat to human life abolishes its social mediations. The film's depiction of a 'survival instinct' that overrides the demands of capital (and leads to its destruction, in the form of the mineral ore cargo) is simply code for the primacy of the natural over the social. It is now our task, however, to register the conflict between the film's literal level—in which nature is the fundamental force—and the symbolic level, where nature's overwhelming power comes to symbolise what it just negated, the dominant social force in *Alien*'s context: capital. My claim here is twofold. First, the corporeality of the spaceship architecture in *Alien* represents the separation of humans from nature in the wake of enclosure. The human characters find themselves confronted by bodily structures that are nevertheless massively disproportionate to their own bodies: they find themselves estranged. Second, the human body is redefined as a means of subsistence for capital. Marx often describes capital as a beast devouring the labourer, and *Alien* replicates this metaphoric language of consumption. Now, however, it is the alien, not Marx's vampires or werewolves, that drinks the life-blood of the workers.

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[5] Ripley's association with mothering begins properly with James Cameron's sequel, *Aliens* (1986), where we learn that Ripley has a child at home. In Scott's film, on the other hand, that affective investment is quite conspicuously redirected towards Jones, her cat.

[6] Thomas B. Byers also notes the transition between natural and social factors, except he reverses the emphasis: 'by their transformation of nature into commodity, human beings have become the true aliens' ('Commodity Futures', in *Alien Zone*, pp. 39-50 (p. 40)). For Byers, it is the crew's expendability that positions them as commodities—specifically, I would add, as late capitalist commodities whose obsolescence is planned. What Byers misses, and what complicates this picture of transformation from nature to commodity, is the return of raw natural force in the alien and, concomitantly, in the survival instinct.

These two analyses of *Alien*'s symbolism will prompt two corollary revisions to the reading offered above. First, where we have identified that the alien destroys species-being, that it diminishes humanity's intrinsic social character and amplifies its evolutionary struggle, now we find that the alienation of the human from its species-being is itself a social principle, one that belongs to capitalism. Second, the alien no longer embodies a natural force at odds with a social one. If its amorality, its indifference to particular human lives, is a product of evolution (such that the alien brings out the terrifying content in evolution), in this way it also stands for capital's indifference to human life. The terror of evolution, which decentres the human's position in the natural order, can be read as an allegory for the decentring effects of a society where exchange-value takes precedence over use-value and dead labour dominates the living.

2.3 The Inorganic Body

In his 1844 manuscripts, Marx depicts the relationship between human and nature as one between an organic and an inorganic body:

> Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., theoretically form a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of science and partly as objects of art […] so too in practice they form a part of human life and human activity. In a physical sense man lives only from these natural products, whether in the form of nourishment, heating, clothing, shelter, etc. The universality of man manifests itself in practice in that universality which makes the whole of nature his *inorganic* body, (1) as a direct means of life and (2) as the matter, the object and tool of his life activity. Nature is man's *inorganic body*, that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body. Man *lives* from nature, i.e. nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.[7]

[7] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 327-8.

It follows from this that, when labour becomes alienated from itself, when it becomes commodified as labour-power, it 'estranges man from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence, his *human* essence'.[8] Capitalism divides nature, unlinks it from itself, and the point of separation is the human body. This split is nothing less than the prime object of enclosure, which separates humans from 'these natural products', in which Marx includes not just food but also 'heating, clothing, shelter etc.', the 'inorganic' organs of human life. The external separation of people from their means of subsistence enacts a parallel separation internal to the human subject, and the body itself is riven by enclosure.

It seems to me that *Alien* offers us several images of the inorganic body, that it thereby dramatises the estrangement of the human subject from the body under enclosure. A particularly vivid example is the anthropoid derelict spacecraft. Its dark, slimy inner walls, faintly ribbed, are reminiscent of the human oesophagus or intestine, and the cave that the characters reach shortly afterward recalls the human stomach (though the presence of alien eggs there implies some fusion of reproduction and digestion, which recurs with the chestburster, as we shall see). Evoking a human body of greatly expanded proportions, the architecture of the craft itself appears to be the work of evolution, of some supraindividual agency analogous to capital (one of whose definitions is '*self*-valorising value').[9] This substitution of biology for architecture reconstructs the body as something inherently tubular, empty, permeable, and leaky—as something spatial, something with a certain depth and volume, such that the body itself comes to seem external and strange.[10] We can also note this extrapolated evolutionary progress in the skeletal figure decaying in the spacecraft (itself the victim of a chestburster), who is several times larger than the *homo sapiens* inspecting him.

The Nostromo, too, resembles an organism, though the connection seems much weaker, at least at first. The initial establishing shots of *Alien* depict the Nostromo as a quadruped stalking nomadically through the universe. Its doors are so many sphincters, controlling exit and entry through its tunnels. This zoomorphism also extends to the film's audio track, as the

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[8] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 329.

[9] Marx noted this very parallel between the bourgeois ethos of competition and evolutionary struggle: 'The division of labour within society brings into contact independent producers of commodities, who acknowledge no authority other than that of competition, of the coercion exerted by the pressure of their reciprocal interests, just as in the animal kingdom the war of "all against all" more or less preserves the conditions of existence of every species' (Marx, *Capital*, I, 477).

[10] The corporeal appearance of walls in the derelict spacecraft is raised to a higher power in *Aliens*, where the aliens surprise their attackers because they have become part of the walls.

sound of the Nostromo's engines is in fact a synthesised heartbeat.[11] Yet as soon as the alien enters the Nostromo, the ship is fated to deteriorate, to become derelict, like the one the crew leave to explore (the Nostromo's self-destruction at the end of the film is then best understood as a last-ditch attempt to resist this destiny). The Nostromo is bound, in other words, to become an inorganic body, a host for the alien species, providing *its* means of subsistence and shelter. While the ship presents us with an image of supreme control over human life—it is a space where humanity has managed to arrest the process of ageing (in its hypersleep containers), almost to tame nature itself—this ends when the alien comes aboard.

Alien also represents capital's destructive relation to the human body through images of consumption. We already find, in Marx, a variety of metaphors employed to express capital's appetite for living labour, many of which figure the body itself as an object of consumption, as sustenance for capital. 'Capital', Marx writes, 'is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.'[12] Capital has a 'werewolf-like hunger for surplus labour'.[13] The capitalist 'devours the labour-power of the worker, or appropriates his living labour as the life-blood of capitalism'.[14] *Alien* likewise renders the capital-relation on screen as the relationship between the subject and its means of sustenance, with the twist that the body is here the sustenance, not the subject. Now it is the alien, not the vampire or the werewolf, that serves as a figure for capital's insatiable appetite. The major symptom preceding its birth is Kane's own intense hunger, as though he has to feed both himself and the foetus growing inside him. The alien's birth seems to depend directly on stimulating an abnormal and ultimately self-destructive desire for consumption in its host. Then, having burst through Kane, it goes on to consume the other crew members—not only in the sense that it devours them, but also in that it uses their bodies for the fulfilment of its own natural processes, most obviously reproduction. The finitude of the crew's needs, served efficiently in the hypersleep containers, stands in stark contrast with the alien's rapacious appetite for sexual reproduction and means of subsistence.

The immediate objection to my emphasis on the alimentary features of *Alien* is already anticipated in the wealth of criticism on the film's sexual (and non-sexual) reproductive

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[11] See Scott's 1979 interview with James Delson, republished as '*Alien* from the Inside Out, Part II', in *Ridley Scott: Interviews*, ed. by Laurence F. Knapp and Andrea F. Kulas (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), pp. 11-31 (p. 30).

[12] Marx, *Capital*, I, 342. On Marx's images of vampires, see Mark Neocleous, 'The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires', *History of Political Thought*, 24 (2003), 668-84.

[13] Marx, *Capital*, I, 353.

[14] Karl Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', in *Capital*, I, 943-1084 (p. 1007).

motifs, for which generation, not consumption, is the primary bodily process that *Alien* depicts. To take one of the best-known examples, Barbara Creed argues that *Alien*'s various primal scenes evoke the 'archaic mother', the parthenogenetic mother who threatens patriarchy and symbolises death.[15] I do not want to disagree with Creed's reading—which has, in any case, ample textual grounding—so much as point out its incompleteness. Creed's focus on reproduction leads her to overlook the ways in which these spaceships also evoke non-reproductive processes: the alimentary canals of the spaceships, the circulation of people and information around them, Mother's role as a cognitive centre. Even where Creed herself notes, in the film's second primal scene (where the facehugger attacks Kane), some overlap between reproducing and consuming, the oral nature of Kane's impregnation, she does not examine the relevance of this latter.[16] If the alien's mouth recalls the *vagina dentata*, as Creed notes, or the alien gestates in Kane's stomach, the alimentary element remains ineradicable. It seems that reproduction and consumption coexist in *Alien*, the distinctiveness or specificity of each function less important than the portrayal of bodily function per se. The film is trying to conjure sheer corporeality, the brute materiality and sensuousness of embodied existence as such, rather than to localise a specific bodily process.[17]

What remains to be noted is that these very efforts to foreground embodiment are a kind of compensation, one that belongs to a social world where the organic body has become separate from the inorganic, as Marx puts it. If enclosure brings about alienation from the body—an internal separation parallel to the external ones between humans and species-being,

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[15] See Creed, pp. 16-30. Other examples of this kind of reading are Constable, 'Becoming the Mother's Mother', and James Scobie, 'What's the Story, Mother?: The Mourning of the Alien', *Science Fiction Studies*, 20 (1993), 80-93. On *Alien*'s body horror, see Philip Brophy, 'Horrality—The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films', *Screen*, 27.1 (1986), 2-13; and, more recently, Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz, 'Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror is Biological Horror', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 40 (2012), 160-8.

[16] Creed, pp. 18-19. Unlike Creed, James H. Kavanagh identifies 'the particularly horrifying confusion of the sexual-gynaecological with the gastrointestinal' in Kane's death ('Feminism, Humanism, and Science', in *Alien Zone*, pp. 73-81 (p. 76)).

[17] Constable comes closer to my position in her response to Creed, where she assigns primacy to the visceral materiality of the facehugger (Constable, pp. 179-81). It is also worth pointing out what is implicit in my analysis, namely that the alien and spaceships are *not* abject. For Kristeva, the abject inhabits an oblique interspace between subject and object; it threatens their border and cannot be reduced to one or the other. In my reading, however, these bodily features are conspicuously external and *objectal*—they evoke a nature massively outside of human control. The subject-object divide is established, even reified, in the corporeal spaceships, not challenged. This marks the limits of any reading of *Alien* purely in terms of the abject. See Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) for her analysis of abjection.

as well as humans and nature—then this is the ontological requisite to the corporeal aesthetic pervasive in *Alien*. But I think we can extend this claim further: though the body is the primary visual object of the film, it is also somehow implicit in the gaze of its subject. The gaze itself seems curiously embodied in *Alien*. The next section aims to explore this subjective embodiment, as well as to disclose the alien's utopian function, where it comes to stand for the working class as much as for capital.

2.4 Capital or Working Class?

The general character of Scott's camerawork in *Alien* is endoscopic, reminiscent of the medical cameras that are inserted into bodies. This endoscopic vision is most evident in the shot of Kane groping his way through the innards of the derelict spacecraft, which, as I have already suggested, look as sticky and slimy as an oesophagus or a colon. The various shots of the Nostromo's tunnels, with their sphincter-like doorways, also imply an endoscopic gaze. But I would go further than this: even where the *mise en scène* is not in some way intestinal, where the visual object does not resemble the body, the perspective remains endoscopic.

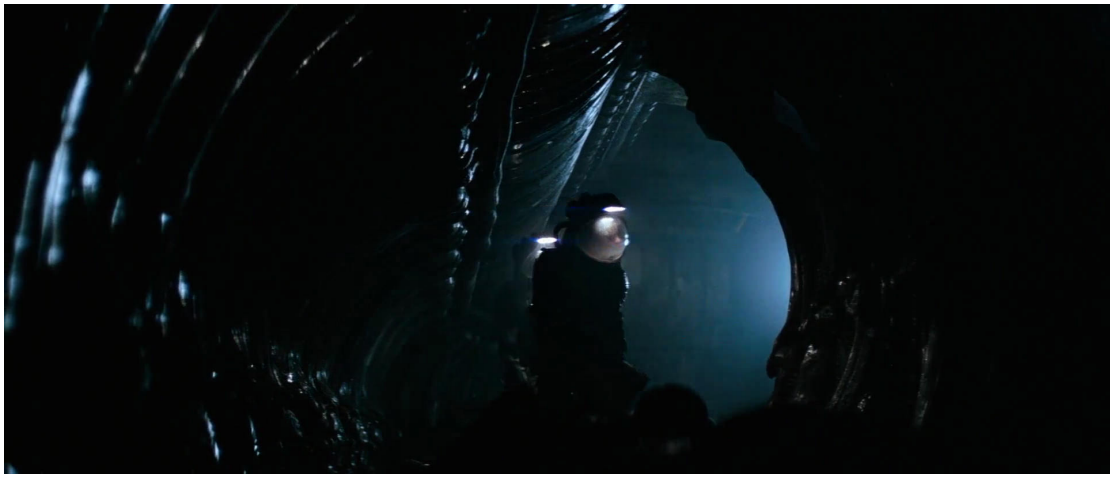

Figure 2: The endoscopic camera

Let us recall Walter Benjamin's characterisation of the difference between painter and cameraman in his famous essay on artistic reproduction:

> Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment.[18]

The surgeon emblematises perfectly the invasiveness of the cameraman, the necessity that they penetrate into the tissue of reality. Benjamin implicitly figures reality itself as a body: the fleshy materiality of the human body, pierced by the surgeon's knife, serves as a model for the materiality of the real. What Benjamin is at pains to point out is the presence of the camera in the space represented and the consequent loss of distance between the point of perception, or the gaze, and the object perceived.[19] In a strikingly analogous way, Scott endows the gaze in *Alien* with its own materiality, such that it too seems not merely to represent space, but to cut into it, to occupy it. As Scott remarks in an interview, wherever possible in *Alien*, the camera is mobile, not stationary. 'The camera sort of just breathes, so you're always slightly aware of its presence,' he suggests (and to that end, he often used hand-held cameras).[20] Scott's penetrative cameras create the sense that the gaze carries with it a body—that the gaze is really an eye, a material object, and not some insubstantial source of perception. The film's perception is necessarily embodied: its eye does not withdraw to the appearance of an object as much as slice into it, a scalpel incising through reality itself.

The purpose of Scott's endoscopic camera is to suture us into the subjectivity of the alien, the only character who could carry this stalking, invasive gaze. For instance, when Ripley searches for Jones in the cockpit, the camera follows her, but from a position that the instruments and machinery would conceal from her view. It is as though we are stalking

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[18] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-45 (p. 227).
[19] For Benjamin, the loss of the aura is partly a result of 'the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" both spatially and humanly' ('Work of Art', pp. 216-7).
[20] Delson, p. 30.

Ripley—as though we have become the alien, tracking its prey.[21] This suturing operation has a definite ideological function: it challenges the apparent neutrality of the endoscopic camera, and thus of scientific reason generally. By equating the alien with the endoscope, *Alien* invests science with its own terror: the alien's amorality—which, in Ash's view, makes it 'the perfect organism'—evokes the impersonal quality of scientific discovery, but this very indifference is also what makes the alien terrifying and deadly (in killing, it simply serves its own instinctual drive to reproduce and consume). The objectivity of the endoscopic camera, and the scientific gaze it implies, is here endowed with the similarly amoral terror of the alien. Hence the alien is the obscene underside of the scientist, Ash; or rather, by incapacitating the crew, it takes the tasks the company has bestowed upon Ash (the disciplining of the Nostromo's workforce) to the end.

Thus, as Jeff Gould argues, 'the Alien is the double, we might say the *biological analogue*, of the Company'[22]—perhaps of capital itself. The alien boards the ship, contrary to Ripley's efforts; it accords with the company's judgement that the crew is expendable; and it entrenches divisions amongst the crew. But even here there remains a decisive ambivalence, for while the alien's destruction of interpersonal social bonds or collective life makes it analogous to capital, it also seems to stand for the working class. To understand how this is so, let us return to Ripley's insinuation that Parker and Brett did not complete all of the repair work—that they engaged a muted form of class struggle against the company and their superiors. Ripley does this by noting that the lights are off in 'twelve module', which Parker and Brett claim they have fixed. This is a crucial moment in the film's symbolic structure, where light and dark spaces suddenly take on socio-political meaning—or rather, where the intrinsically political character of lighting becomes overt. We remember that, in the opening section of *Alien*, just before the crew wakes up, the Nostromo turns its lights back on. The lighting is therefore linked, from the film's inception, to the company's need for energy efficiency, implicitly for profit maximisation. It is precisely by tampering with this conspicuously functional role of the Nostromo's lighting that Parker and Brett introduce a

[21] Like *Jaws* (1975), then, *Alien* dares to suture its human viewers into a non-human subjectivity. This forms the filmic equivalent of what Elena Gomel has identified in various science fiction novels: that they tend to create alien subjectivity through focalisation and voice rather than narrative structure or content. See her 'Posthuman Voices: Alien Infestation and the Poetics of Subjectivity', *Science Fiction Studies*, 39 (2012), 177-194.

[22] See Gould's piece in Jackie Byars and others, 'Symposium on *Alien*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 7 (1980), 278-304 (p. 283).

symbolic one, where the darkness evokes the workers' background resistance to the dehumanising and debilitating effects of capital accumulation.

This link between darkness and resistance forms the basis of the alien's second meaning, where it stands for the working class. The alien seems to belong organically to darkness, not in the mundane sense that it is evil, but rather in the sense that the darkness is its body, or conversely, that it is the body of the darkness. The dark spaces of the Nostromo before the crew awake conjure the terrible prospect of a post-human future: as viewers, we see what the characters cannot, since as soon as they wake up, the lights turn on.[23] The darkness of this post-human future is, of course, what the alien also threatens, and indeed achieves, insofar as it strands Ripley, cutting her loose from human society. Additionally, when we see the alien (and until the end, we see it only partially), its body melts into the darkness of its surroundings: it lifts the silent objectivity, even naturalism, of the *mise en scène* into a symbolic realm of heightened drama and meaning. The alien is therefore the corporeal expression of the ship's *mise en scène*. It is the Nostromo's dark space, the space of the manual workers, stepping forward in animal form.

This last, utopian meaning, the alien as an embodiment of resistance, finds expression on the screen through anamorphosis. The alien's short life is one of constant change; every time we see it, we notice different body parts; new and terrifying features appear. It nevertheless remains unclear whether these changes are mutations in the object itself (the alien's body is maturing) or whether it has to do with the position of the viewing subject (the different angles and distances from which we see the alien, and how it is lit, determine which parts are visible). In this impossible interpretive situation—does the shift occur in the object or the subject?—we can say only that the alien is anamorphic, that this perceptual distortion is the essence of its being. It is as if the alien takes the space of the Nostromo—a disciplinary space, which permits or prohibits crew members' access to particular areas on the basis of their seniority—and bends it around itself, thus posing a symbolic challenge to the architecture that maintains Weylan-Yutani's control. Insofar as these doors, corridors, and barriers exert disciplinary force, keeping the crew's (and thus the company's) internal hierarchy intact, the alien exists as some absolute limit to corporate domination, to the subsumption of ever greater zones of human (and non-human) existence under the logic of

[23] For a sustained analysis of how the film's opening shots create this sense of 'post-human futurity', see Caetlin Benson-Allott, 'Dreadful Architecture: Zones of Horror in *Alien* and Lee Bontecou's Wall Sculptures', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 14 (2015), 267-78.

capital.[24] The alien accords with some of Weylan-Yutani's wishes, as Gould argues, but it also seems to embody what the company, and what capital, cannot control.

2.5 Conclusion

Alien thus occupies itself in no small measure with both the persistence of enclosure and the conditions to which enclosure itself responds. As we have seen, it imagines an interstellar capitalism whose scale attests to the existence of crises of overaccumulation; it dramatises debates over the labour contract, implicitly over the terms of the capital-relation; it depicts an inorganic body dissevered from the organic; and it deploys the alien ambivalently, as an embodiment of capital and of resistance to capital. Although *Alien* does not directly represent any real instances of enclosure, enclosure in general finds expression in the film's visions of estranged bodies, objectal and separate (whose function cannot then be reduced to the exhibit of body horror). *Alien* demands this historical and materialist treatment. Its narrative, aesthetics, and symbolism cannot fully be understood without reference to the tectonic shifts occurring in its socio-economic context: the return and intensification of enclosure.

This film, and this chapter, will serve us henceforth as a kind of zero-level or standard against which to measure the explicitness of other films' engagement with the new enclosures. *Blade Runner* is a step up in this respect: the film's depiction of a burgeoning city, its individual parcels of land seemingly oversaturated, recalls the problematic of enclosure more directly than *Alien* does. We shall note, indeed, that *Blade Runner* responds to enclosure less by means of symbolism, more at the level of narration itself. If the conventional Hollywood narrative involves, even requires, movement through space—

[24] For Marx, the 'real subsumption' of capital refers specifically to capital's ability to alter the form of the labour process ('Results of the Immediate Process of Production', pp. 1023-5, 1034-8). But in the Nostromo, capital's subsumption goes even further; it seems to engulf the employees' entire lives (hence, they must hibernate when not working, when not useful to the company). This is closer to Hardt and Negri's own expanded use of the term 'real subsumption'. For them, what is subsumed is not merely labour, or the production process, but society itself: 'with the real subsumption of society under capital, social antagonisms can erupt as conflict in every moment and on every term of communicative production and exchange. Capital has become a world' (*Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 386).

specifically *bodily* movement, as Tasker notes in reference to the action genre[25]—how can one produce such a narrative in an enclosed world, where one's movement is largely restricted?

[25] 'For action [movies] the key sign is the movement of the body through space' (Tasker, *The Hollywood Action and Adventure Film*, p. 5).

CHAPTER THREE

Hardboiled Postmodern Flânerie: The Purpose of Noir in *Blade Runner*

3.1 Introduction

For many of its viewers, *Blade Runner* has offered one of the canonical representations of postmodernism in general and the postmodern city in particular. Giuliana Bruno's reading of the film as 'a metaphor for the postmodern condition' is only one of the best-known examples of this interpretation (which has not, for all that, gone unchallenged).[1] A brief plot summary is likely to predispose the reader towards her view. In 2019, in a totally commodified Los Angeles, a small group of Replicants—androids produced to serve as slaves—escape from their offworld colony and return to Earth. They do so to confront their maker and, through his intervention, to overcome death. The Replicants are almost identical to humans; the Voight-Kampff empathy test is the sole means of distinguishing them, and as such the Replicants must die young, lest they become too emotionally capable for the test to work. It is up to Rick Deckard, a 'blade runner' (a kind of hardboiled detective adapted to the twenty-first century), to kill (or 'retire') the Replicants, who are said to pose a danger to the human populace on Earth. Deckard escapes death at the hands of one Replicant, Roy Batty

[1] Bruno, p. 184. Similarly, Harvey argues that *Blade Runner* 'is a science fiction parable in which postmodernist themes, set in a context of flexible accumulation and time-space compression, are explored with all the imaginary power that the cinema can command' (*The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 313). For a critique of these readings, see Marcus A. Doel and David B. Clarke, 'From Ramble City to the Screening of the Eye: *Blade Runner*, Death, and Symbolic Exchange', in *The Cinematic City*, ed. by David B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 140-67.

(Rutger Hauer), and falls in love with another, Rachael (Sean Young), but eventually he succeeds, exorcising from Earth the twin spectres of posthumanity and simulacra.

As Bruno notes, *Blade Runner*'s city recalls the real postmodern one, or at least its inevitable decline: 'The future', as prophesied by the film, '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'.[2] For Bruno, the architectural layout of Los Angeles in 2019, mixing temporally and spatially disparate elements, exemplifies the postmodern proclivity for schizophrenia and pastiche. It depicts the rise of a 'postindustrial' society, where waste and detritus exist alongside cutting-edge technology. Yet what is absent from Bruno's account is the increasingly private and enclosed nature of the postmodern city, features that—this chapter will argue—are also central objects of concern for *Blade Runner*. The film depicts the city as a patchwork of overstuffed parcels of space, each struggling to contain the accumulating detritus.

But if *Blade Runner* is concerned with enclosure, it is because this latter challenges the act of narration itself, which in most cases (if not by definition) depends for its development and resolution on a character's ability to move through space. This is the reason why Deckard must return to his post as a blade runner: police officers are able to move about Los Angeles's enclosed space in ways unavailable to other people. They can enter others' private spaces, a privilege that Deckard exercises not infrequently in the course of the narrative. It is on this basis that Captain Bryant (M. Emmet Walsh) distinguishes between the 'cop' and 'little people'; I claim that this is only a coded version of the difference between a genuine narrative actor—one whose life is potentially narratable—and those humans so utterly consumed by the struggle to survive that their lives do not seem to be of interest, do not furnish the basis for being told as a story.

Of course, Deckard is neither a private eye nor a cop, but an uneasy mixture of both, combining the former's mode of operation with the latter's commitment to restoring law and order. This ambiguity is itself a result of *Blade Runner*'s return to noir, whose hardboiled hero is necessarily a mobile figure, shifting between the various enclaves of Los Angeles (Walter Neff, on the screen, and Philip Marlowe, on the page, are the models here). I argue that *Blade Runner* looks to noir because it acts as a readymade generic paradigm for exploring movement through the urban environment. The figure of the noir hero may itself be seen as an evolution of the flâneur, the stroller par excellence of the Parisian boulevards. I

[2] Bruno, p. 185.

want to suggest, then, that Deckard is a postmodern flâneur: he is the flâneur reimagined for a time when one's movement through the city space is increasingly restricted, surveilled, and policed—when the city is increasingly enclosed. In this context, only the blade runner is free to roam.

3.2 The Monopolistic Space of Los Angeles

Although, as Marx notes, landed property as such precedes capitalism, it is only in the course of capitalist development, with the steady advance of enclosure, that land gains full spatial independence from landlord, capitalist, and worker—that areas of land become detached from their owners and cultivators. We have seen that this separation of the workers from their means of subsistence is what transforms them into labourers, dependent on selling their labour-power to survive. But a corresponding shift also occurs at the other end of the social scale, as landlords find they can now spend their lives in Constantinople, even though their landed property remains in Scotland, as Marx puts it.[3] Marx does not draw out the philosophical consequences of this detachment in the third volume of *Capital*, where the question of rent detains him, but his remarks there about 'monopolistic space' recall earlier preoccupations, particularly his view that private property divides humans not just from themselves and their species-being, but from nature itself.[4] Indeed, it seems that capitalism's development of monopolistic space—in which 'particular persons enjoy the monopoly of disposing of particular portions of the globe as exclusive spheres of their private will'[5]—raises with a new prominence the ontological problem of subject and object, since the advent of private property institutionalises their separation.

As a result of this separation of subjects from their objects, people from the land, enclosed space begins to acquire the characteristics of a container. It becomes an empty, finite area, an 'absolute' space independent of the people and things that later fill it. There may be other kinds of space operative in capitalism—Harvey identifies relative and relational spaces too—but absolute space in particular is what private property both creates and

[3] Marx, *Capital*, III, 755.
[4] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 322-34.
[5] Marx, *Capital*, III, 752.

presupposes.[6] Los Angeles itself would seem to exemplify this gradual monopolisation of space: there, since the 1960s, a reinvigorated drive to defend private property has created a kind of urban enclavization, which reaches its apotheosis in the gated community outside the city limits.[7] The malls of Los Angeles have meanwhile come to resemble giant panopticons, deterring criminal activity. 'The valorized spaces of the new megastructures and super-malls are concentrated in the center, street frontage is denuded, public activity is sorted into strictly functional compartments, and circulation is internalized in corridors under the gaze of private police,' observes Mike Davis.[8] Nan Ellin has suggested that the will to privatise and enclose, to destroy public space and disperse the crowd, structures postmodern urbanism generally.[9] Crucially, it is the extrapolated form of this same problem, the finitude of enclosed space, that seems to impose itself on the denizens of *Blade Runner*'s Los Angeles, where each land parcel seems to have become saturated with surplus product.[10] Its retrofitted architecture expresses the oversaturation of the city with capitalism's surplus.

Such is then the purpose of *Blade Runner*'s claustrophobia: to evoke a crisis in monopolistic space. The monopoly control of space seems to have exceeded itself, as no one area remains unsullied by the detritus of another. The city itself is waste, replete with trash, inhabited by a waste population, unfit for life on offworld colonies. But more than this, each individual compartment pollutes another: neon colours the streets, searchlights penetrate J.F. Sebastian's (William Sanderson's) block, steam pours from vents, noise filters through walls, and advertising is projected onto skyscrapers. This aesthetic of excess is not so much negated as raised to a higher power in the emptiness of the other flats in Sebastian's block, where emptiness compounds upon emptiness: space overflows its own boundaries, as though space itself were somehow in excess. One might remark the same of the Tyrell building, in which space seems superabundant, the echoes of human voices suggesting an even greater room than what we can see. Tyrell's (Joe Turkel's) conspicuous consumption of space is as

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[6] David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, revised edn (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), p. 168.
[7] See in particular Davis's account of 'fortress LA' in *City of Quartz*, pp. 223-63.
[8] Davis, p. 226.
[9] Nan Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 145-54. Soja discusses the recent expansion of urban fortresses and gated communities in *Seeking Spatial Justice*, pp. 42-44, while Stuart Hodkinson emphasises the intrinsic relationship between enclosure and neoliberal urbanism in 'The New *Urban* Enclosures'.
[10] Harvey defines the capitalist city precisely by its function as absorber of surplus product (*Social Justice and the City*, pp. 216-40). His 'The Right to the City' (*New Left Review*, 53 (2008), 23-40) develops this theme explicitly in the context of overaccumulation.

excellent an indicator of the company's wealth in the film as its owl is in Philip K. Dick's novella, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), on which *Blade Runner* is of course loosely based.[11]

Yet there is a dialectical reversal at hand here, for such is the ubiquity of waste in Los Angeles that its very status as waste is called into question. The city's economy recalls the 'hyper-capitalism' theorised by Baudrillard, where the aim of production is no longer the effective satisfaction of needs, but the opposite, such that consumption serves primarily to reproduce production. In this economy, Baudrillard suggests, the category of 'waste' does not apply: production now being an end, and the commodity a means to that end, every commodity now carries out its proper function.[12] Similarly, in *Blade Runner*, waste is the background and presupposition of all existence, the unifying feature of everything present, a new commonality.[13] Waste becomes an existential condition, not least for the characters we follow: Pris (Daryl Hannah) finds refuge in the city's rubbish, the Replicants have their wastage written into their code, while Deckard's job is to dispose of faulty commodities. Suffering an accelerated decrepitude, Sebastian does not become waste in the way that a commodity does, but he does make visible the process of wasting away: he serves as the human correlate to the Replicants' existential condition. The same logic applies also to the city's retrofitted architecture, whose useful parts, such as pipes, are integrated into its aesthetic and become ends in themselves. Here, then, obsolescence is normal, and loses its negative valorisation: within the closed horizon of Los Angeles, there are few positive examples of utility or functionality with which to compare the waste. Los Angeles is turned inside-out, the inversions of a fetishistic social world taken to an extreme: the movement of people imitates the circulation of commodities, humans consume to justify production, and the rhythms of obsolescence give the city its pulse.

This discussion of utility and waste will be incomplete, however, without mention of Deckard's Esper machine, a key counterexample to the city's general anti-functionalism. The Esper machine is able to navigate, in three dimensions, a two-dimensional photo from Leon's (Brion James's) apartment, but its narrative interest (it reveals the presence of Zhora (Joanna Cassidy)) is almost certainly less striking than its function (blowing up a flat image into three

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[11] On the adaptation process between the novella and the film, see Landon, pp. 45-58.

[12] Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: SAGE, 1993), pp. 27-8.

[13] For Bruno, the city's waste is a symptom of 'postindustrial decay', 'an effect of the acceleration of the internal time of process proper to postindustrialism' (Bruno, p. 185).

dimensions) and thus than its symbolic opposition to the clutter of Deckard's apartment and of Los Angeles more generally. Against the backdrop of degraded utility, the Esper machine seems to fetishise functionality; it attains the status of a gadget.[14] Moreover, just as the Esper machine thematises use-value, Deckard embodies the fantasy of non-alienated work: his labour process is one in which the concrete outcome takes precedence over its abstraction *qua* exchange-value. Hence Deckard has more in common with the Replicants than one might expect:[15] they too are created to fulfil, better than humans can, one specific function, each Replicant being designed with a particular job in mind.[16] Deckard and the Replicants' irreducibly goal-oriented activity attests to a contrastive, even a utopian, purposiveness in a social world otherwise subsumed under the logic of non-use, non-purpose, or waste.

The spatial attributes of Los Angeles in 2019—congestion and enclosure on the one hand, the inevitable transgression of boundaries on the other—set the scene for *Blade Runner*'s primary concern: the ability of a character to navigate space in an enclosed diegetic world. At two key moments (the opening sequence and Deckard's meeting with Bryant), the film raises the question of what kind of character can become a protagonist—of where such characters are to be found in the alienated, repetitious social world of capitalism. I shall argue that *Blade Runner* uses these moments to thematise the motivation of its own device (the process by which narrative form acquires content), or, more precisely, the difficulty of finding such motivation in an enclosed diegetic world. Only when we have comprehended these problems will we be able to consider why *Blade Runner* identifies their solution in film noir.

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[14] Baudrillard describes the gadget as a 'functional simulacrum': the gadget is 'pure gratuitousness under a cover of functionality, pure waste under a cover of an ethic of practicality' (*For a Critique of The Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos, 1981), p. 32). We might recognise in Baudrillard's comments echoes of Debord's own analysis of the gadget: 'The proliferation of faddish gadgets reflects the fact that as the mass of commodities becomes increasingly absurd, absurdity itself becomes a commodity' (*Society of the Spectacle*, para. 67).

[15] This raises the perennial question: is Deckard is a Replicant? The evidence that he is so is stronger in the director's cut of *Blade Runner*, which was released in 1992. Because this study is concerned with the 1980s, however, I focus mainly on the 1982 US Theatrical Release. In this earlier version, which omits the unicorn dream scene, Deckard is less obviously a Replicant.

[16] Following Baudrillard, Doel and Clarke define the Replicants as labourers, not slaves, since 'their very existence is a poisonous gift from capital in the shape of Tyrell' (Doel and Clarke, p. 159). The question, however, is whether the gift of life can be said to have come from capital at all if the Replicants fail to produce new value through their work.

3.3 Enclosure as a Narrative Problem

For all the critical emphasis on *Blade Runner*'s evocation of late capitalism, the central class element is missing. The Replicants are slaves, Deckard is an 'unproductive' worker (his job creates no value), and the masses in the street resemble the lumpenproletariat more than the classical revolutionary subject, the working class. But the absence of alienated labour need not impede a Marxist interpretation of *Blade Runner*; what is peculiar about the film—and detectable only against the background of the Marxist typology—is that, while imagining in detail a world overrun by commodities, its narrative keeps its distance from the 'hidden abode' of commodity production. Workers are here reified in their effects, in the non-use-value of waste, but do not appear as its producers.[17] We confront a situation where the commodity-form dominates Los Angeles—where the city is virtually an imprint of the commodity-form—and its inhabitants seem to spend their time in exchange or circulation, but the main characters live on the margins of capitalism (and thus of Los Angeles society itself), being either slaves or service workers.[18]

Yet could one produce a narrative about a class of beings whose daily tasks, at least as dramatised in *Blade Runner*, consist primarily of exchange, of circulation between one market and the next? The film's masses are resolutely non-narrative; their lives, organised around the atemporal and repetitious act of exchange, do not seem to hold potential for narration. Their purpose, in fact, is to act as a contrast to a small group of properly narrative beings, who exist in linear time and seek to master their own denouements, this being the precise reason for the Replicants' return to Earth. The single blue eye overlooking Los Angeles takes a metanarrative view: at the opening of the film, it seeks out these potential narrative-bearers and, zooming into the Tyrell building, selects them for portrayal in its

[17] Chew (James Hong), the eye manufacturer, is perhaps the exception to this.

[18] There are good contextual reasons for the absence of the classical working class, too. As Soja notes, Los Angeles witnessed, in the 1960s and 1970s capitalist restructuring, an increasing polarisation of its labour market—a split between the 'high technocracy' at the top and low-wage immigrant labour at the bottom (*Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 200-8). In his reading of *Blade Runner*, Harvey suggests that the Replicants exemplify the 'short-term, highly skilled and flexible labour-power' associated with 'flexible accumulation' (*The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 309). This overlooks, first, that the Replicants are slaves, and second, that their skill is not like human skill (they are produced already adept at the skill, while humans acquire theirs over time). Could a Replicant be de- or re-skilled, as a flexible labourer is?

syuzhet.[19] So it is that *Blade Runner* dramatises the emergence of the narrative from an otherwise endless repetition of the same. Narrative itself appears to be incompatible with the sphere of circulation—the duration of which, under capitalism, tends towards zero[20]—let alone the absent sphere of production.

Figure 3: The metanarrative eye

But the desire to narrate founders upon monopolistic space, too: this is why, in *Blade Runner*, it is the characters' transgression of boundaries that gives the narrative its momentum and direction. To take an obvious example, the film's first narrative impulse is the Replicants' return to Earth, when they ought to have remained on their offworld colony. Deckard's investigation, meanwhile, proceeds on the condition he become a cop, someone whose access to other people's private property is legal. When Deckard initially refuses to take on the job, Bryant reminds him, 'If you're not cop, you're little people,' and reiterates thereby the distinction between the 'little' inhabitants of the sphere of circulation and a genuine narrative actor, one who moves more freely because they can cross into others'

[19] The *syuzhet* is the plot, the temporal organisation of events in a specific narrative (which might include prolepsis or analepsis), and it is distinct from the *fabula*, the chronological rearrangement of those events. For a discussion and critique, see Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 106-8.

[20] 'The more that the circulation metamorphoses of capital are only ideal, i.e., the closer the circulation time comes to zero, the more the capital functions, and the greater is its productivity and self-valorization' (Marx, *Capital*, II (1978), 203).

private spaces. Deckard requires this privileged position vis-à-vis property rights (and privacy generally) often in the course of his investigation, during which he enters the Tyrell building, Zhora's dressing room, Leon's apartment, and Sebastian's block. Put simply, the cop is the chief role in *Blade Runner* because, unlike other humans, the police officer can make exceptional movement through an enclosed social world. As such, the flying police car, the Spinner drifting above the masses, emblematises perfectly the difference between cop and little person.

So acutely aware of the spatio-temporal limits of narrative is *Blade Runner* that it projects a certain position on narration, one that bears similarity to the Russian Formalist notion of the 'motivation of the device'. This is the view that narrative content serves to motivate or produce literary form; it turns on its head the idea that form is secondary, a shape-giver, a force applied to pre-existing ideological content. By zooming into the Tyrell building, and by making explicit its selection of narrative actors, the film thematises precisely this process by which an impulse to narrate acquires its motivating content—by which, as Shklovsky puts it, '*the form creates content for itself*'.[21] Yet the reason why form and content in *Blade Runner* appear inverted, why the film stages the motivation of the device, is because the crisis in monopolistic space impedes just such a motivation—that is, because of a deeper problem of *content*. *Blade Runner* depicts a world suffering, first, the spatio-temporal compression of postmodernity,[22] but also the limitations on free movement as the metropolis becomes increasingly enclosed. These features, impeding narration, seem to bring about a compensatory awareness of the requisites of narrative itself, emblematised most clearly in the blue metanarrative eye.

So it is that, while the dystopian 'cross now' and 'don't walk' commands restrict the crowd's movement, the detective rises above the level of compulsion (literally rises, in the

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[21] Viktor Shklovsky, 'On the Connection between Devices of Syuzhet Construction and General Stylistic Devices', trans. by Jane Knox, in *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. by Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), pp. 48-72 (p. 56). It strikes me that Brian De Palma's *Blow Out* (1981), released one year before *Blade Runner* and bearing certain stylistic affinities (in particular, its use of noir tropes), exemplifies this formalist principle even more vividly: the narrative of the governor's death and Jack Terry's effort to reveal its cause ultimately serve to provide Terry with the sound effect of the woman's scream—the lack of which prompted Terry to go out in the first place, and which led to his entanglement with the murder. It is this scream sound effect and its absence that motivates De Palma's entire film.

[22] Harvey reads *Blade Runner* precisely through this notion of 'spatio-temporal compression': the film's conflict, he argues, 'is between people living on different time scales, and seeing and experiencing the world very differently as a result' (*The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 313).

case of the Spinner). It is worth noting that we encounter this character-type—someone, often a law enforcer, who can traverse monopolistic space in ways that the little person cannot—in several other films examined in this thesis. Ash represents the law (or at least the unanswerable will of the company) in the Nostromo; it is he who, first, enters Ripley's private space (the ship's command centre) to attack her and, second, frees the quarantined crew members. The central conflict of the *RoboCop* narrative ignites when RoboCop disrupts OCP's property claim over himself, when he escapes his enclosure in the police station. And in *Total Recall*, Douglas Quaid rushes through the urban spaces of Earth and Mars—and, indeed, between Earth and Mars—with ease, especially compared to the inhabitants of Venusville, whose condition resembles that of Los Angeles's 'surplus population' here in *Blade Runner*.

If, as the next section shall argue, *Blade Runner* incorporates the tropes and iconography of noir, this is because noir serves as the generic solution to this aforementioned narrative problem: the difficulty of producing a narrative in enclosed diegetic space. *Blade Runner* turns to noir, I suggest, because the genre is centrally concerned with urban movement. Deckard is only the postmodern version of the hardboiled hero, who is in turn derived from the figure of the flâneur, the stroller of the nineteenth-century Parisian arcade. *Blade Runner*'s crucial innovation in this respect is its objectification of the flâneur's interest in physiognomy—the study of the human face as a means of deciphering the person's character or ethnic origin. Now it is not the flâneur who scrutinises humanity but the Voight-Kampff machine, which studies the face and the eye for signs that its subject is not a human at all.

3.4 Noir as a Generic Solution

The conditions of possibility of the flâneur—the stroller par excellence of the Parisian boulevard—were secured only with Haussmann's expansion of Paris in the mid- to late nineteenth century. 'Before Haussmann wide pavements were rare,' Benjamin writes, 'and the narrow ones afforded little protection from vehicles. Strolling could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades.'[23] Walking through these arcades, between the

[23] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 36.

glass-fronted shops, the flâneur would become fascinated with the individuals comprising the crowd. The flâneur, Benjamin writes, 'flatters himself that, on seeing a passerby swept along by the crowd, he has accurately classified him, seen straight through to the innermost recesses of his soul'.[24] But the desire to discover the uniqueness of each individual, each 'passerby', tips over into its opposite, 'so that in the final analysis a person of the greatest individuality would turn out to be exemplar of a type'.[25] Crucially for us, the flâneur's interest in such passers-by, their fascination with the phantasmagoria of the metropolis, carries them inexorably into the realm of crime: 'No matter what trail the *flâneur* may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime.'[26]

The flâneur's impulse to typologise, and their concomitant link to the criminal underworld, passes into Deckard through classic film noir, whose protagonist is also a metropolitan stroller. As Petra Nolan argues, 'the hardboiled hero of noir apotheosises the […] traits of flânerie, many of which were inchoate in the classic flâneur'.[27] The flâneur's perambulation, observation, loitering, transience, and evasion all carry over into the protagonist of classic noir, whose model might be taken to be Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray), the insurance salesman in *Double Indemnity* (1944). 'Like the classic flâneur,' Nolan writes, 'Neff is an obsessive observer, analysing the incidental element of any scene in order to uncover its essence or "truth".'[28] Philip Marlowe would meanwhile seem to be the hardboiled literary equivalent of Neff. Symptomatically, in his book on alienation and authenticity in the 'noir tradition', Erik Dussere analyses Chandler's tendency to sort America into its constituent types:

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[24] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 21.
[25] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 22.
[26] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 41.
[27] Petra Nolan, *Hardboiled Heroes, Deadly Dames: Modernity and 1940s Film Noir* (Saarbrucken: VDM Verlag, 2008), p. 57. Frank Krutnik's essay on the city of classical film noir also picks up on the hero's relation to the crowd: he (for the figure is almost always male) regularly confronts 'the strange otherness of others and the strange otherness within' in the 1940s and 1950s American metropolis ('Something More Than Night: Tales of the Noir City', in *The Cinematic City*, pp. 83-109 (p. 89)). Of course, crucial differences also obtain between the two figures. The flâneur's ambiguous gender identity becomes, in the noir hero, unequivocally masculine, while the flâneur's fascination with the department store contrasts with the noir hero's aversion to the supermarket. On the relationship between noir and consumerism, see Erik Dussere, *America is Elsewhere: The Noir Tradition in the Age of Consumer Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 26-43. Davis argues that noir developed as an 'anti-myth' of Los Angeles in *City of Quartz*, pp. 36-46.
[28] Nolan, p. 86.

> His technique of detailed description—of people, clothing, furniture, space—allows him to evoke the whole social organization of life in Los Angeles, and America, while also subjecting it to Marlowe's aggressive dismissal. Once a person has been identified as belonging to a type, Marlowe can fix him or her in a verbal formulation that puts the detective in a superior position: the other person is now located in the proper stratum of the degraded social world—wherein you are either part of the problem, or you are Philip Marlowe.[29]

For Dussere, Marlowe is a figure 'forever *moving through*, penetrating the American landscape and cityscape both through his physical movement and his jaded observations'.[30] Observing and strolling, Marlowe too embodies the characteristics of the flâneur.

It is precisely the impulse to observe and categorise, common to the flâneur and the hardboiled hero, that *Blade Runner* elaborates in the figure of Deckard, whose basic role is to defend human universality from its simulacra. The Voight-Kampff empathy test, focused on changes in the eye, and representing a kind of postmodern physiognomy, seeks to disclose the identity of the subject seated before it: human or android. The irony, of course, is that humans are relying on machines to protect the final signs of their universality (and this irony is only redoubled in the director's cut of *Blade Runner*, when we learn that Deckard may himself be a Replicant, such that two degrees of mechanical intervention separate humanity from its self-recognition).[31] So while, on the one hand, *Blade Runner* opens up the physiognomic gesture to the level of human universality, on the other, it alienates even this perception in the dead labour of the Voight-Kampff machine (and possibly of Deckard himself). If the film maintains, however precariously, the utopia of species-being, it does so by challenging the subject's position within that species.

But Deckard and the flâneur share more than a tendency to observe and taxonomise. In fact, as the stroller, the traverser par excellence of the modern metropolis, the flâneur also forms the basis for what I have already suggested is Deckard's exceptional mobility. The noir

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[29] Dussere, p. 80.

[30] Dussere, p. 21. Jameson reads Marlowe in much the same way, as a device for linking together the various enclaves of American life. Since, in the USA after the Second World War, 'there is no longer any privileged experience in which the whole of the social structure can be grasped, a figure must be invented who can be superimposed on the society as a whole, whose routine and life-pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together' (*Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 7).

[31] In a similar way, the Terminator, whose own hybrid, cyborg body threatens such universality, becomes humanity's protector in *Terminator 2* (1991).

hero again mediates between them, though it introduces a key difference: it moves the flâneur from street to highway. 'The centrifugation of Los Angeles from the 1920s onwards, which ensured an increasing reliance upon cars, demanded a flânerie which was specifically motorised as opposed to a more leisurely perambulation,' argues Nolan.[32] Deckard himself indulges in motorised flânerie when Gaff (Edward James Olmos) takes him through Los Angeles in the Spinner (though Deckard is transported under duress, and the flâneur strolls freely). At this moment, situated behind the driver's and passenger's heads, the camera invites us, too, to observe the city's high-tech phantasmagoria as a postmodern flâneur would.

But enjoying such a view is itself a mark of privilege. Critics have often noted that vertical space in *Blade Runner* represents the class difference between the little people and the likes of Tyrell.[33] As such, it is appropriate that the city becomes available as aesthetic object—rather than mere productive force, subordinator of species-being—only when we rise out of the street, above the circuits of capital accumulation. This logic reaches its climax in the sun-drenched vista extending from Tyrell's building. The opposition between sunshine and noir—which Mike Davis has famously elaborated in the context of Los Angeles[34]—corresponds to the high-low distinction, and thus the class distinction, as if, in building this skyscraper, Tyrell used his surplus-value to buy sunshine itself. The striking view from Tyrell's apartment echoes Haussmann's expansionary project, not least when, in preparation for the Voight-Kampff test, Tyrell draws down the curtain: Haussmann's boulevards were equally landscapes, and were presented as such. These perspectives, Benjamin notes, 'prior to their inauguration, were screened with canvas draperies and unveiled like monuments; the view would then disclose a church, a train station, an equestrian statue, or some other symbol of civilization'.[35]

Noir, by contrast, exists at street level, in the city's darkness, its rain and miasma. These elements must be read literally—as features of a city that trades around the clock, that must therefore be alive in the night as much as in the day, in rain as well as fair weather—rather

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[32] Nolan, p. 82.

[33] See, for instance, David Desser, 'Race, Space, and Class: The Politics of Cityscapes in Science-Fiction Films', in *Alien Zone II*, pp. 80-96 (p. 94); and Dussere, p. 200. Sobchack's analysis of *Blade Runner*'s city, for which 'the visual experience of Los Angeles has little to do with verticality and lofty aspiration', is at odds with these readings, and seems to miss the hierarchical structuring of the film's vertical space ('Cities on the Edge of Time: The Urban Science-Fiction Film', in *Alien Zone II*, pp. 123-43 (p. 136)).

[34] Davis, pp. 15-97.

[35] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 24.

than expressively—as metaphors for the characters' manichean moral states, say.[36] Here, the rhythms of production and circulation have become untethered from natural conditions, capital accumulation riding roughshod over natural barriers to economic activity.[37] In this context, not just the gaze, the object viewed, but the eye itself becomes reified, dissected, transformed into a stable object of scientific enquiry. Before Deckard tests Rachael, Tyrell reduces the metaphysical disclosure of the Voight-Kampff test to the level of ocular mechanics: 'capillary dilation of the so-called blush response, fluctuation of the pupil, involuntary dilation of the iris.'

What differs between the flâneur and Deckard, and where the latter registers a still higher degree of alienation, is in the mediatory role of the crowd. As Benjamin notes, the crowd turned Paris from mere city into the well-nigh hallucinatory object of the flâneur's gaze: 'The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city is transformed for the flâneur into phantasmagoria.'[38] For Deckard, on the other hand, the crowd is opaque, an impediment, and does not seem to elicit recognition as humanity. This is one of the film's major paradoxes: Deckard must police the boundary of the human—he must retire the Replicants before they become sufficiently empathetic to pass as human—yet the humanity thronging in the streets is a matter of indifference, even a nuisance, to him. We might wonder whether Deckard, and the other human citizens of Los Angeles, would themselves pass an empathy test.[39] *Blade Runner*'s social world is one in which humans are visibly estranged, not merely from their work and their species-being, but from the rest of humanity itself.[40]

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[36] Whereas the actuality of emotion and other interior states is irrelevant to the human masses of Los Angeles—whose task is merely to buy—the mere potential of android interiority is dangerous and unacceptable, in *Blade Runner*.

[37] Marx captures precisely this tendency for capital to transgress seemingly natural barriers to capital accumulation (here in the context of increased expropriation of absolute surplus-value at the end of the eighteenth century): 'Every boundary set by morality and nature, age and sex, day and night, was broken down. Even the ideas of day and night, which in the old statutes were of peasant simplicity, became so confused that an English judge, as late as 1860, needed the penetration of an interpreter of the Talmud to explain "judicially" what was day and what was night. Capital was celebrating its orgies' (*Capital*, I, 390).

[38] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 21.

[39] Hence, as Steve Neale argues, *Blade Runner* generally works to erase the difference between human and android ('Issues of Difference: *Alien* and *Blade Runner*', in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. by James Donald (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), pp. 213-23 (pp. 216-21)).

[40] It is worth pointing out here, however, that *Blade Runner* turns the indifference of Deckard's gaze into its own compositional principle. Instead of taking a critical distance from Bryant's distinction between cop and little person, it reifies and legitimises such a distinction in its portrayal of the crowd, which, as Timothy Yu argues, betrays Scott's Orientalist imaginary. See Yu's 'Oriental Cities, Postmodern Futures: *Naked Lunch*, *Blade Runner*, and *Neuromancer*', *MELUS*, 33.4 (2008), 45-71. Our gaze at the undifferentiated mass in the streets is then Deckard's gaze at them: there is a sort of *a priori* suturing here,

Blade Runner's crowded streets also serve a crucial narrative function insofar as they frustrate Deckard's efforts to retire the Replicants. On the one hand, the darkness at street level provides the Replicants with the cover they need to delay detection, and the crowd proffers further disguise. 'I was looking for six Replicants in a city of 106 million people,' Deckard notes in the voiceover (a comment that recalls the flâneur's obsessive inspection). As David Desser argues, when the Replicants land on Earth, 'their first instinct is to live among the masses on the city's streets': Zhora works in a strip club, Leon moves into the second floor of his hotel, Pris makes her home amongst the rubbish, and Roy Batty travels through the crowds.[41] On the other hand, Deckard turns the anonymity of the crowd to his own advantage when he poses as a member of the Confidential Committee on Moral Abuses: in a moment of unequivocal flânerie, he pretends to read the paper while waiting for Zhora. In some sense, the Replicants' survival depends on attaining the status of objects—on becoming an authentic member of Los Angeles's desubjectivised crowd. The emblematic incident occurs when Deckard visits Sebastian's apartment: standing still amongst the latter's multitudinous automata, Pris hides from Deckard in plain sight precisely by imitating an object. Objectivity itself becomes camouflage, becomes refuge, when one's status as subject is illicit.

These foregoing remarks on Deckard's flânerie, on his ability to move around the city, leave us poised to reflect on the significance of noir in *Blade Runner*. Discussing this point, critics often turn to Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche, according to which the latter involves imitation 'without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse',[42] and criticise the film for using noir styles and motifs without a determinate political purpose. Leighton Grist represents this view, for instance, when he argues that *Blade Runner*'s 'self-conscious use of noir conventions, while extensive and consistent, is superficial rather than analytical, pastiche not parody'.[43] Yet the disparaging tone of these

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where the presentation of Los Angeles is already inflected by Deckard's perspective, represented from his point of view, before any formal suturing process actually occurs. *Blade Runner* thereby undermines the implicit appeal to human universality it elsewhere appears to make. At best, as Yu goes on to note, the Asians only assist Deckard and the Replicants; they serve to provide them with clues or 'access to the heights of white corporate power' (Yu, p. 56).

[41] Desser, p. 112.

[42] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 17. Contrary to this view, Dussere suggests that *Blade Runner* returns to noir in order to articulate its own (postmodern and hybridised) politics of authenticity, this being, in his opinion, a key function of the entire 'noir tradition' (Dussere, pp. 200-3).

[43] Leighton Grist, 'Moving Targets and Black Widows: Film Noir in Modern Hollywood', in *The Movie Book of Film Noir*, ed. by Ian Cameron (London: Studio Vista, 1992), pp. 267-85 (p. 274).

comments is at odds with Jameson's own use of the term 'pastiche', which is diagnostic rather than moralistic.[44] As such, while using 'pastiche' in Jameson's distinct sense, critics of *Blade Runner* miss the distinctiveness of Jameson's analysis of postmodernism: it is dialectical, and recognises the utopian as inextricably bound to the ideological. Grist's one-sided analysis sees only the 'innate conservatism of the postmodern'.[45] A genuinely dialectical approach might indeed acknowledge the political toothlessness of pastiche, but it would also want to discern, in the same moment, its utopian obverse: the existence—in an age that has 'forgotten how to think historically'[46]—of an impulse to communicate with, or refer to, the past.

In any case, my argument suggests that noir does have a purpose in *Blade Runner*, that it is not drafted in perfunctorily, a lifeless imitation. As we have seen, the noir hero is a creative derivation of the flâneur; it takes on the latter's desire to typologise, to move freely and anonymously. In a film focusing on restrictions on mobility in enclosed space, then, classical noir provides a readymade generic framework with which to explore that situation. When *Blade Runner* seeks to distinguish between cop and little person, this is only the postmodern expression of an older distinction between the noir hero and the masses, even between the flâneur and the Parisian crowd. The stages of this schema—flâneur, hardboiled hero, blade runner—correspond to higher degrees of urbanisation, the city bulging outwards as it absorbs and accommodates ever more surplus product, until we end up with something like Scott's dystopian vision of Los Angeles in 2019. The flâneur strolls around Haussmann's broad boulevards, the noir hero drives from the metropolitan core to the expanding suburbs of twentieth-century Los Angeles, and the blade runner shifts between the private enclaves of a densely enclosed city.

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[44] 'Yet if postmodernism is a historical phenomenon, then the attempt to conceptualize it in terms of moral or moralizing judgments must finally be identified as a category mistake' (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 46).

[45] Grist, p. 274.

[46] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. ix. Tantalisingly, Bruno begins to formulate just such a utopian reading of pastiche in her essay on *Blade Runner*: 'Postmodernism, particularly in art and architecture, proclaims such a return to history as one of its goals. It is, however, the instantiation of a new form of historicity. It is an eclectic one, a historical pastiche. Pastiche is ultimately a redemption of history, which implies the transformation and reinterpretation in tension between loss and desire. It retraces history, deconstructing its order, uniqueness, specificity, and diachrony' (Bruno, p. 193).

3.5 Conclusion

What remains to be added, against this backdrop of utter alienation and disenchantment, is that *Blade Runner* contains a utopian moment. In Marx's fourfold typology (elaborated in the introduction), it is primarily action that here remains unalienated. We see Deckard estranged from humanity and from species-being, but he is not yet estranged from his labour activity itself. Undertaking 'unproductive' work outside the circuit of capital production and realisation, Deckard stands in sharp contrast to the crowd, whose subsumption under capital is complete, their movement subordinated to the rhythms of commodity circulation. The flâneur is likewise defined by their activity, by strolling or loafing, moving around the city made at their own pace, under their own direction, without the compulsion of capital. Benjamin writes that the flâneur's

> leisurely appearance is his protest against the division of labour which makes people into specialists. It is also his protest against their industriousness. Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The *flâneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace. But this attitude did not prevail; Taylor, who popularized the watchword 'Down with dawdling!' carried the day.[47]

Meanwhile, the Replicants' own utopian impulse derives from the goal-oriented nature of their activity: in a world oriented towards the production of exchange-value, their work is inextricable from use-value; their being is bound to the concrete purpose for which they were created.[48]

In the course of this chapter, we have seen that *Blade Runner* requires a flâneur-type figure, rediscovered through film noir, to propel and carry its narrative. We have seen that the film thematises this very process of narrative spatialisation, that it depicts the motivation of its own device. The aesthetic, narrative, and thematic features discussed above are corollaries

[47] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 54. See also Benjamin's note in the *Arcades Project*: 'The idleness of the flâneur is a demonstration against the division of labor' (*The Arcades Project*, p. 427).

[48] Of course, by the end of the film, the Replicants have become humanised; the difference between them and the humans has almost totally broken down. But this humanisation is not utopian: we become convinced of Batty's humanity only by his suffering—by his implication (when he saves Deckard) that he lives in constant fear. To be 'more human than human' (Tyrell's slogan for the verisimilitude of the Replicants) is, it seems, to dwell in constant, unbearable anxiety.

of *Blade Runner*'s motivating problem: the difficulty of telling a story in an enclosed diegetic space. *Blade Runner*'s distinctively postmodern content needs to be understood in that context: not as a general reflection of the postmodern city as such, but as a specific engagement with the increased enclosure and privatisation of that city. Paradoxically, the film's interest in its own narrative and aesthetic apparatuses—its self-reflexivity, if you like—arises from the intensity with which just such an extra-textual situation asserts itself at this historical juncture. The problems that *Blade Runner* presents on the level of its own form are ultimately reflexes of its socio-economic content.

This leaves us poised to proceed to the next film, Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, which contains its own postmodern flâneur: Max Renn, whose movement across Toronto recalls Deckard's across Los Angeles. *Videodrome* bears witness to a still more conscious comprehension of the new enclosures than we have witnessed in either *Alien* or *Blade Runner*, however: Cronenberg's film makes explicit reference to the commodification of the airwaves and the expansion of intellectual property rights. More than this, *Videodrome*'s depiction of a Debordian society, in thrall to the spectacle, reminds us of the reified social world to which enclosure itself gives rise. As far as genre is concerned, the next chapter will see our focus shift from noir to horror and melodrama, whose manifestations in *Videodrome* also return us to the context of the new enclosures.

CHAPTER FOUR

Of Airwaves and Images: *Videodrome*'s Society of the Spectacle

4.1 Introduction

The commodification of the Canadian airwaves, and of Canadian culture in general, since the mid-twentieth century forms the primary context of David Cronenberg's 1983 film *Videodrome*. Such is the view of this chapter, which seeks to argue that, like many science-fiction films released in the 1980s, *Videodrome* takes the new enclosures as one of its chief preoccupations. The sale of the Canadian public's airwaves, the state's failure to regulate the use of those airwaves effectively, the industrialisation of cultural production in the 1970s, eventual cutbacks to public spending in the 1980s, and finally the inclusion of Canadian culture in its free trade agreement with the United States—few of these are explicit in *Videodrome*, but together they constitute the socio-economic background against which it must be read.

Videodrome opens with Max Renn, the president of cable television station CIVIC-TV, looking for ways to reinvigorate his channel's programming, which usually consists of softcore pornography. To this end, Renn conspires privately with Harlan (Peter Dvorsky), a self-described 'prince of pirates', to set up an illegal satellite dish that can intercept television signals from across the world. Soon enough, Harlan unscrambles about a minute's worth of content from a programme called 'Videodrome', a 'snuff' television show that depicts real

scenes of torture and murder.[1] This is the tougher content that Renn was looking for, and he asks Harlan to try to intercept more of its transmissions. Renn also starts to date Nicki Brand, a radio presenter who—though initially objecting to the lewd and degenerate content shown on CIVIC-TV—finds herself aroused by the much more explicit material of 'Videodrome'. When Renn finds out from Harlan that the source of the 'Videodrome' signal is not Malaysia, as Harlan had first thought, but Pittsburgh, Nicki decides to travel to go on the show. Renn coaxes one of his producers, Masha (Lynne Gorman), to look into 'Videodrome', but having done some research, Masha warns Renn that it is dangerous. Undeterred, Renn attempts to visit Professor O'Blivion (Jack Creley), a media prophet involved with the 'Videodrome' project. Renn has recently started to hallucinate, and he finds out from O'Blivion—who agrees to speak to him only through video—that exposure to 'Videodrome' has given Renn a brain tumour. In fact, O'Blivion is already dead, killed by 'Videodrome' in the same way; he lives on solely through the videotapes he recorded before his death. It soon transpires that Harlan has been working, not for Renn, but for Barry Convex (Les Carlson), a businessman who intends to use the malignant television signal delivered via 'Videodrome' to purge society of the degenerate and the impure—the kind of people who, he thinks, would watch Renn's station. O'Blivion's daughter, Bianca (Sonja Smits), knows of Convex's plan, so Convex sends Renn to kill her. Before Renn (now in a trancelike state induced by 'Videodrome') carries it out, however, Bianca shows him a video of Nicki being strangled to death on 'Videodrome'. That suffices to switch Renn's allegiances once more: he kills Convex and Harlan, and then himself.

If this synopsis only hints at the relation between the film's content and the abovementioned political and economic changes, the first section of the present chapter focuses more intently on their conjunction. It argues that *Videodrome* registers the enclosure of the Canadian airwaves and the development of private television broadcasting. The second section traces the film for its depictions of reification—Lukács's term for the alienating, abstracting effects of capitalism—in particular as it affects the human body and its perceptual apparatus. My suggestion here is that the theory of reification, especially as Debord develops it in his work on the spectacle, bears close resemblance to the film's own concerns, its portrayal of the image as something like the ultimate commodity. The third section considers the role of melodrama in Cronenberg's film. It argues that melodrama serves less as a mode

[1] I shall be placing the name of the fictional television show 'Videodrome' in quotation marks to distinguish it from the name of Cronenberg's film, which remains italicised.

or genre structuring *Videodrome*, more as an object of enquiry within the film frame itself: less as form, more as content. *Videodrome* thematises melodrama in this way, I suggest, because melodrama is an organic response to a commodity society, to a society where exchange-value takes priority over all other value-forms.

4.2 'Piracy in the High Frequencies'

Videodrome's action is comprehensible only in the context of the enclosure of the electromagnetic spectrum. Although we learn that Renn never intercepted another station's transmissions, that he was always their intended recipient and victim, it is significant for us that *Videodrome* uses piracy, and not something else, as the pretext for Renn's first encounter with 'Videodrome'. That is, although Renn does not really pirate anything (at least that we see), it remains clear that such practices do occur in this diegetic universe, that the entertainment industry must enclose its private property to defend against pirates. The form of enclosure represented by *Videodrome* is 'scrambling': Renn's (purported) first interception of 'Videodrome' lasts only 53 seconds because, as Harlan claims, the transmitting station used an 'unscrambler scrambler' to protect their frequency, re-encrypting the signal. The scrambler is to the image, here, as the fence is to the field. In any case, something like the opposite is actually taking place: Renn's exposure to 'Videodrome' is the first link in a chain of events that Convex hopes will lead him to ownership of CIVIC-TV. It is ultimately Renn's ability to broadcast that is under threat.

Of course, Cronenberg's speculative imagination did not conjure the enclosure of the airwaves *ex nihilo*. In the introduction, I discussed how successive American governments privatised the electromagnetic spectrum, how they sought (and ultimately failed) to compensate the public for giving away their common property. I would now like to rehearse the history of the enclosure of the Canadian airwaves in the mid- to late twentieth century, particularly as it relates to television, *Videodrome*'s primary medium of interest. In April 1949, the Canadian government announced the formation of the Massey Commission and tasked it to examine, *inter alia*, the development of broadcasting in Canada. The Commission's 1951 report recommended that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (or 'CBC', established in 1936) withhold private television broadcasting licences until it has its

own programming in order.[2] In an effort to promote a distinctively Canadian content, the Commission also advised that the CBC try to restrain commercialism in Canada's new television industry. The report of the Fowler Commission, released in 1957, recommended that private broadcasters be permitted but regulated, since the airwaves their signals use are a scarce resource.[3] The same year saw the election of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, who would oversee the creation of 'second station' licences, permitting private television stations to operate alongside the state broadcaster in eight major cities.[4] The first private television licence was issued to CFTO-TV in Toronto in 1960.[5]

By the end of the 1960s, television broadcasting in Canada was changing, largely as a result of the rise of cable television (and it is worth noting that CIVIC-TV is imagined as a cable television channel). This, alongside the evident problems with the current Broadcasting Act (published in 1958), prompted the government to update its legislation.[6] The resulting act, the Broadcasting Act of 1968, 'represents a watershed in broadcasting legislation and the beginning of the modern era in the history of Canadian broadcasting policy', Robert Armstrong suggests.[7] Importantly for our purposes, Section 2 of the 1968 act begins by asserting that radio frequencies are public property. It implies thereby that the radio and television stations using them are trustees of the Canadian public. The act also established the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (or 'CRTC'), whose job it would now be to regulate broadcasting and issue licences.

As such, the Canadian airwaves were gradually privatised in the mid- to late twentieth century. And like the United States government, the Canadian authorities sought to regulate Canadian broadcasting to compensate the people for the appropriation of their airwaves.[8] As we have already seen, the Massey Commission argued for the necessity of promoting Canadian content. The 1958 Broadcasting Act mandated the creation of the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG), who were explicitly tasked to regulate public and private stations in the interest of Canadian citizens. They did so in part by setting Canadian content

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[2] Robert Armstrong, *Broadcasting Policy in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 33-4.
[3] Armstrong, p. 35.
[4] Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 82.
[5] Armstrong, p. 36.
[6] Armstrong, p. 38.
[7] Armstrong, p. 41.
[8] 'Broadcasters made plenty of profit; it was just that they could not expect to do so without giving something back to the population whose airwaves they used to amass monies' (Edwardson, p. 203).

quotas, to be introduced in 1960, stipulating that 55 per cent of all television broadcasting be Canadian in its content and character.[9] The BBG seemed unable to enforce these quotas, however, because broadcasters could flout such requirements without losing their licence.[10] Thus, in 1970, under the leadership of Pierre Juneau, the CRTC formulated new quotas for radio and television content.[11]

While *Videodrome* does not obviously recount this history, it draws the link between the ownership of the airwaves and the violation of the public interest. It recalls the compensatory function of content regulations, for instance, when it stages Max Renn's defence of his channel's violence and softcore pornography. Asked whether he thinks his content contributes 'to a climate of sexual violence and malaise', Renn proposes that CIVIC-TV (a channel whose name itself gestures towards the relationship between the public and the media) offers his viewers 'a harmless outlet for their fantasies and their frustrations'.[12] That, Renn suggests, is a 'socially positive act'. It is not insignificant that Renn expresses this view on television itself, on the Rena King Show, which hosts debates on moral issues. Whether or not he convinces us, Renn's intentions are qualitatively distinct from Convex's: the latter wants to use 'Videodrome' for a genocidal project in which the degenerate members of society are exposed to its signal, develop brain tumours, and die. Thus, in *Videodrome*, we shift from Renn's contrived defence of his content on the grounds of its public interest—this recalling the tenuous claims of real broadcasters to that function—to Convex's explicit assault on the desensitised public, his use of 'Videodrome' predicated on the purification of North America.[13]

Meanwhile, Harlan's suggestion that the 'Videodrome' signal originates in Pittsburgh recalls the penetration of American signals through the Canadian border, the encroachment of

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[9] Armstrong, p. 36.

[10] 'J. A. Pouliot, president of the [Canadian Association of Broadcasters], even went so far as to claim that Canadian content was already between 75 and 80 per cent. The CRTC, on the other hand, estimated the level to be between 4 and 7 per cent' (Edwardson, p. 201).

[11] Armstrong, p. 43; Edwardson, pp. 198-206.

[12] In his commentary on *Videodrome* (included in the film's Criterion Collection release), Cronenberg claims that CIVIC-TV was inspired by CITY-TV, a real station in Toronto: 'a small, local, city television station that would be very responsive to what was going on in the city and included interviews with people in the streets constantly, and so on. It was really quite an interesting invention, and also was the first channel to show softcore porn films.'

[13] By the 1970s, Canadian broadcasting was judged some of the most violent in the world (Edwardson, p. 226). Private television stations began to import violent programmes from the USA in higher quantities in an effort to improve their economic situation. It seems possible that the popularity of violent content in *Videodrome*'s Canada serves as a comment on this situation, too.

American television culture into Canadian life after the Second World War. This is particularly relevant to us because, as Cronenberg notes in an interview, his reception of American television signals as a child was the inspiration for *Videodrome*. The scene where Renn watches 'Videodrome'

> is really an elaborate version of what was the core for me of the invention of the story-idea of *Videodrome*. As a kid we had a television set with an antenna that rotated, and you could rotate it from inside your house; and when the major channels would go off the air you could rotate it and pick up strange other channels from smaller cities around, from across the border and Buffalo and so on. And you would see strange things. It was kind of hard to see; there was a lot of static. It was very intriguing to watch that kind of thing. And that was really the core; the crystal at the centre of this movie was my experience of that, thinking, well, what if the images that you pulled up were really quite extreme, disturbing, possibly illegal, and what would you think then? Would you keep seeking out those channels, or would you call the police?[14]

Cronenberg's experience was not atypical. With the growth of television in the USA after the Second World War, and despite the efforts of the Massey Commission to promote a highbrow national culture in Canada, many Canadian households tuned into American stations.[15] In response, in the early 1970s, the Canadian government stipulated that advertising expenses would be eligible for tax deductions if the advertising was placed on Canadian, not American, television stations.[16] The CRTC also formulated the policy of 'simultaneous substitution', which gave local signals priority over distant ones if both were carrying the same content.[17] If a Canadian station broadcasted an American show at the same time as an American network transmitted it, Canadian cable systems would have to carry the Canadian signal (assuming a local station had requested that they do).

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[14] From the commentary on the Criterion Collection release. The accidental reception of signals also occurs at the beginning of De Palma's *Blow Out* (released two years before *Videodrome*), where the protagonist, Jack Terry, inadvertently tunes into a couple's conversation, a frog's croaking, and then a gunshot. The accidental reception scene in De Palma's film derives from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), itself an adaptation of Julio Cortázar's short story of the same name, published in 1959. Jameson discusses *Videodrome* and *Blow Out* together as conspiracy films, attempting to map an essentially unmappable capitalist totality, in the first chapter of the *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 9-84.

[15] Armstrong, pp. 32-3; Edwardson, p. 79.

[16] Armstrong, pp. 45-6.

[17] Armstrong, p. 45.

But this moment, when Harlan claims to receive an American signal in Toronto, has a much broader resonance, too: it dramatises a tension latent in Cronenberg's oeuvre, which, as several critics have already observed, cuts across Canadian and American cultures. For Piers Handling, writing shortly after *Videodrome*'s release, Cronenberg is positioned both inside and outside the Canadian national cinema: he resists the latter's conventional realism while taking up many of the themes and problems native to that genre.[18] William Beard also acknowledges the duality of Cronenberg's work. Cronenberg exhibits a 'dualism of articulation […] wherein the elements associated with consciousness are quiet, controlled and receding, while the elements associated with nature are violent, chaotic and brash. These may be said to correspond respectively to the "Canadian" and "American" aspects of Cronenberg's cinema'.[19] Renn's narrative trajectory in *Videodrome* is thus, for Beard, one from American to Canadian: from the 'American' will to dominate nature to the 'Canadian' failure to achieve such domination. More recently, Mark A. McCutcheon has suggested that Cronenberg's use of American stars (James Woods and Debbie Harry) on *Videodrome*'s Toronto set emphasises, more strongly than any of his earlier films, his connection to Hollywood.[20]

Indeed, Cronenberg produced *Videodrome* at a moment of increasing harmony between American and Canadian broadcasting cultures.[21] In the 1970s, Pierre Trudeau's administration increased Canadian content regulations for television and introduced them to radio, implemented a voluntary quota system for films, attracted new investors to the film industry, and rigged the job market in favour of Canadian academics (to give just a few examples of his intervention); but this was more a response to Québécois separatism than to

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[18] Piers Handling, 'A Canadian Cronenberg', in *The Shape of Rage: The Films of David Cronenberg*, ed. by Piers Handling (Toronto: General Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 98-114.

[19] William Beard, 'The Canadianness of David Cronenberg', *Mosaic*, 27.2 (1994), 113-33 (p. 129).

[20] McCutcheon, p. 214. See, in addition to Gaile McGregor's text (cited in the introduction), Mertxe Lassiera, 'Cronenberg: A Modern Canadian Myth', in *Screening Canadians: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Canadian Film*, ed. by Wolfram R. Keller and Gene Walz (Marburg: Universitätsbibliothek Marburg, 2008), pp. 135-159.

[21] This is partly why the question whether *Videodrome* is a Canadian rather than a Hollywood film is at least simplistic, if not outright mistaken: the film itself engages with the increasingly close relationship between the two cultures since the 1970s. The failure, recounted here, of Canadian efforts to regulate its cultural production and to specify a distinctive 'Canadian content' attests to the increasing porousness—even the increasing irrelevance—of the conceptual distinction between Canadian culture and American mass culture. Cronenberg is one step ahead of his critics on this point: employing well-known American actors, thematising the commodification of Canadian culture, *Videodrome* suggests that the hard division between Canadian film and Hollywood is anachronistic.

American cultural imperialism.[22] Soon, the industrial model of cultural production Trudeau inadvertently pioneered became an end in itself. The government would henceforth measure the success of its interventions in the 'cultural industries' by economic yardsticks, by profits made and people employed, the original anti-American and anti-separatist motivations secondary.[23] 'Canadian content needed to not only be produced but also sold, its saleability enhanced through commodification and its vibrancy measured in terms of economic tallies,' Ryan Edwardson notes.[24] The commodity-form having penetrated into the sphere of culture, enclosing it, American commercialism became a model to be emulated. The crowning moment of Canadian-American cultural unity was their free trade agreement of 1987. The Canadian government broke its promise to the electorate that culture would be kept off the table: among other things, they placed certain cultural inputs and products on a duty-free list, provided for cable transmission rights, and made advertisements in foreign periodicals eligible for tax deductions.[25] *Videodrome* emerges from this moment of increasing interpenetration of American and Canadian culture, the latter commodifying its cultural industries.

I have already suggested that, in its brief reference to piracy, *Videodrome* evokes one really existing form of enclosure: the Canadian government's sale of the airwaves. But it is also worth noting the film's gesture towards the expansion of intellectual property rights, which occurs when Convex tries to record Renn's hallucinations (purportedly to help him, though his true purposes are more sinister: to work out what degree they can control him). Just after Convex reveals the recording device, Renn jokes: 'Do I get to keep the copyright? I'd hate to see it show up as movie of the week and not get paid for it.' In *Videodrome*'s perverse diegetic world, where real violence is on the verge of being broadcast publicly, Renn's scenario seems plausible. If not Convex himself, perhaps someone like him really would be looking to broadcast another person's hallucinations. Our suspicions are only compounded when Convex responds with the utmost seriousness to Renn's comment: 'Max, I'm trying to help you.'

These references to the privatisation of the airwaves and to intellectual property rights situate enclosure firmly in *Videodrome*'s context. Yet as I noted in the introduction, enclosure is itself entwined with the problematic of reification—Lukács's term for the processes of

[22] Edwardson, pp. 185-219.
[23] Edwardson, pp. 241-59.
[24] Edwardson, p. 242.
[25] Edwardson, pp. 256-7.

abstraction, rationalisation, and formalisation that engulf our social world as the commodity-form takes hold. And this is indeed one of the main ways that *Videodrome* bears witness to the background presence of the new enclosures: it registers a qualitatively heightened state of reification and estrangement, what Debord names the society of the spectacle. My contention in the next section is that it is Debord's work on the spectacle that offers the most precise analysis of *Videodrome*'s diegetic society. The structure of *Videodrome*'s Toronto, the omnipresence of the image there, the pervasiveness of alienation and separation: these features of the film, as much as its portrayal of mass media, recall us to Debord's theses, and from there to the expansion of commodification that characterises the 1980s.

4.3 Feeling Abstraction

In *Videodrome*, the television set becomes the structuring principle of everyday life. This is most overt in the Catholic Ray Mission, where television is used to 'patch' alienated members of society 'back into the world's mixing board', as Bianca O'Blivion puts it. Her comment recalls Debord's definition of the spectacle as 'a social relation between people that is mediated by images':[26] the image appears to be the sole means of human interconnection in *Videodrome*'s atomised world too. Yet the film also suggests that the image causes this fragmentation in the first place. The inhabitants of the Cathode Ray Mission sit like monads in their booths, dividers concealing them from their neighbours, expressing *in nuce* the architectural corollary of a society dominated by the image.[27] The television is here not merely a conveyer of audio-visual content: as a piece of technology, *Videodrome* seems to suggest, it entails a world where the private is opposed to the public, the individual to the

[26] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 4. Debord sees the consumption of televisual images as something like the apotheosis of spectacular consumption in general: 'The time spent consuming images (images which in turn serve to publicize all the other commodities) is both the particular terrain where the spectacle's mechanisms are most fully implemented and the general goal that all those mechanisms present, the focus and epitome of all particular consumptions. Thus, the time that modern society is constantly seeking to "save" by increasing transportation speeds or using packaged soups ends up being spent by the average American in watching television three to six hours a day' (*Society of the Spectacle*, para. 153)

[27] Again, see Debord, who seems to anticipate Harvey's notion of spatio-temporal compression: 'While eliminating geographical distance, this society produces a new internal distance in the form of spectacular separation' (*Society of the Spectacle*, para. 167).

collective. This kind of individuated space repeats across the city: the hotel rooms where Renn meets potential clients, his own apartment, the back rooms of Spectacular Optical, Professor O'Blivion's stock room of videotapes, the disused tugboat in which Renn finally self-immolates. It is as if, not merely the Cathode Ray Mission, but every space in Toronto is organised around the invisible presence of the television, better to suit the monadic and awkward human creature it creates. *Videodrome* implies that the society of the spectacle culminates in the extreme compartmentalisation of social space.

But we can go one step further here, for *Videodrome* seems to depict the city itself as a fragmented space. Evoking another Debordian thesis, urbanism in *Videodrome* is nothing less than a '*technology of separation*'.[28] For Debord, urbanism serves to isolate and atomise the working class, who are inadvertently socialised by the concentration of production in the city. The film emphasises this same isolation by establishing a continuity between the space of the 'Videodrome' set and the space of the city: just after Renn has sex with Brand, it fades from the prisonlike space of 'Videodrome's set to Toronto's skyline, filled with cuboid skyscrapers. The 'drome' appears as the ultimate cube, the archetype for all the other compartments we see. *Videodrome*'s equation of these spaces as geometrical forms suggests, moreover, that they have become abstract in themselves: that they have ejected their content, lost their utility, become purposeless spectacles. The emptiness and abstraction of these different compartments is embodied most clearly in Spectacular Optics itself, for the shop is devoid of eye-glasses ('There ain't much here but take your time anyway,' the employee tells Renn, as he pretends to look around) and serves merely as a front for Convex's more sinister plans. Cronenberg's abstract Toronto thus returns us to the primacy of seeing in postmodernity: as Jameson suggests, our desire for architecture today is in fact a displaced desire for photography, for the *image* of postmodern architecture.[29]

[28] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 171.
[29] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 99.

Figure 4: Toronto, cuboid city

It is worth pausing here to note that Cronenberg's cityscape has the same general function as Scott's Los Angeles. My argument in the preceding chapter—that Deckard is a kind of noir hero, wandering around the enclosed metropolis—clearly applies to some degree to Renn too. Not only is Renn sometimes attired as a noir hero (his trench coat, for instance), but he mimics its *modus operandi*, skulking around the city, finding refuge in the street's anonymity.[30] The noir hero, an echo and modification of the modernist flâneur paradigm, is indeed a useful figure to deploy if one wishes to explore the possibilities of free movement around an enclosed city. That being said, Renn differs from Deckard, and from the Marlowe-type private eye in general, because he is not opposed to commercialism. As Dussere argues, what characterises Marlowe is precisely his disdain for the market and for money, his longing for a more authentic America.[31] Renn therefore occupies a structurally distinct position

[30] As for the presence of other noir tropes in *Videodrome*, we could also point to the sharp lighting contrasts (for instance, when Renn emerges from shadow to kill Bianca, or the effect created by venetian blinds in Renn's apartment) and Brand's characterisation as the ultimate *femme fatale* (she has entered Renn's life solely to 'seduce' him, according to Bianca).

[31] In his discussion of the hardboiled novel, Dussere formulates a distinction between the executive and the detective, 'between two possible versions of male identity; if the executive is the embodiment of the American man as citizen-consumer, then the detective is the embodiment of noir fiction's attempt to imagine an alternative, idealized version of American identity—he exists as an oppositional principle and represents the negation of the citizen-consumer. In the terms I have been using here, the detective represents the principle of authenticity, bearing with him the sense that American national identity has been lost or betrayed and can perhaps be found or redeemed, even if its content cannot be articulated' (Dussere, p. 78). Remembering that, for Dussere, the noir hero's authenticity is a reaction to the historical association between the United States and the market, we might speculate that it is because Renn is a

within the capitalist system: he is a new version of the noir hero, moving *within* the circuits of capital accumulation, running a small business for profit, rather than observing them cynically from the outside.

The paradox constitutive of the flâneur in particular—who is both separate from the crowd and immersed in it—becomes general in *Videodrome*, as its characters seem to oscillate between hypersensitivity and numbness.[32] The human sensorium finds itself pushed to either extreme: plugged in and wired up, painfully conscious of all external stimuli, or bereft of input, disconnected from 'the world's mixing board'. The exemplar of the former is Nicki Brand (who lives, by her own testimony, 'in a highly excited state of overstimulation'), and of the latter is the patient of the Cathode Ray Mission. The body relates to objects as though they are in fact either more or less than an object: as though their sensuous properties overflow and exceed the object, on the one hand, or as though such properties have disappeared, leaving only a dull abstraction of the object, on the other. What remains to be noted is that the two kinds of relation implied here are, in reality, extrapolated from the antinomic halves of the commodity-form itself: its use-value, its concrete sensuousness, and its exchange-value, its abstract, 'suprasensible' property. *Videodrome* presents a world where the division between use-value and exchange-value is in effect transposed or externalised onto the human populace itself, such that one group—embodied by Nicki Brand—experiences the object in its immediate material sensuousness, while the other—typified by the Cathode Ray Mission patient—remains detached from the object.[33]

My emphasis on *Videodrome*'s Debordian picture of society—its diagnosis of a society reified, mediated by the image—runs counter to the critical consensus, according to which the film's main theoretical reference is in fact Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian media scholar.[34] It is true that *Videodrome* evokes two core McLuhanite propositions: first, that 'the

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Canadian character that he is not as sharply opposed to commercialism, that the impulse to negate commercialism is not as strong.

[32] 'The *flâneur* is someone abandoned in the crowd,' writes Benjamin (*Charles Baudelaire*, p. 55).

[33] The flâneur, too, may be said to bear the soul of the commodity: 'If the soul of the commodity which Marx occasionally mentions in jest existed, it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would have to see in everyone the buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle. Empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the *flâneur* abandons himself in the crowd' (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 55). For Benjamin, the flâneur is the personification, the mouthpiece of the commodity-form.

[34] See, as a prime example, Douglas Kellner's claim that '*Videodrome* carries through Cronenberg's exploration of his fellow-Torontonian's media probes' ('David Cronenberg: Panic Horror and the Postmodern Body', *Canadian Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 13.3, (1989), 89-101 (p. 94)). Beard takes Cronenberg's references to McLuhan as a sign of his underlying Canadianness: 'Worth noting, in

medium is the message' (the 'Videodrome' signal, not the violent content of 'Videodrome', is what produces the tumour), and second, that technology is to be comprehended as an 'extension of man' (Brian O'Blivion, the professor who represents McLuhan, asserts that 'the television screen has become the retina of the mind's eye' and wonders whether the signal-induced tumour is really a new organ developing in the brain).[35] Cronenberg's interviews confirm the relevance of McLuhan to *Videodrome*. Discussing the film shortly after its release, Cronenberg postulates that, like the characters in *Videodrome*, no one is really in control of their destiny: 'That's what McLuhan was talking about when he said the reason we have to understand media is because if we don't it's going to control us.'[36] More recently, in his commentary on *Videodrome*, Cronenberg has been explicit about the broad influence of McLuhan, who taught at the University of Toronto at the same time as he was there (though Cronenberg took none of McLuhan's classes).[37] Cronenberg notes that the Cathode Ray Mission and O'Blivion's office were extrapolated from McLuhan's life and work.

Yet these elements of the film, petrified by critical discourse as so many monuments to McLuhan's influence on Cronenberg, offer up interpretations beyond the scope of McLuhan's theory. I would prefer to argue, for instance, that the notion of the screen as a new 'retina', plugged into the sensorium, develops quite naturally out of the themes of abstraction and reification analysed above. As Marx suggests, the human owner of a commodity compensates for the immateriality of its exchange-value—'for this lack in the commodity of a sense of the concrete, physical body of the other commodity'—'by his own five and more senses'.[38] This is simply another way of putting what I have suggested above: that *Videodrome*'s images of hypersensitivity respond to a real world in which the

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turn, is that Cronenberg's formative years were spent in Toronto in the 1950s and 60s, the same environment in which such monumental cultural critics as Frye and McLuhan were working' (though Beard also acknowledges that what matters is not the degree of direct influence, but the emergence of these figures in a similar socio-historical context) (Beard, p. 117).

[35] 'O'Blivion is an edgy parody of McLuhan: he makes "prophetic" pronouncements on media, sometimes almost quoting McLuhan, and, as McLuhan did, he also suffers a brain tumour. Appearing only as a TV "talking head", and later as a room full of videotapes, O'Blivion becomes a referential doppelgänger, citing not only McLuhan but also Glenn Gould, the Canadian pianist who gave up live performance to work exclusively in recordings' (McCutcheon, p. 215).

[36] William Beard and Piers Handling, 'The Interview', in *The Shape of Rage*, pp. 159-98 (p. 187).

[37] Again, see Cronenberg's commentary on the Criterion Collection release.

[38] Marx, *Capital*, I, 179. Marx's point here is that, when an object is produced for the purpose of exchange (that is, when the object becomes a commodity), other objects begin to serve as the forms of appearance of its value. The object's defining property, its exchange-value, is therefore absent, abstracted from it, and the human senses compensate for that abstraction. Jameson develops this compensatory notion of sense perception in *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 47-9.

commodity-form has almost become universal. The malevolence of the medium (the television signal) rather than the message is also comprehensible as a kind of reification: the antagonistic social relations between Convex, O'Blivion, and Renn are materialised in the tumours, in a kind of objectified subjectivity that bears their opposition.[39]

So far our discussion has centred on *Videodrome*'s content: on its references to enclosure and its depiction of a reified society, overstimulated and numb. But the matter of genre now demands our attention, for it offers us a further way of connecting *Videodrome* to its socio-economic context. In the next section, I shall argue that *Videodrome* depicts a kind of horror that is irreducible to the body, that cannot simply be described—in a manner familiar to many critics of Cronenberg—as body horror.[40] I propose to call this 'the horror of association': the term describes the cognitive distress undergone especially by Max Renn, whose mind cannot be switched off or calmed, returning constantly instead to sites of bygone horror. Since we are sutured into Renn's perspective throughout *Videodrome*, we view narrative events as though we, too, were suffering that horror. The film's composition is itself associative or metonymic, then, constantly taking us back, reminding us, pulling against the forward momentum of plot.

Crucially, it is because *Videodrome* is a metonymic text that it seems both to invoke and to reject the melodramatic mode, that at moments of emotional or ethical climax it severs our

[39] We cannot conclude this section without quoting Debord's own comments on McLuhan: 'MacLuhan [*sic*] himself, the spectacle's first apologist, who had seemed to be the most convinced imbecile of the century, changed his mind when he finally discovered in 1976 that "the pressure of the mass media leads to irrationality", and that it was becoming urgent to modify their usage. The sage of Toronto had formerly spent several decades marvelling at the numerous freedoms created by a "global village" instantly and effortlessly accessible to all. Villages, unlike towns, have always been ruled by conformism, isolation, petty surveillance, boredom, and repetitive malicious gossip about the same families. Which is a precise enough description of the global spectacle's present vulgarity, in which it has become impossible to distinguish the Grimaldi-Monaco or Bourbon-Franco dynasties from those who succeeded the Stuarts. However, MacLuhan's [*sic*] ungrateful modern disciples are now trying to make people forget him, hoping to establish their own careers in media celebration of all these new freedoms to "choose" at random from ephemera. And no doubt they will retract their claims even faster than the man who inspired them' (*Comments*, pp. 33-4).

[40] See Shaviro, 'Bodies of Fear'; Lianne McLarty, '"Beyond the Veil of the Flesh": Cronenberg and the Disembodiment of Horror', in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 231-52; Linda Ruth Williams 'The Inside-Out of Masculinity: David Cronenberg's Visceral Pleasures', in *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Michele Aaron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 30-48; Scott Wilson, *The Politics of Insects: David Cronenberg's Cinema of Confrontation* (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 36-68; and Timothy Holland 'Cronenberg's Anaesthetics (Virtual Flesh)', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 15 (2017), 141-51.

tie to what Peter Brooks calls the 'moral occult'. For Brooks, as we shall see, melodrama connects us to this hidden moral domain by means of a kind of metaphoric transaction, but metonymy is antithetical to that: when *Videodrome* threatens to make some moral injunction or comment, the horror of association undercuts it, brings us back to *this* world, blocks off whatever transcendental message the film might have conveyed. The purpose of such a structure, I shall conclude, is to dramatise the absence of such moral meaning in a world increasingly penetrated, increasingly desacralised, by the commodity-form.

4.4 Metonymy against Melodrama

Videodrome's horror is certainly, on the immediate level, that of bodily abjection, the horror of guts and blood: Renn's stomach wound, Convex's bulging entrails, Harlan's bloody and disfigured arm. But it is also and more profoundly the horror of association: of a restless and agitated cognition for which an object is barely contemplated, fixed in awareness, before it mutates into something else, shifting before our mind's eye. One such instance occurs when Renn's secretary, Bridey (Julie Khaner), visits him at his apartment to deliver his wake-up cassette and a videotape from Professor O'Blivion. As she approaches his television, Renn appears to slap her, at which precise moment she turns into Brand. This associative leap repeats later, when Renn dreams he is on the 'Videodrome' set whipping Brand (or, really, whipping a television screen portraying her). After the camera turns away and back again, however, we find Brand transformed into Masha. Masha then jumps from this dream-space to Renn's own room as—having apparently woken up—Renn finds her bound and dead next to him. The three women in Renn's life seem to exist on some frictionless associative continuum, each person liable to shift into one of the others.

Videodrome's viewer is encouraged to read the film in much the same way as Renn experiences his illusions—as a horror of association.[41] The film massages the viewer's own interpretive faculties, inducing the hypersensitivity of Renn and Brand in its audience as well.

[41] Thus, as Wilson observes in his Žižekian reading of the spectator's position in *Videodrome*, 'we are not just seeing Max seeing (although we do), just as we are not seeing *what* Max sees, with the utilization of point-of-view shots (although we do that too): here we see *as* Max sees, which involves, essentially, experiencing the film's diegesis without the aid of those formal anchors that work to locate and contain the diegetic experience' (*The Politics of Insects*, p. 190).

Take, for example, the associative chain that begins with Nicki Brand burning the cigarette onto her skin. The first link we ought to make is between her surname and the literal branding of the skin, and the second link is formed only a few minutes later: we see Renn looking intently at Masha's cigarette, and then a close-up of that cigarette itself (the viewer now sutured into Renn's point of view). With Renn, we are condemned to go back, to return to the scene of body horror, the cigarette scorching Brand's skin. While we could of course integrate the image of the cigarette into some deeper thematic structure—relating it to *Videodrome*'s hellish imagery, say: the flames in which Renn falls after killing himself, the red prison of 'Videodrome'—the film seems to solicit an alternative reading in which, instead of passing into its signified, the cigarette persists at the level of the signifier. It serves less as a meaningful object in its own right, more as a syntagmatic trigger, taking us back to that earlier event, ultimately to the signifier itself: 'Brand'. (In a sense, Nicki Brand was never anything more than a signifier: having died before the beginning of the narrative, she is simply an afterimage the creators of 'Videodrome' use to seduce Renn.)[42] Transporting us to an earlier event in the *fabula*, in something akin to Renn's compulsion to repeat, *Videodrome*'s primary mode of reference is metonymic.

Cronenberg himself cues us to the presence of this horror in his work: Max Renn and Seth Brundle 'cannot turn the mind off', he suggests; 'and the mind undercuts, interprets, puts into context. To allow themselves to go totally into the emotional reality of what's happening to them is to be destroyed completely'.[43] Cronenberg's implication—that another kind of distress, another kind of destruction, is exhibited in his work—admits us a glimpse of something that studies of his body horror necessarily overlook.[44] This is also the moment to recall that, in *Shivers* (1975)—one of Cronenberg's most visceral films—cognition is seen as humanity's true burden: 'Hobbes believed that "man is an animal who thinks too much, an over-rational animal that's lost touch with its body and its instincts" […] In other words, too much brain, not enough guts. So what he came up with to help our guts along was a parasite

[42] It is Bianca who reveals this to us, shortly before she shows Renn Brand's death: 'They killed her, Max. They killed Nicki Brand. She died on "Videodrome". They used her image to seduce you, but she was already dead.' Brand's own claim that she was 'made for that show'—for 'Videodrome'—seems to support this reading. She existed for Renn only in the form of the image. The corollary is that Renn's first hallucination is the Rena King Show.

[43] *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, ed. by Chris Rodley (London: Faber, 1997), p. 115.

[44] On politics as a lacuna in studies of Cronenberg's body horror, see Gordon Sullivan, '"Something That'll Break Through": Political Rupture and Novelty in Cronenberg', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 15.2 (2017), 172-80.

that's "a combination of aphrodisiac and venereal disease that will hopefully turn the world into one beautiful mindless orgy"', as Rollo Linkski (Joe Silver) says, quoting from Emil Hobbes's (Fred Doederlein's) papers. What we perceive as the film's body horror is, for Hobbes, a solution to the horror of human cognition.

Videodrome generates this horror at the level of viewerly experience mainly by literalising figures of speech. Having cut out the tenor, it flips the vehicle into its own tenor in a kind of short-circuit. One of Professor O'Blivion's main theses, we recall, is that television has become reality, that television gives its viewer a kind of 'raw experience' no longer available in reality itself. Lest we would prefer to take that as hyperbole, the wound in Renn's stomach soon literally begins to function as a tape recorder. Bianca O'Blivion later tells Renn that the people behind 'Videodrome' can 'play you like a tape recorder', and that he is 'the video word made flesh', these not figures of speech but objective descriptions of the situation. As another example, in one of his hallucinations, Renn pushes his head into a television screen displaying Nicki's lips, which almost swallow him. Renn remarks to Bianca O'Blivion shortly after that the videotape 'bites'. She replies, 'What kind of teeth do you think it has?'—meaning, seemingly, What effects do you think it has? But the dental metaphor is to be understood quite literally. Brand's claim that she was 'made for' 'Videodrome' also turns out to be much more literal than we first think: as Bianca later tells Renn, Brand really does exist for him only insofar as she appears on 'Videodrome'. Her sole purpose is to 'seduce' Renn through the cathode ray tube. And finally, when Renn's pistol merges with his hand, *Videodrome* effectively literalises McLuhan's proposition that technology is an 'extension of man'.[45]

On this basis, it would be a mistake to read the cigarette or the needle that Renn uses to pierce Brand's ears as euphemistic forms of sexual intercourse, or as means of dodging censorship.[46] *Videodrome* distinguishes itself by making these acts a kind of sexual intercourse in their own right. They are erotic, not because they approximate or refer to sex, figuring phallic penetration, but because they really are sex. The cigarette scene where Nicki burns herself is a conscious inversion of the euphemistic Hollywood code: while the shot of a

[45] Shaviro also picks up on Cronenberg's strategy of literalisation: 'The brutally hilarious strategy of *Videodrome* is to take media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard completely at their word, to overliteralize their claims for the ubiquitous mediatization of the real' (Shaviro, p. 138).

[46] Various sections of *Videodrome* were censored before its release in Canada, as Cronenberg discusses in the Criterion Collection commentary. Cronenberg's major censorship scandal came in the United Kingdom with the release of *Crash* (1996); for an overview of the affair, see Annette Kuhn, '*Crash* and Film Censorship in the UK', *Screen*, 40 (1999), 446-50.

couple smoking on their bedroom balcony, say, typically suggests that they have just enjoyed coitus, now the cigarette is invested with its own immanent erotic content. In much the same way, the film eliminates any referential distance between 'Videodrome' and death: the show is not merely some analogue for the moral decay of the human in a media society. Rather, as Bianca O'Blivion says to Renn near the end of the film, '"Videodrome" is death'. At this moment, a gun protrudes from the television screen, stressing the directness of the equation, the inseparability of its two terms. 'Videodrome' does not symbolise death; it *is* death.

Crucially, *Videodrome*'s proclivity for the literal and the metonymic is what brings it into contrast with melodrama, since this latter is a metaphorical mode. According to Peter Brooks's classic work on the genre, melodrama serves to connect the world of the Enlightenment with the vestiges of the sacred. In melodrama, Brooks argues, '[s]tates of being beyond the immediate context of the narrative, and in excess of it, [are] brought to bear on it, to charge it with intenser significances'.[47] Brooks defines this excessive state more precisely as the 'moral occult': an ineffable space containing the remnants of sacred myth.[48] Crucially for our purposes, Brooks conceives of the shift from reality to the occult as a metaphoric one, a transferral from the vehicle to the tenor, as though reality itself were already metaphorical, already infused with the kind of moral significance that melodrama discloses. But in his analysis of this metaphoric relation, Brooks goes further still: 'the more elusive the tenor becomes—the more difficult it becomes to put one's finger on the nature of the spiritual reality alluded to—the more highly charged is the vehicle, the more strained with pressure to suggest a meaning beyond.'[49] The two sides of the metaphor stand in active and shifting relation to one another; the intensity of the melodrama is inversely proportional to the clarity of the tenor. At one extreme, this means that a tenor too well defined, too obvious, fails to charge the plane of reality at all, rendering mere naturalism. At the other extreme, a tenor too obscure or esoteric invests reality with an acute sense of drama but severs its link to the moral occult.

So it is that the nature of *Videodrome*'s reference—horizontal, between signifiers, rather than vertical, from signifier to signified—makes it antithetical to melodrama, so conceived. The film represents the second limit position: of a moral occult so abstruse and indistinct that

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[47] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 2. For a discussion of the melodrama as a filmic category, see Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, pp. 179-204.
[48] Brooks, p. 5.
[49] Brooks, p. 11.

it can no longer be registered at all. This explains why the reality depicted by *Videodrome* often seems heightened, electrified, hyperbolic—the vehicle here absorbs all the energy of the absent tenor—and yet thwarts any attempt at articulation with a deeper spiritual domain. Perhaps the best example occurs at the film's denouement, at its seemingly most melodramatic moment, when Renn whispers, 'Long live the new flesh,' and kills himself. This climax occurs not once but twice, a repetition that seems to empty the gesture of meaning.[50] Renn's ultimate act being one of brute repetition, following Brand's hypnotic instructions, it cannot be assigned some deeper motivation or purpose, and it therefore resists integration into an occult domain of moral values. 'Only the doubling of the sign truly puts an end to what it designates,' writes Baudrillard in another context: such is also *Videodrome*'s means of obliterating the signified.[51]

Why does *Videodrome* build to these moments of melodramatic tension, only to eviscerate the moral occult? And what might this have to do with enclosure, and the penetration of capital into hitherto uncommodified spaces? For Brooks, we recall, melodrama is best understood as a compensatory response to the French Revolution and the desacralising impulse of the Enlightenment. 'Melodrama represents both the urge toward resacralization and the impossibility of conceiving sacralisation other than in personal terms,' he argues.[52] Yet such a description also evokes the image of capitalism's desacralising dynamism conjured by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*: 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.'[53] It is on the basis of such a similarity that we must take Brooks's analysis further and suggest that melodrama is indissociable from the emergence of a commodity society, this latter being the effect (or retroactive cause) of the bourgeois revolution itself. Melodrama encounters its true purpose when—to pull another

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[50] Shaviro entertains the idea that Renn's death is on an eternal loop: 'The film ends with the sound of his gunshot—perhaps a finality, perhaps a rewind to one more playback' (Shaviro, p. 142).

[51] Baudrillard's concern is the architectural form of the World Trade Center ('Requiem for the Twin Towers', in *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 27-38 (p. 30)).

[52] Brooks, p. 16.

[53] Marx and Engels, p. 223. Both Garry Leonard and Ben Singer link Marx and Engels's diagnosis to the notion of desacralisation. See Leonard, 'Tears of Joy: Hollywood Melodrama, Ecstasy, and Restoring Meta-Narratives of Transcendence in Modernity', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 79 (2010), 819-37 (p. 824); and Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 131-48. For a seminal discussion of Marx's view that, in capitalism, 'all that is holy is profaned', see Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp. 115-20.

phrase from Marx and Engels—there remains 'no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment"': when interpersonal relations are imputed to objects and commodities become our fetish, supplanting the divine.[54] In this context, as Garry Leonard suggests, melodramas offer us 'an alternative means of valuation through capitalism', one attuned more to the symbolic values of ritual and sacrifice than to the economic values of profit and return.[55] Where exchange-value asserts itself as the prime mediator of human relationships, there melodrama finds its meaning as the source of other, more transcendent value-forms.[56]

Thus *Videodrome*'s double movement—encouraging a spiritual reading, then severing the link to the spirit—serves to dramatise the loss of the transcendent in a world increasingly penetrated, increasingly disenchanted by capital, where people cannot relate to each other but through the medium of things, through 'callous "cash payment"'.[57] If the melodrama ordinarily constructs alternative frameworks of valuation, *Videodrome* exposes the lack for which such frameworks compensate. The film recalls us to our experience of reading melodrama, prepares us for the denouement, the pivot from vehicle to tenor, the flash of the moral occult, but disappoints such expectations, grounding us in the meaninglessness of the

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[54] Marx and Engels, p. 222.

[55] Leonard, p. 828.

[56] The relationship between capitalism and melodrama I have just sketched out treats the latter as a response to the increasingly mediatory role that economic value—the alienation of labour-time—plays in the sphere of human relations. But it would also seem possible to connect the two through the division of labour peculiar to capitalism, as Chuck Kleinhans suggests: 'In short, "personal life", the contemporary family, and the special role of women in a social sphere separated from the production sphere can and must be seen as a historically specific form. […] Under capitalism people's personal needs are restricted to the sphere of the family, of personal life, and yet the family cannot meet the demands of being all that the rest of the society is not. This basic contradiction forms the raw material of melodrama' ('Notes on Melodrama and the Family under Capitalism', in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. by Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), pp. 197-204 (p. 200)). However, these two explanations—one centring on value, the other on the division of labour—are not incommensurable. Value begins to take on its mediatory role only once the production process has become separate from the reproduction process, thus only when labour-time is isolated from non-labour-time, productive labour from unproductive labour. The primacy of value is indexed to that separation. Its ultimate source is, of course, enclosure.

[57] Shaviro likewise observes that, in Cronenberg's films, '[m]aster narratives of social progress or myths of inherent evil or of spiritual redemption are no longer available to inure us to the excruciating passion of the subjugated body. There is no vision of transcendence in the claustrophobic world of these films' (Shaviro, p. 115). I try to proceed a step further here by asking about the causes, the contextual origins of Cronenberg's dismissal of the transcendent. We should also note the ambiguity in Shaviro's argument: while Cronenberg rejects 'master narratives' (a position he shares with much postmodern culture), he also provides a counterpoint to postmodernism, for Shaviro.

signifier instead. Again, Nicki Brand is the ultimate example. Even at the film's conclusion, after Renn has taken his revenge on Harlan and Convex, 'Videodrome' continues to control him through Brand, who talks to Renn from the abandoned ship's television. 'Videodrome' is now without its driving agents, without its political aims or its 'philosophy', but it functions regardless: it claims Renn as its victim, a death at once seemingly pregnant with meaning—'Long live the new flesh'—and also emptied of meaning. As I have already suggested, Brand is herself nothing but a signifier, since she dies before the narrative begins. Renn never sees her in the flesh. Now, at its climax, when Brand calls Renn to his own meaningless destruction, *Videodrome* also returns, winding the events of the narrative back into its primordial signifier, Nicki Brand.

4.5 Conclusion

It has seemed impossible to discuss *Videodrome* in this chapter without referring to the hybrid generic codes that it incorporates into its structure. The film appears to take some of its *mise en scène* and character types from noir; it raises its narrative to the pitch of melodrama while also, crucially, eliding the moral occult; and it includes clear elements of horror—the horror of association as much as body horror. Yet *Videodrome* belongs in this study because it is also a work of science fiction, and I propose, as a means of concluding, to suggest why this is so.

For Darko Suvin—as we recall from the introduction—all science fiction serves as an analogy for the conditions obtaining in its creator's empirical environment, as an exploration of the possibilities immanent in the present: 'However fantastic (in the sense of empirically unverifiable) the characters or world described, always *de nobis fabula narratur*.'[58] It follows, for Suvin, that the chief problem confronting science-fiction criticism is how to distinguish between different kinds of analogy, analogy between the text's future (or past) and our present.[59] I would argue that the literalisation we have observed in *Videodrome* be included as one such kind of analogy. If this seems paradoxical (analogy bearing much

[58] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 92.
[59] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 95. Jameson adds 'world-reduction' to Suvin's models of analogy and extrapolation in 'World-Reduction in Le Guin: The Emergence of Utopian Narrative', *Science Fiction Studies*, 2 (1975), 221-30.

resemblance to metaphor), it is only because our ordinary discourse about reality is already rich with euphemism and metaphor—figures of speech that, taken literally, would produce something quite different to what actually exists. In *Videodrome*, the video really does bite, the television really is an addictive drug, and Renn really is controlled like a tape recorder. This diegetic world, made strange by means of literalisation, may then begin to serve as an analogy for our own, for our imprisonment in a fetishistic world, where objects themselves contain a human property: value.[60]

Yet this analogical device is, as we have seen, just one of *Videodrome*'s engagements with the context of enclosure. The others include its invocation of piracy and copyright law, its depiction of a society increasingly reified by the expansion of the commodity-form, and its thematisation of melodrama. The prime theorist of this society is not, as a survey of the critical literature seems to suggest, Marshall McLuhan, but rather Guy Debord, for whom the spectacle is the name for this 'ultimate fulfilment' of the fetishism of commodities.[61] Like the other films examined in this thesis, then, *Videodrome* becomes fully comprehensible only when we analyse it as a response to the new enclosures.

The next chapter, which examines Verhoeven's 1987 film *RoboCop*, returns us to the more familiar science-fictional device of extrapolation. The film's strategy is to take the enclosures of its moment and blow them up, such that a single company—Omni Consumer Products—threatens to take over, not just policing, but water, space exploration, hospitals, and energy. As I shall argue, however, Verhoeven's film also contains a utopian moment: RoboCop's dream, utterly unanticipated by the scientists who made him and the capitalists whose interests he is meant to serve. Thus *RoboCop* will be seen to offer a more explicit kind of utopianism than we have observed in the last two chapters, in *Blade Runner* and *Videodrome*, where a character's strolling around the city seems the final unalienated, self-directed activity.

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[60] 'The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things' (Marx, *Capital*, I, 165).

[61] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, para. 36.

CHAPTER FIVE

Plumber or Police Officer?: Enclosure as a Category Error in *RoboCop*

5.1 Introduction

'Take a close look at the track record of this company and you'll see that we've gambled in markets usually regarded as nonprofit: hospitals, prisons, space exploration,' crows Dick Jones (Ronny Cox), the Vice President of Omni Consumer Products (or 'OCP'). Behind Jones, on an array of television screens, 'marine', 'data', and 'energy' also appear—other 'nonprofit' areas, it would seem, that OCP has heroically ventured into. Jones makes this presentation to the company's board, before whom he is about to unveil his proposed enforcement droid, ED-209, a huge machine equipped with automatic guns and rocket launchers. As Jones informs us, OCP have won a contract to manage Detroit's police department; thus the purpose of ED-209 is 'urban pacification', fighting the city's rampant crime. But there is also a deeper motivation for OCP, which aims to raze Detroit and build the gentrified Delta City in its place. Crime, we understand, must be eliminated before that can happen, before the builders can start work on the new city. Unfortunately for Jones, the ED-209 droid malfunctions, gunning down an employee. The CEO, known as the Old Man (Dan O'Herlihy), puts his head in his hands. 'Dick, I'm very disappointed,' he says. 'We're scheduled to begin construction in six months. Your "temporary setback" could cost us fifty million dollars in interest payments alone.'

Jones's mishap opens the door for Bob Morton (Miguel Ferrer), who works as part of Security Concepts (seemingly a department within OCP), to propose his 'RoboCop

programme' as a contingency. The advantage of Morton's scheme is that it keeps organic components in the police officer, who is therefore properly a cyborg, and who seems less likely to fail than a pure machine such as ED-209. The Old Man gives Morton permission to take his plans forward; all that is needed is for a police officer to die, to 'volunteer' to give their corpse to the RoboCop programme. Alex Murphy (Peter Weller) is here the unwitting participant, but Morton directs his scientists to remove Murphy's entire body, leaving only (we presume) the brain. And since Murphy's memory is also to be wiped, it seems that RoboCop is a cyborg in a merely formal sense. No genuinely living or active human material remains within.

RoboCop begins to clear up crime in Detroit until, quite incomprehensibly, he dreams. In the dream, RoboCop relives Murphy's death at the hands of Clarence Boddicker (Kurtwood Smith) and his gang. How RoboCop is able to dream remains unknown to us and to OCP, but these visions of Boddicker change him: RoboCop deviates from OCP's priorities and turns his attention to the gang. Teaming up with Murphy's old partner, Anne Lewis (Nancy Allen), while the rest of the police department are on strike, protesting OCP's takeover, RoboCop hunts the gang down and kills them at an abandoned steel mill. By now, RoboCop has learnt that the Boddicker gang is in cahoots with Jones, who earlier sent Boddicker to kill Morton. Jones portrays Delta City as a prime opportunity for Boddicker, 'the man who knows how to open up new markets'. The link between Jones and the criminals being proven, RoboCop returns to OCP's headquarters and concludes the film by shooting Jones.

OCP's privatisation of the police thus augurs the total commodification of Detroit. The 'Omni' of Omni Consumer Products declares an intention to subsume all areas of human activity under the market, to complete the process of commodification with Delta City. As such, *RoboCop*'s diegetic Detroit is a response to, even a science-fictional extrapolation of, the new enclosures.[1] It is the task of this chapter to trace the various ways that *RoboCop* represents such a context. It does so in particular, I shall argue, by dramatising the various category errors to which the rampant expansion of the commodity gives rise. Areas of our social world that were not primarily defined or conceptualised by their relation to capital must now be rethought, and that process of rethinking acts as the motor for *RoboCop*'s main conflicts. As we shall see, the police officers' debates over their status as labourers—are they manual workers like plumbers, say, and should they therefore be able to strike?—attest to the

[1] For a discussion of the real legal context of the kind of privatisation dramatised in *RoboCop*, such as the contracting out of policing, see Michael Robertson, 'Property and Privatisation in *RoboCop*', *International Journal of Law in Context*, 4 (2008), 217-35.

conceptual challenges posed by the privatisation of law enforcement. Meanwhile, is RoboCop himself a human, a machine, or a product? Whose property is he, precisely?

Such an argument implies that the true contextual object of *RoboCop*—the referent on which it focuses its attention—is capitalism, not machinery or technological development as such. This puts us at odds with Telotte's reading of the film, which concentrates on the conflict between human and machine and refers to *RoboCop*'s context euphemistically as 'a fantastic world' or as a 'postmodern, thoroughly technologized culture', hardly daring to utter the word 'capitalism'.[2] Though Steven Best considers the relationship between *RoboCop* and capitalism in more depth, he also concludes that the film's 'sharpest criticism is directed not against media or capitalism per se, but against technology'.[3] Hence, for Best, *RoboCop*'s basically liberal approach to social problems fails to identify capitalism as the source of reification and alienation. My argument in this chapter disputes such a conclusion: though *RoboCop* does not show us the very core of capitalist exploitation, its depiction of the new enclosures, of the corporation's will to commodify everything, does indeed shed light on the source of the capital-relation. The film's main shortcoming, I shall suggest, is not so much an incomplete critique of reification as an inattention to race—surprising especially given *RoboCop*'s setting in Detroit.

The next section of this chapter analyses the relationship between OCP's privatisations and the new enclosures. Here I discuss the conflict within the police force over the question of strikes, which become a matter of contention because the police officers are unsure how to react to the privatisation of their work, the encroachment of the capital-relation into the police department. In some ways, this recalls our analysis of the labour contract in *Alien*: *RoboCop* too dramatises the unfreedom concealed beneath the apparently free choice we make in signing such a contract. This section also posits that *RoboCop*'s core dilemma—is RoboCop a machine or a cyborg, and to what degree can OCP then own him?—derives from the contemporaneous expansion of intellectual property rights.

The third section suggests that *RoboCop* is fundamentally a utopian film and that RoboCop's dream is the primary site of this utopianism. The dream expresses the existence of something that corporate rationality cannot control or eliminate. It thus implies, in quasi-autonomist fashion, that human beings cannot be fully subjected to the dictates of capital.

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[2] Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, pp. 175, 177.

[3] Steven Best, '*RoboCop*: In the Detritus of Hi-Technology', *Jump Cut*, 34 (1989) <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC34folder/RobocopBest.html> [accessed 14 June 2018] (para. 21 of 49).

The utopianism of RoboCop's dream is, in addition, only the individual expression of the police officers' strike; their resistance to OCP and capital manifests itself as Murphy's resistance to automation and reification. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of Irvin Kershner's sequel, *RoboCop 2* (1990), which elaborates and clarifies many of the core themes of Verhoeven's original.

5.2 Enclosure's Category Errors

RoboCop's critique of the new enclosures begins with the boardroom itself, which, as Edward Neumeier (the film's screenwriter) points out, was made in the image of the Reagan White House, the Old Man modelled on Reagan himself.[4] OCP's boardroom is the afterimage of government in an era of privatisation: it depicts the latter transposed onto the enterprise, the power of the politician become the power of the board member. Susan Jeffords's reading of *RoboCop*, according to which OCP can be understood as an allegory for the American state in the 1980s, seems to miss precisely this conflation.[5] The film cannot use the corporation as an analogue for Reagan's government because it takes, as its central concern, what happens when government becomes corporate, when the gap between the two halves of Jeffords's allegorical equation diminishes. The film reimagines the bureaucratic officials of old as directors and CEOs, the political class made manifest as the capitalist class. In an interview with Cornea, Verhoeven puts it most bluntly: 'when, somewhere near the end of the movie, one character asks Jones if the corporation has access to the military—then Jones, the CO of the corporation, says that there's no fucking difference—the military and the corporation are the same.'[6]

RoboCop's striking police officers, threatened by the prospect of automation, also recall us to the context of the new enclosures. It will be remembered that Midnight Notes sees the

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[4] Edward Neumeier, quoted in Milo Sweedler, 'Class Warfare in the *RoboCop* Films', *Jump Cut*, 56 (2014-15) <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc56.2014-2015/SweedlerRobocop/index.html> [accessed 14 June 2018], 1-2 (p. 1).

[5] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 108.

[6] Cornea, pp. 139-40. This is the same situation we encounter in *Alien*: there, as I noted in Chapter 2, Weylan-Yutani also has its own weapons division, though we never learn its precise motives for maintaining one.

new enclosures as a means of weakening labour, breaking its resistance to capital. As such, the decentralisation of labour in Detroit's automobile industry—which proved, according to Thomas J. Sugrue, 'an effective means for employers to control increasing labor costs and weaken powerful trade unions'—ought to be understood as one such instance of enclosure.[7] Typical of the new enclosures, the deindustrialisation of Detroit was as much an effort to suppress the agitation of workers and unions as to maximise profit; or, rather, weakening subjective resistance was a vital part of decreasing wages, and thus of increasing surplus-value. Portraying this threat to the police officer's jobs, *RoboCop* recalls one of the basic forms of accumulation by dispossession, where capital hurls workers from their jobs into the 'industrial reserve army'.[8] As Harvey argues, following Marx, sometimes it is in capital's interest to put people out of work, especially if automation creates higher productivity and applies downward pressure on wages through unemployment. In this context, the anthropoid cop perfectly embodies the lack where previous employees used to be: in a strikingly literal way, his robotic form displaces the now-unemployed officers.

This penetration of the capital-relation deep into the fabric of Detroit causes increasing uncertainty over what sort of labourer the police officer is. The dilemma appears at the beginning of the film, when Murphy enters the police station and informs Sargent Warren Reid (Robert DoQui) that he has been transferred to Metro West from Metro South. 'We work for a living down here, Murphy,' Reid replies, his comment recalling the critical injuries (just reported in the film) of Frank Fredrickson, another Detroit police officer. As such, in this first remark, 'work' means something more than work: it means a state of precariousness, even peril, beyond that of other wage-workers. Only a few moments later, as the camera takes us with Murphy into the locker room, we learn that the police officers are beginning to contemplate striking, largely in response to the threat of privatisation. Overhearing this discussion, Reid puts his foot down: 'I don't wanna hear any more talk about a strike,' he says. 'We're not plumbers; we're police officers. And police officers don't strike.' Thus Reid again implies that the activity of the police officer rises above the status of ordinary manual labour. In the end, however, the twin threats of privatisation and automation, as well as the mortal danger of their job, force the police officers to walk out, rejecting both Reid's warning and his definition of wage-labour. This amounts to nothing less than an

[7] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 128.
[8] Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 141.

affirmation by the police officers themselves that they are *not* qualitatively different to the plumber.

Such a dispute, such a slippage in the definition of the labourer, clarifies the stakes of the whole film. The primary opposition explored in *RoboCop* is not, as Telotte argues, between humans and technology, but rather between labour and capital.[9] Or, to put that another way, *RoboCop* is interested in technology only insofar as this latter's development serves the demands of capital accumulation. For one thing, and as I have just noted, the film shows persistent interest in the relationship between the state apparatus (here, the police) and wage-labour. For another, it is quite clear that the source of the conflict between human and machine in *RoboCop* is the corporation, if not the profit motive itself: recall that the ED-209 machine's malfunction is reprehensible because it will cost OCP $50 million in interest payments, not because of the loss of human life, human welfare thereby subordinated to profitability. And finally, if the return of Murphy's subjectivity to RoboCop 'reminds us how much our scientific planning fails to account for, how much of the human still falls outside its purview' (as Telotte puts it),[10] then this is only because science embodies most overtly the kind of formalism and rationalisation that Lukács associates with reification, and therefore with the expansion of the commodity-form into all zones and levels of society. To determine that *RoboCop* concerns itself most deeply with the dichotomy of human and machine is to fail to penetrate through such superficial oppositions to the labour-capital relationship that undergirds them.

In much the same way, the significance of *RoboCop*'s depiction of Detroit's criminal underworld is comprehensible only in the context of capital accumulation: 'Ain't no better way of stealing than free enterprise', as Emil Antonowsky (Paul McCrane), a member of Boddicker's gang, remarks. The gang steals cocaine and sells it for a profit, an act that Antonowsky frames as 'capital investment'. Boddicker is meanwhile portrayed as the capitalist par excellence, 'the man who knows how to open up new markets' in Delta City. Of course, Boddicker not really a capitalist in the strict sense—he is not an exploiter of wage-labour or an owner of means of production—but *RoboCop* uses him nonetheless to cue us to the coercion that founds the 'silent compulsion of economic relations' (to use one of Marx's evocative phrases).[11] Boddicker embodies the violence antecedent to, and underlying, capital accumulation—the violence inherent to the apparently benign process of 'opening up new

[9] Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, pp. 161-78.
[10] Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, pp. 168-9.
[11] Marx, *Capital*, I, 899.

markets'. *RoboCop*'s focus on criminality is thus a way of making the oppressive underside of capital accumulation visible. Contrary to OCP's claim that crime must be eliminated in order for workers to be able to build Delta City, we learn that crime will fester and grow all the better among the gleaming skyscrapers of that gentrified metropolis. Corporate exceptionalism here reaches beyond RoboCop's Directive 4, which prohibits him from arresting an officer of OCP: Delta City, we suppose, is founded on such a directive. The corporation will be above suspicion, and so will its crime.

RoboCop also gestures towards the contradictory nature of the freedom inaugurated by enclosure and enshrined in the labour contract. Let us return to Marx's analysis of the relationship between freedom and dependency. Capitalism requires 'free workers', Marx suggests,

> in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietors. The free workers are therefore free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own.[12]

The worker's freedom is a condition of utter dependency; selling their labour-power is requisite to their survival. Freedom in this context means only the freedom to starve, to be homeless; and it is precisely this sense of the word, this formal and dependent kind of freedom, that *RoboCop* dramatises in OCP's cyborg programme. Near the beginning of the film, we learn that Morton has 'restructured the police department and placed prime candidates according to risk factor' for the role of RoboCop, this being the reason for Murphy's redeployment to Metro West. What restructuring and candidature really mean here, of course, is precariousness and death. Morton adopts this euphemistic style again when he tells his colleague Donald Johnson (Felton Perry) that the RoboCop programme will begin 'as soon as some poor schmuck volunteers'—as soon as a police officer is murdered. Only then, when Murphy is dead, lying in the operating theatre, do the relations of compulsion underpinning the 'free' labour contract come into view. 'Well he signed the release forms when he joined the force, and he's legally dead. We can do pretty much what we want to him,' affirms Johnson. Murphy's labour contract volunteers him to die and permits OCP free

[12] Marx, *Capital*, I, 874.

use of his body after his death. It grants freedom to the corporation, casts chains on the worker.

RoboCop attends to the unfreedom at the heart of the labour contract because it is produced at a moment when capital renews its own foundations by making the worker still 'freer'. Yet there remains one further form of enclosure that pertains to *RoboCop*, namely the expansion of intellectual property rights from around 1980. Such has been the development of its legal framework in the last forty years that, at least for Boyle, intellectual property law today constitutes a 'second enclosure movement', where 'things that were formerly thought of as common property, or as "uncommodifiable", or outside the market altogether, are being covered with new, or newly extended, property rights'.[13] Notable among the many examples Boyle gives are the efforts to extend property rights to compilations of facts; the patenting of algorithms as soon as one proposes to solve them 'by means of a computer'; increasingly generous legal interpretations of what counts as a 'nonobvious', and therefore patentable, innovation; lengthier and stricter copyright protections on music; and the growth of patents in biotechnology. Shiva suggests that the rising US trade deficit in the 1980s and the emergence of Japan as a genuine economic competitor propelled this expansion, whose aim was to make intellectual property the main US export.[14] Because trade in knowledge could occur only if other countries recognised the same intellectual property rights as did the United States, Western powers took it upon themselves to apply US laws on patents and intellectual property around the world, mainly through the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, begun in 1986.[15]

For one thing, Jones's and Morton's frequent reminders that RoboCop, a cyborg, belongs to them evokes this moment of broadening intellectual property rights. But more generally, the core dilemmas of *RoboCop* (how much of Murphy survives in RoboCop, and how far then can he be owned?) recall the questions being thrown up by the application of intellectual property law to biotechnology. As I noted in the introduction, the first mammalian patent was granted in 1988, one year after *RoboCop*'s release.[16] This decision followed the landmark case *Diamond v. Chakrabarty*, where the United States Supreme Court interpreted the genetic engineering of a micro-organism as 'manufacture' and granted the first patent on life.[17] The

[13] Boyle, p. 45.
[14] Shiva, p. 19.
[15] Shiva, p. 20.
[16] Shiva, p. 1.
[17] Shiva, p. 41.

key point here is that the controversy surrounding this case—to what degree did Chakrabarty actually create life?—reflects the interpretive conundrum of *RoboCop*: to what degree does the robot remain Murphy? To what degree did OCP then 'invent' RoboCop? The dramatic indeterminacy at the heart of *RoboCop* thus seems to develop out of the problematic of intellectual property rights, especially as they were extended to new domains.

So it is that *RoboCop* derives much of its narrative energy from category errors. The debates about whether the police should strike are rooted in their uncertainty whether the cop counts as a labourer. Similarly, when RoboCop goes to arrest Jones, he learns that he is product before he is a worker, that his freedom to carry out his law-enforcing role is enframed or delimited by OCP's property claim. Yet there remains a dialectical reversal to be observed here, for while such category errors motivate the antagonisms of the narrative, they also form the ground of its utopianism. The utopian quality of RoboCop's dream consists in the surprise emergence of the subject from the object—in the realisation that RoboCop is not entirely object, but rather some amalgam of subject and object, reducible to neither category in itself. The political significance of Murphy's return will be our chief concern in the next section.

5.3 The Body and the City

RoboCop dreams twice. He has a nightmare of Murphy's violent death and then, shortly after, having returned to his empty home, a daydream of Murphy's domestic life, which includes his wife and son. That RoboCop dreams of home and family takes on particular significance here because Detroit, the birthplace of Fordism, is associated with the emergence of the 'family wage', which was supposed to allow a male worker to support his wife and children.[18] In this context, the man becomes the guarantor of the woman's means of subsistence, and marriage is redefined as a mode of access to such subsistence. It follows that

[18] However, as Kathleen Stanley and Joan Smith point out, this was far from a reality in Detroit: families depended on subsistence work by wife and child, and in the postwar period, the wife's wage was commonly needed to supplement the husband's ('The Detroit Story: The Crucible of Fordism', in *Creating and Transforming Households: The Constraints of the World-Economy*, ed. by Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 33-62). See also Fraser's discussion of the Fordist approach to social reproduction in 'Contradictions of Capital and Care', pp. 108-12.

the empty home and the dream of wife and child are more than a kind of nostalgia for Murphy's family. They are also, just as poignantly, marks of the loss of that family's access to means of subsistence (a concept that includes housing and shelter) after the husband has left. In this sense, it does not matter why Murphy's wife and child moved away (we never know their motive); that Murphy has gone, and that the house is left empty, is enough to remind us of the patriarchal form of dependency institutionalised in the family wage. Only in this context—that of the ideal family wage—then, does the full meaning of *RoboCop*'s dream-sequence (his nightmare, his return home, his daydream) become visible.

The daydream and the nightmare represent the miraculous survival of a subjectivity that OCP and its scientists thought they had excised (their work purportedly involved 'total body prosthesis' and blanking Murphy's memory). They bear witness to something incalculable in RoboCop's apparatus—something that has eluded OCP's efforts to transform a human into an object—and thus articulate, I would suggest, a kind of rudimentary autonomism. The notion that subjects cannot be fully controlled, that a minimal resistance is virtually constitutive of subjectivity, is central to Hardt and Negri's theorisation of the multitude, which is disciplined only because, at some fundamental level, it remains stubbornly resisting, free.[19] This is why Hardt and Negri define capital as '*reactive*', adapting to the subject's primary modes of agitation in a given period: 'The power of the proletariat imposes limits on capital and not only determines the crisis but dictates the terms and nature of the [subsequent] transformation.'[20] For Midnight Notes, too, as we have seen, such resistance is precisely the reason for the return of enclosure, which aims to deprive the proletariat of the terrain on which they might fight back. *RoboCop* is virtually an allegory of this process, a demonstration that some hard core of subjective resistance always persists beneath the imperatives of capital accumulation. (We saw much the same thing in *Alien*: that the alien itself, though it initially accords with the demands of the company, also instantiates the limits of corporate control.) In this sense, RoboCop's body serves as the heightened means of expression of the police officers' strike action. The dream, functioning here as a kind of protest against OCP, is only the psychological manifestation of the officers' protest against privatisation and precariousness. Though RoboCop does not—perhaps cannot—strike, his decision to avenge Murphy's death, to prioritise arresting the Boddicker gang, is, in an indirect and limited way, also a form of rebellion against the dictates of OCP.

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[19] See, for instance, their analysis of Foucault's distinction between biopolitics and biopower in *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 56-63.
[20] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 268.

Yet this is still not quite to comprehend the properly utopian element in RoboCop's dream. Because we know that Murphy underwent full body prosthesis, the scientists blanking his memory, it is unclear how, exactly, RoboCop is able to dream. Where would such a dream come from? Although this is clearly Murphy's vision, a personal recollection of family life, the dream is untethered from Murphy's body; it emanates from some no-place, some *outopia*, beyond his body but somehow within RoboCop's own. So it is that the dream bears witness to some intrinsic, universal human capacity for dreaming. The dream seems to exist as the lowest common denominator of human subjectivity, some small part of the subject that remains even after all the other parts have been surgically removed. The irruption of the dream sublates the film's individualism with a kind of collectivism, an appeal to universality.

RoboCop's utopianism thus operates at two levels simultaneously: that of the individual body (Murphy's dream) and that of collective praxis (the police officers' strike). These two, I have suggested, are expressions of each other, such that the dream—and RoboCop's subsequent departure from protocol—is the individual and psychological equivalent of the officers' protest.[21] It is now worth noting that such a bifurcation, such a distinction between individual and collective utopianisms, is virtually constitutive of the concept of utopia itself. For instance, Jameson has sought to schematise what he calls the 'two distinct lines of descendency' from More's original utopia: 'the one intent on the realization of the Utopian program, the other an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices.'[22] Jameson proceeds to define the body as the most rudimentary form of the impulse and the city as one of the most developed forms of the programme. This distinction seems to derive in part from Sargent's work on utopian literature, according to which such forms may be divided into 'utopias of sensual gratification or body utopias' (which envisage a simple life, free from scarcity) and 'the utopia of human contrivance or the city utopia' (an expanded form, where humans start to construct and manage their own utopian societies).[23]

Yet *RoboCop* also synthesises these two halves, these two dimensions of utopia, the body and the city. This synthesis is the police department's locker room, whose egalitarianism Milo Sweedler is at pains to point out:

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[21] This equivalence becomes impossible in *RoboCop 2*, however: there, RoboCop is explicitly identified as a strike-breaker.

[22] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 3.

[23] Sargent, pp. 10-11.

> Verhoeven presents the precinct's unisex locker room as though it were the most natural thing in the world, not even worthy of comment. Women change clothes (and presumably shower) alongside men, and no one seems to find this the slightest bit awkward or unusual. I can think of no other mainstream Hollywood sci-fi or action film that presents male and female partial frontal nudity (from the waist up) so nonchalantly.[24]

Figure 5: Unflinching egalitarianism

The utopianism of the locker room is neither individual nor universal, then, but a synthesis of the two: the social space of a particular subgroup (police officers) from which the gender antagonism in particular seems to have been exorcised. But even here there remains a caveat: as we enter the locker room (the camera following Murphy), we overhear several police officers lamenting the imminent privatisation of the force. This is the same scene that culminates with Reid's assertion that police are not like plumbers, that they should not go on strike. Hence the scene places its accent less on the egalitarian state of the locker room than on the increasingly embattled state of the police; or, to put that another way, the utopianism of its gender relations serves primarily as a backdrop or negative to the worsening class antagonism. It throws this latter into relief.

[24] Sweedler, p. 2.

Though Sweedler is right to note how strikingly nonchalant *RoboCop* is in its depiction of male and female nudity, the kind of equality thereby expressed is also readily found in other Hollywood science-fiction films of this period. I have already noted that *Alien* begins by portraying the crew of the Nostromo sitting around a circular table, chatting amicably, signs of seniority and hierarchy invisible at first. Such harmony is then broken by the characters' debates over the terms of the labour contract: capitalist relations of production there, as here, in *RoboCop*, are shown breaking the peace. It is also worth noting the specifically gendered aspect of *Alien*'s equality: it is unremarkable, for the other characters, that Ripley, a high-ranking crew member, is a woman. At least in terms of the division of labour, *Alien* depicts a workforce from which categories of gender seem to have been eliminated.[25] Venusville—one area of the human colony on *Total Recall*'s Mars, which we shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter—also seems to offer an image of quasi-utopian comradeship and solidarity: its mutant and non-mutant humans mix as though their gruesome bodily deformations were irrelevant. And once again, such a community is under threat from the outside: specifically, from the Mars administration, which determines to crush the resistance fomenting in Venusville.

I have suggested that *RoboCop* uses Murphy's dream—a surprise irruption of subjectivity into a robot—as a means of articulating a kind of universalism, a common propensity for social dreaming. Yet it seems to me that the film's treatment of race also generally undermines such a claim or appeal to universality. Though *RoboCop* does include some black characters (notably Johnson, Reid, the criminal Joe Cox (Jesse D. Goins), and several black police officers), this remains a narrative about white heroism in Detroit—a city that has had a black majority population since the 1970s.[26] It is not incumbent on a science-fiction film to mirror, in a strict one-to-one ratio, the real demographic situation of Detroit (this would be antithetical to the genre's innately speculative, extrapolative logic). What

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[25] As Penley notes, 'Dan O'Bannon's treatment for [*Alien*] was unique in writing each role to be played by either a man or a woman. Ridley Scott's direction followed through on this idea, producing a film that is (for the most part) stunningly egalitarian' (Penley, pp. 124-5). For a contrary view, see Neale, 'Issues of Difference', pp. 213-16.

[26] Notable too is the sheer degree of racial segregation between the city of Detroit and the suburbs. 'Neighbourhood segregation does not distinguish Detroit from Atlanta, Chicago, Boston, or New York,' Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry J. Holzer point out. 'In the nation's older metropolitan areas with substantial African American populations, blacks and whites seldom live in the same neighbourhoods. But the thoroughness with which long-term social, economic, and racial trends produced an African American central city in Detroit surrounded by an overwhelmingly white suburban ring makes Detroit unique' (*Detroit Divided* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), p. 9).

matters, however, is that race is neutralised or erased here in a way that gender is not. For instance, shortly after Murphy receives his uniform, we see Lewis fight and subdue a felon in the police station. Murphy is impressed—'Pretty neat', he says—but he does not seem to compliment Lewis because he is especially surprised at a woman's physical toughness.[27] As the fight follows the locker-room scene, we are encouraged to read Murphy's judgement as though it too transcends categories of gender. Thus *RoboCop* demonstrates conspicuously the equal standing of women in the police force. The police officers' indifference towards gender challenges the viewer's gender stereotypes, their expectation, say, that Lewis would be a weak fighter. The film makes this erasure of gender difference overt. Crucially, while *RoboCop*'s Detroit also does not appear to contain explicit racism or racial discrimination, the issue is not brought into the narrative foreground in the same way that Lewis's stereotype-defying physical ability is.[28] The film thematises the elision of gender in the police force to a degree that it does not with race.[29]

5.4 Conclusion

This thesis has so far argued, not only that *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *Videodrome*, and *RoboCop* all engage with the new enclosures, but that, as the decade proceeds, the new privatisations and dispossessions come into sharper focus in the Hollywood science-fiction film. We should now be able to appreciate the distance between *Alien*'s representations (in 1979) and

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[27] This is not to say that women are treated equally outside of the police station: the lewd television show, glimpsed throughout the film, quite clearly reduces woman to the status of sexual object, to an object of the male gaze, in a way that contrasts with, say, Murphy's first gaze at Lewis.

[28] One may point to Lewis's encounter with Cox in the disused factory as a counterexample. When she sneaks up on him, Lewis finds Cox urinating; this catches her off-guard and gives him the upper hand in their combat. But this very explicit—and biological—inscription of sexual difference serves primarily as a contrast with the locker room, where police officers are indifferent to their colleagues' full-frontal nudity. The sharply gendered space of the factory is thereby counterposed with the egalitarian space of the locker room. What matters, again, is that the film appears to be conscious of gender dynamics in a way that it is not of racial dynamics.

[29] It is here worth comparing *RoboCop* with *Alien*, which likewise seems to emphasise the gender equality in the Nostromo more than any racial equality (Parker, the only black character, is a manual labourer, lower in the hierarchy than all but one of the other white characters), and contrasting it with *Blade Runner*, which effectively reinscribes race into its problematic by having Bryant use the term 'skinjob', a derogatory epithet for the Replicants. 'In history books,' Deckard informs us, 'he's the kind of cop used to call black men "niggers".'

RoboCop's (in 1987): where the former mainly portrays the situation in which enclosure would intervene—where it depicts low-level class struggle and hints at the state of overaccumulation—*RoboCop* represents a corporation that is quite literally enclosing the city, bringing hospitals, energy, prisons, and space travel into the remit of the private company. We sense that the Hollywood science-fiction film itself was developing a more or less consistent argument in the course of the 1980s, refining its understanding of the socio-economic transformation underway at that moment.

In this context, it seems fitting to conclude our discussion of *RoboCop* with a brief analysis of its sequel, Irvin Kirshner's *RoboCop 2*, released in 1990, since it brings many of the elements present in the original to their logical conclusion. Most significantly for us, the sequel depicts OCP taking over not merely individual public services, but the city itself. We learn that the Detroit administration—headed by Mayor Marvin Kuzak (Willard E. Pugh)—owes OCP more than $37 million, and that if the city defaults, OCP has the right to foreclose all public assets. 'We're taking Detroit private,' the Old Man affirms, before the mayor blurts out the essential ideological conflict of the film: 'You want Detroit to tear itself apart, so you can raid it like you would any other corporation?' *RoboCop 2* thus imagines something like what Naomi Klein would come to refer to as 'disaster capitalism': 'orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities.'[30] The city's crisis of public order and its burgeoning debt are here such 'opportunities' for OCP's privatisation of everything. *RoboCop 2* takes this perversity still further, however: the producers of Nuke—a highly popular, highly addictive drug—offer to settle the city's debts to OCP in return for legal immunity, and Kuzak agrees. The choice confronting him is not between private or public provision of the city's core amenities, but rather between which private organisation will take control of Detroit. To whose coercion will Kuzak submit?

I have already suggested that the original *RoboCop* depicts dependency and freedom enmeshed at the heart of the capital-relation. While the labour contract itself is not as explicitly at stake here, Nuke serves *RoboCop 2* as another such figure for the subject's paradoxical unfreedom in capitalism. When Kuzak meets with the people behind Nuke, to his surprise he finds himself seated opposite a child, Hob (Gabriel Damon), who is now in charge of the drug's production. 'We don't go shoving our shit down anybody's throat, and we don't advertise it like they do with cigarettes and booze,' Hob says. Angie (Galyn Görg), who also

[30] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Allen Lane: London, 2007), p. 6.

works for Nuke, adds, in much the same vein: ‘Leave us alone, and anybody who wants it, gets it.’ Of course, we know that Nuke is not so benign, that it drives its users inexorably towards dependency. It is by such means that Hob compels Angie to yield to his plans: he can withhold the drugs that she needs. Hence we also know, analogously, that Hob and Angie’s recourse to the rhetoric of free markets—‘anyone who wants it, gets it’—conceals its own source of oppression (which Marx would identify as the ‘hidden abode’ of production, the locus of capitalist exploitation). Drug dependency itself becomes symbolic of the labourer’s free unfreedom in capitalism.

So it is that the sequel turns on the same concepts—privatisation and dependency—as did its original. If anything, *RoboCop 2* makes them more explicit, shows us their culmination. I have argued that *RoboCop* dramatises the process of enclosure through the police officers’ strikes, the debates over whether a police officer is a labourer like any other, and the spectre of corporate takeover. Its central dilemma—is RoboCop a robot or a cyborg, and can OCP therefore claim to own him?—recalls the kinds of question being raised in the domain of intellectual property law in the 1980s. But more than this, the film tries to articulate some kind of utopian response to the context of the new enclosures. It does so through RoboCop’s dream, which marks out some limit to corporate control, and which serves as the individual and psychological equivalent of the officers’ strike. If there are limits to the universalism *RoboCop* posits through the dream, this is a result of the film’s own blindness to issues of race, which seems something of an afterthought when compared with its engagement with gender and class.

The kind of explicitness and precision we find in the sequel’s portrayal of these issues will also be evident in our discussion, in the next chapter, of Verhoeven’s *Total Recall*. On the one hand, sophisticated critical or analytical tools will hardly be required to disclose *Total Recall*’s depiction of enclosure: the commodification of the air on Mars quite straightforwardly extrapolates the enclosures of the 1980s into a dystopian future of total reification. On the other hand, enclosure penetrates into elements of the film that appear, at first sight, to be concerned with other things. Schwarzenegger’s ‘hard body’ is one such example: no doubt it can be understood as a kind of fetish in the Freudian sense (and several critics have argued just that, as we shall see). But I shall also suggest that it replicates the structure of the commodity fetish, as analysed by Marx: the hard body seems to carry its identity independent of the spaces it inhabits, and thus it denies the determination of identity by an extrinsic network of social relations. It is with *Total Recall* that the 1980s science-

fiction film becomes most acutely aware of the new enclosures and the commodity fetishism that is their consequence.

CHAPTER SIX

Total Recall: Total Commodification

6.1 Introduction

Released in 1990, *Total Recall* seems to have a sharper awareness of the new enclosures than some of its predecessors, analysed earlier in this thesis. We have seen that *Alien*'s engagement with enclosure is mostly indirect and oblique, that *Blade Runner* explores enclosure through the restrictions it places on urban movement, and that *Videodrome* deals with the enclosure of the airwaves. In 1987, the same year that Reagan sets up his Committee on Privatization, *RoboCop* imagines a city increasingly controlled, not by a government, but by a corporation—a city where medicine, incarceration, space exploration, and the police force have all been privatised. Now, released at the start of the new decade, *Total Recall* uses enclosure as the backbone of its plot, as its ultimate object of interest, since its narrative ends only with the abolition of a system of private ownership. The commodification of air on *Total Recall*'s Mars implies the commodification of everything else, enclosure brought to its logical endpoint and conclusion.[1]

The year is 2084, and instead of enjoying the privileges usually reserved for the coloniser, the humans of Mars live under the iron fist of Vilos Cohaagen, the planet's governor. Cohaagen can wield absolute power over his subjects as long as he continues to export terbinium ore back to Earth; as such, he is concerned to crush the riots periodically organised by the followers of Kuato (Marshall Bell), a near-mythic underground insurgent.

[1] *The Truman Show* (1998) would seem to be the thematic successor of *Total Recall*, not just because of its concern for the relationship between simulacra and reality, but also because it literally constructs a world of total commodification: everything on its set can be purchased.

Cohaagen has already disciplined his subjects by commodifying the air supply on Mars, forcing them to pay for their most basic means of subsistence (and at a price that he regularly increases); yet for all his wealth and power, Cohaagen cannot locate Kuato, cannot sever the insurgent movement at the root. To kill Kuato, Cohaagen must infiltrate the rebel faction. Working with one of his agents, Hauser, he concocts a plan to do just that.

Cohaagen creates a fictional identity, 'Douglas Quaid', and, by erasing Hauser's memory, programmes him to act and behave like Quaid back on Earth. Quaid is settled in a mundane job, married to a woman, and given a memory implant to believe that this has always been his life, that he was always a manual labourer on Earth. Next, having gone to great lengths to turn Hauser into Quaid, Cohaagen is to convince Quaid that he was, in fact, Hauser—to turn the whole thing around again by informing Quaid that he used to work for an intelligence agency on Mars. The key difference this time is that Quaid thinks he is Cohaagen's antagonist—he thinks he must defeat Cohaagen—so he joins Kuato's rebel forces. Believing in good faith that he is fighting Cohaagen, not abetting him, Quaid leads Cohaagen right to Kuato, who is promptly killed. The resistance defeated, Cohaagen prepares to reimplant Quaid's old memory, to get his good friend Hauser back.

Only when the mission seems to have succeeded does it go wrong. Quaid refuses to return to his life as Hauser and frees himself and his partner, Melina (Rachel Ticotin), who helped him fight Cohaagen. Shortly before his death, Kuato told Quaid to start the terbinium reactor, supposedly built by aliens deep in a mine. Remembering this, Quaid and Melina hasten to the mine (killing Cohaagen's henchman and troops en route), find the reactor, and set it off. Cohaagen's secret, it turns out, is that the reactor would melt Mars's icy core, releasing air and triggering a seismic event in which Mars generates its own atmosphere. Cohaagen dies trying to prevent Quaid and Melina from starting the reactor, so he does not witness the downfall of his regime and the liberation of the human populace on Mars, who can now emerge from their protective domes and explore the planet unaided. Surveying the newly habitable landscape of Mars, Quaid wonders whether this extraordinary chain of events—this 'mind fuck', in his own words—was all a dream.

But the twist that Verhoeven applies to this action story is that it may well have been a dream, or, if not a dream, at least an artificial memory. At the beginning of the film, before the action really gets underway, we learn that Douglas Quaid is obsessed with the idea of going to Mars, much to the displeasure of his wife, Lori (Sharon Stone). Against the advice of his co-worker, Quaid decides to go to Rekall Incorporated, a company that sells memories of spectacular vacations on Earth, but also on other planets. Quaid buys memories of a trip in

which he is a secret agent trying to save Mars; on this trip, his sexual interest will be a brunette who is both demure and wanton. Of course, this is exactly the plot of the rest of the film: Quaid works undercover as a spy, fights the Martian administration, meets his love interest (the demure and wanton brunette Melina), and frees the citizens of Mars. We cannot be sure whether Quaid's heroics are fictional memories implanted at Rekall or whether they really happened, Quaid's true existence as a former secret agent prompting him to pick that fantasy in the first place.

This is a complicated plot, playful and parodic.[2] But if we bracket for the moment the narrative indeterminacy—the irresolvable question about what is true in this fictional world—we can see more easily that it requires, as its socio-economic background, a system of enclosure. The film's motivating conflict is Cohaagen's private ownership of means of subsistence, specifically air, and thus its resolution logically depends on Quaid's redistributing it by starting the reactor. The relation of dependence between the citizens of Mars and Cohaagen culminates in the latter's management and commodification of the air supply. Since all the other forms of human subsistence seem actually to have been enclosed in reality—land, shelter, food, and water—all that is left for science fiction's characteristic extrapolation is now control over the most basic means of survival: oxygen.

Yet we can also trace the relationship between *Total Recall* and the context of the new enclosures through other mediations: these will form our main preoccupation in the present chapter. I begin by suggesting that the difference between Quaid and Hauser is essentially one between two different loci of social relations: one on Mars, where this person works as a spy, and the other on Earth, where this person is a manual labourer. The ensuing dilemma of identity, which Quaid seeks to resolve in the course of the film, issues from the fetishistic illusion, in the Marxist sense, such that *Total Recall* may be said to engage with human identity as a form of fetishism. This leads us into a discussion of Arnold Schwarzenegger's place in *Total Recall*: why does he express that specific kind of identity crisis? I argue that Schwarzenegger's body in particular, and the hard male body in general, seems to carry its identity immanently, through visible marks, not least its size and its muscularity, and thus it

[2] The primary object of parody in *Total Recall*, we should note at this stage, is the Hollywood action film itself. Verhoeven achieves this primarily through isolating the action plot—through making it just one of two distinct versions of reality—and prompting us to decide which plot, the fantastic action one (in which Quaid is a spy sent back from Mars) or the mundane one (in which Quaid is a construction worker on Earth), we believe is real. When Dr Edgemar (Roy Brocksmith) asks Quaid whether he believes in the reality of his adventure on Mars, he addresses Schwarzenegger—the action hero par excellence—and the audience too.

contrasts with the notion that identity is determined by one's position within an extrinsic (and immaterial) network of social relations.

Additionally, Quaid's body holds a different socio-political status to the mutant bodies of the inhabitants of Venusville. My main argument in this chapter is that the film turns on the distinction between these two kinds of body: one immutable and essential, the other mutable and expendable. The Martians of the film are disposable; the Agency sees them as essentially valueless. On the other hand, Quaid is a privileged object, not just for the resistance, but also for Cohaagen, who needs Quaid to lead him to Kuato. In this context, the Martians come to represent the surplus populations, the 'reserve army of labour'—itself both a product and a precondition of capitalism—which expanded in the 1970s as a consequence of the crisis of overaccumulation. Although *Total Recall* was released almost a decade after unemployment in the USA peaked, it sustains attention on the plight of those whom capital accumulation makes surplus.[3]

6.2 Fetishism and Identity

The humour and the narrative energy of *Total Recall* have their source in Quaid's self-misrecognition, in the discrepancy between who he thinks he is—his intrinsic identity, we might call it—at any given moment, and who he really is, his position within the extrinsic network of social relations. Even at the end of the film, we cannot tell whether Quaid remains at Rekall suffering a schizoid embolism, Dr Edgemar having entered his dream in earnest to try and save him, or whether he is a secret agent, sent back to Mars to help Cohaagen find Kuato. We have no privileged insight into Quaid's real identity. But whatever the truth, both versions of reality depend on Quaid's misidentification. If Quaid is indeed the construction worker, and the failed implant at Rekall convinces him that he is a spy, then his delusion of grandeur results from the subordination of his labour and creativity to capital: the drudgery of Quaid's life is what compels him to visit Rekall. If Quaid is a spy, but begins this film believing he is a mere construction worker, then the misery of his Earthy life results from his

[3] That being said, Ronald Shusett, one of *Total Recall*'s scriptwriters, claims that he optioned the script as early as 1974. He discusses the film's gestation in the documentary *Imagining 'Total Recall'*, dir. by Jeffrey Schwarz (Artisan Entertainment, 2001).

life as a secret agent on Mars—someone dangerous enough that the Agency must wipe his memory, lest he bring down the politico-economic system.[4] In one case, Quaid's belief that he transcends the network of capitalist relations is a reflex of his being, back on Earth, deeply imbricated in those relations, subject to the discipline and tedium of the capitalist labour process. In the other case, his belief that he remains trapped in that drudgery is the reflex of his being, in actual fact, an operative working for the ruling classes, on the side of capital.

It follows that *Total Recall* turns on a fetishistic conception of identity, and expresses that fetishism specifically through spatial disjuncture. The film's central paradox is that, whoever Quaid seems to be at a given moment, his identity is determined by the relations of production obtaining on the other planet. When he appears to be a labourer on Earth, he is a member of the Agency on Mars; when he appears to be a spy on Mars, he is a construction worker on Earth. Extracting its protagonist from the social situation that would constitute his identity, *Total Recall* implicitly follows the fetishistic conception of identity that Marx outlines in his critique of the political economists. 'Under certain circumstances,' Marx notes, 'a chair with four legs and a velvet covering may be used as a *throne*. But this same chair, a thing for sitting on, does not become a throne by virtue of its use-value.'[5] The chair transcends its base materiality, its concrete properties, and becomes a throne because it exists in a society that considers it such. Marx turns this logic against the political economists, for whom cotton, spindles, knives, and grain function as capital regardless of the particular social formation in which they exist. This 'folly of identifying a specific *social relationship of production* with the thing-like qualities of certain articles',[6] of confusing the intrinsic properties of an object with the extrinsic network of social relations, is, as I have just shown, the foundation of *Total Recall*'s plot: it is the precise form in which its identity conundrum is posed. Removing Quaid from the site of the social relations that determine his identity is the film's means of depicting the inner-outer dichotomy, the structure of fetishism itself.

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[4] It is one of the film's many ironies, of course, that Quaid chooses to be a secret agent, someone whose identity is meant to be unknown.

[5] Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', p. 997.

[6] Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', p. 998. It ought to be remembered that, according to Marx, this fetishistic structure arises specifically in capitalism, where relations between people really are mediated by objects, by the commodity-form itself. The film does not turn on the fetishistic structure to disabuse us of an illusion; rather, this very 'illusion' is constitutive of the capitalist mode of production: 'To the producers […] the social relations between their private labours *appear as what they are*, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between producers in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things' (Marx, *Capital*, I, 165-6, emphasis mine).

The fetishism of identity depicted in *Total Recall* appears to be the film's chief innovation, not least because we find something quite different in its literary source, Philip K. Dick's 'We Can Remember It for You Wholesale' (1966).[7] Much like the film, the story begins with Douglas Quail awakening from a dream of Mars and deciding to visit Rekal to have memories of a visit there implanted. Quail wishes to go as an agent for 'Interplan', but as the Rekal employees begin to sedate him, preparing Quail for implantation, he claims that he really was a secret agent on Mars. McClane, the Rekal employee overseeing Quail's trip, concludes that Quail is telling the truth: he had been an Interplan agent and they, at Rekal, have accidentally jogged his memory, which they must now try to wipe. When Quail returns home, unable to remember precisely what just happened, two Interplan police agents arrive, claiming they have access to his thoughts. Since Quail's memory of his Interplan mission—in which he assassinated an enemy leader—and his combat skills are returning, the agents decide to kill him immediately. Quail manages to escape and bargains with the authorities for his life, communicating with them telepathically. Interplan agree to try to supplant Quail's real memory one more time, but now, to keep him from getting restless and going back to Rekal, the false memory will satisfy Quail's deepest fantasy. This fantasy is that, as a nine-year-old, Quail prevented alien invasion of Earth through his humaneness and compassion, the mice-like aliens agreeing to leave Earth unharmed as long as Quail remains alive. Interplan prepare Quail for reimplantation at Rekal; McClane gathers together the items they will put in Quail's apartment to help convince him that the false memories are true: a scroll from the aliens, a magic wand, and a letter of thanks from the UN Secretary General. But once again, just as Quail starts to go under, he claims that the fantasy really happened—that he really did save Earth from alien invasion. He has proof back at his apartment: a scroll written in alien script and an invisible magic wand. The story ends with McClane supposing that the UN's letter will soon arrive. Quail's deepest fantasy, it transpires, is real.

The major difference between Dick's and Verhoeven's plots therefore lies in their configurations of fantasy and reality. In Dick's narrative, the fantastic dimension—Quail's deep desire to be humanity's saviour, having forestalled alien invasion—does not merely become part of reality, but sustains it. It is only because Quail impressed the aliens with his show of humanity that earthly life continues. The supernatural is here not an illusory excess, but the foundation of human civilisation. Extra-terrestrial space is integrated into the diegetic

[7] Philip K. Dick, 'We Can Remember It for You Wholesale', in *The Philip K. Dick Reader* (New York: Citadel Press, 1997), pp. 305-22.

universe, shattering geocentrism. In *Total Recall*, however, Mars is opposed to terrestrial space, reality thus equally opposed to fantasy, the two remaining distinct and incommensurable. If Quaid is an agent, then his home-life has the status of a fantasy (albeit a dreary one), but if he is a labourer, then his visions of Mars are a fantasy—it is one or the other, and we have to choose.[8] The spatial disjuncture of *Total Recall*, the difference between Earth and Mars, therefore forms its novelty, and with that its core preoccupation: the fetishistic nature of its identity crisis.

Yet the link between space and fetishism implicit in *Total Recall* is not accidental; fetishism itself has an intrinsic spatial dimension. We have seen that the film uses the disjuncture between Earth and Mars to express its identity dilemma, and this bears comparison with Marx's argument in the last chapter of *Capital*, Volume 1, where he confronts the fetishism consequent on the imperialist's journey from metropole to colony. Here Marx seems to suggest that the fetishistic illusion arises most prominently when objects that are capital in the 'mother country' are moved to the colonies, where they suddenly cease to act as capital, metamorphosing somehow in transit. To illustrate the point, Marx relates a humorous anecdote (originally from E. G. Wakefield's work *England and America* (1833)):

> A Mr Peel, [Wakefield] complains, took with him from England to the Swan River district of Western Australia means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. This Mr Peel even had the foresight to bring besides 3,000 persons of the working class, men, women, and children. Once he arrived at his destination, "Mr Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river." Unhappy Mr Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production to Swan River![9]

Under the dual illusion that objects are in themselves capital and some people are by nature labourers, Mr Peel believes that transporting labour-power and means of production to Western Australia will suffice to begin capitalist production. But the capital-relation does not yet obtain in the Swan River district; Wakefield bemoans the disobedience of the same workers who, back in England, would have served capital unhesitatingly. *Total Recall* illustrates the constitutive relationship between space and identity in virtually the same way,

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[8] Verhoeven was committed to making a film that, in his own words, 'had two levels, and that both levels, throughout, would always be consistent, and that you could never say, "Now we are in a dream," or, "Now we are in reality"' (*Imagining 'Total Recall'*).

[9] Marx, *Capital*, I, 932-3.

by removing an object (or, here, a person) from the geographical locus of its social relations. The film's humour consists in precisely this: that Quaid's identity is independent of the terrain on which he stands, that his social relations—specifically, the capital-relation—are not themselves rooted in a particular space.

This reading of Quaid's identity in *Total Recall* diverges from Nathan Abrams's interpretation, according to which Quaid's dilemma expresses the conflictual and heterogeneous nature of human identity in general. 'Many features of this film represent, in a simplified and exaggerated form, the interplay of memory, identity, and self-positioning which each of us faces almost everyday [*sic*],' Abrams suggests.[10] In making this argument, Abrams invokes Foucault's notion of inscription, for which the body serves as a blank page on which identity is written, and indeed it is true that Schwarzenegger's body is something of a blank space, inscribed alternately with Quaid's and Hauser's identities. But what this analysis overlooks is the constitutive distance in *Total Recall* between the spaces in which one's identity is formed and the spaces that the body actually inhabits, and as such the inappropriateness here of the notion of identity as writing. The film's central body is defined, not by the discursive field in which it is presently located, but by the relations of production obtaining in the other space: Earth, when Quaid dreams he is a spy on Mars; Mars, when Hauser becomes Quaid on Earth. If anything, the metaphor of inscription is reversed in *Total Recall*: it is precisely through checking his present handwriting against his past handwriting that Quaid tries to verify that he was, indeed, Hauser. It is not what is written on the body, but how the body writes, that matters.

We could make a similar observation about Yvonne Tasker's reading of *Total Recall*. In her analysis, the film

> offers hero Quaid/Schwarzenegger a choice between two women, the wife he is "placed" with by the "agency" and Melina, whom he dreams of. In either case these women are, like the hero, very definitely *constructions*, so that at key points in the development of the narrative, we are left unsure whether these women, indeed the whole "world" in which the action takes place, are "real" or fantasised.[11]

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[10] Nathan Abrams, '"Are You Still You?": Memory, Identity, and Self-Positioning in *Total Recall*', *Film and Philosophy*, 7 (2003), 48-59 (p. 49).

[11] Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 28.

For Tasker, this is part of the suggestion, usually posed by the heroine, that the hero's skills are learned, not innate, a prospect that destabilises the hero's masculinity. But in *Total Recall* at least, Tasker seems to get it the wrong way around: the point is precisely that we do not know whether Lori and Melina are 'constructed' in that sense. Although Quaid 'builds' Melina at Rekall, it remains possible that Melina really exists, that Quaid is just remembering her from his former life on Mars as a spy, when she knew him as Hauser. But if Melina is constructed, and Quaid is dreaming at Rekall, then Lori is real—she is really his wife. If one woman is constructed, then the other is not. In much the same way, either Quaid or Hauser is real, and the other is a fiction. The film's drama is generated out of this tension: were all the characters' identities 'very definitely' constructed, there would be no narrative indeterminacy; the question over which identity is real would not enter the frame, because a real identity would not exist. What matters in *Total Recall* is only that we cannot *know* what is real.[12]

In any case, we still have not touched on the true specificity of *Total Recall*, for in Verhoeven's film it is not any object that moves from Earth to Mars, but specifically Arnold Schwarzenegger's hyper-masculine body. The foregoing analysis implies that his body must now be read as a fetishistic object—fetishistic in Marx's sense, not Freud's.[13] His body appears to transcend the relations of production obtaining in any given place; it conceals the materiality and historicity of human identity, just as the political economists did with objects when they defined all cotton, spindles, knives, and grain as capital, independent of the historico-geographical context. As I shall argue in the next section, Quaid is emblematic of the muscular male body in general, which seems to carry its gender identity immanently, on the level of the body itself. This 'hard' body is by nature ahistorical, by nature fetishistic, denying the determination of identity by an extrinsic network of social relations.

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[12] It is on this basis that we should resist reading *Total Recall* as a straightforwardly postmodern film. If anything, it resembles a Baudrillardian 'deterrence machine', 'set up to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp' (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 13).

[13] This distinguishes my reading from Linda Mizejewski's, according to which Schwarzenegger gives body to the 'fetish' of masculine autonomy (Mizejewski, p. 27). This claim forms the centre of Mizejewski's convincing argument: that while *Total Recall* seems postmodern, it re-centres masculinity, neutralising the threat associated with Schwarzenegger's feminisation.

6.3 Hard and Soft Bodies

Verhoeven foregrounds the muscularity of Schwarzenegger's body from the first scene of *Total Recall*, where Quaid wakes from his nightmare naked, panting and sweating.[14] The dream establishes Quaid's objects of desire, Mars and Melina, but it also simulates the physiological effects of action on Schwarzenegger's body—heavy breathing and perspiration—without any action in fact taking place. Quaid is really on Earth, at home, in bed, but it is as if his body is on Mars, fighting or fleeing. Hence, from the outset, *Total Recall* foregrounds the opposition between its two planetary spaces. But also, just as importantly, it emphasises Quaid's muscularity, and sets up the contrast between the material properties immanent to an object and the immateriality of the social field that surrounds it, the disconnect constitutive of the fetishistic illusion. We are assured, in the film's opening moments, that Quaid's appearance and his strength will suffice to guarantee his masculinity.[15]

This equation of masculinity with the hard body comes at the end of a period in which that body served an especially prominent ideological role in American life. During the 1980s, Jeffords notes, the USA was often figured as a body in public discourse, while control over

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[14] My argument here contrasts with Robert E. Wood's reading of Schwarzenegger's function in *Total Recall*. For Wood, *Total Recall* assumes that the audience is already aware of Schwarzenegger's physicality; its emphasis, he contends, is rather on Schwarzenegger as a Baudrillardian 'fractal subject', who seeks self-identity even in his fragmentation ('Remembering the Body: Ideological Ambivalence in *Total Recall*', *Studies in the Humanities*, 24 (1997), 23-42 (p. 41)). Such a reading would seem destined to overlook *Total Recall*'s parody of the action genre, Schwarzenegger's physicality being intimately associated with the latter's framework. Wood also downplays too much the moments where the body *is* emphasised: virtually the first thing we see in this film is Schwarzenegger's naked, perspiring body. Contrary to Wood, Amaya Fernández-Menicucci suggests that 'Verhoeven seems to delight in the mightiness of Schwarzenegger's physique as much as he enjoys taking his body to the limit and breaking it' ('Memories of Future Masculine Identities: A Comparison of Philip K. Dick's "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale", the 1990 Film *Total Recall* and its 2012 Remake', *Between*, 4.8 (2014), 1-25 (p. 13)). Mizejewski's piece (cited in the introduction), meanwhile, offers a welcome corrective to Wood's emphasis on the film's postmodern fragmentation, since this fragmentation, she notes, is recontained in an essentially phallocentric fantasy.

[15] However, Schwarzenegger's association with bodybuilding feminises a body that seems, in itself, ideally masculine, as Linda Ruth Williams notes ('Arnold Schwarzenegger: Corporeal Charisma', in *Pretty People: Movie Stars of the 1990s*, ed. by Anna Everett (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 19-42 (p. 27)). In his text on Schwarzenegger and *Total Recall*, Jeff Goldberg makes a similar observation: 'The male bodybuilder's body aspires to other than bodily limits, to a hypermasculinity that fails, insofar as it exceeds, to guarantee the gender category it means to secure' (Goldberg, p. 176). Mizejewski locates this possible feminisation within *Total Recall* itself—the threat that Schwarzenegger could be looked at as though he were a woman (Mizejewski, p. 29).

individual bodies was seen as essential to the health of the nation.[16] The Carter presidency being 'soft', Reagan's tenure promised a return to a harder, more robust masculinity. Reagan and his administration managed 'to portray themselves successfully as definitively masculine, not merely as men but as decisive, tough, aggressive, strong, and domineering men'.[17] However, the question is not just *what* mediates between individual and nation—here, the hard male body—but *why* that specific mediation, and not something else? Jeffords's method, coordinating different parts of the superstructure—principally, politics and culture—allows her to assert that the hard body becomes predominant in American visual culture in the 1980s, but not to understand why that is so.

In the Marxist tradition, by contrast, 'the very term superstructure already carries its own opposite within itself as an implied comparison, and through its own construction sets the problem of the relationship to the socio-economic base or *infrastructure* as the precondition for its completeness as a thought'.[18] It is therefore incumbent on us to follow this interpretive principle, to complete our own analysis, by relating the dominance of the hard body in visual culture to its material preconditions. As we have seen, *Total Recall* emphasises that relations of production are anchored in space, but it does so negatively, by making a comedy of the opposite, of a human identity determined independently of its geographical locus. In this context, I would argue, Schwarzenegger functions as an essentially *utopian* figure: his hyper-masculine body is such precisely because it seems to carry its identity on the level of skin, sinew, muscle, and so on—because its identity is constituted immediately at the level of the body, not as a reflex of its location within enclosed space.[19] The hard body is an elementary fetishistic object, in Marx's sense: it bears its identity within itself, in its heroic actions and

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[16] Jeffords, p. 14. Tasker seeks to write the prehistory of this male body throughout *Spectacular Bodies*, emphasising its antecedents and precursors.

[17] Jeffords, p. 11. The homological line of argument that Jeffords pursues is most conspicuous when she claims that the sequentiality of action films in the 1980s reflects the sequentiality of the USA's overseas conflicts (Grenada, the Persian Gulf, Panama, and Iraq) (Jeffords, p. 156). On the next page, we find a second parallel: *The Terminator*'s repetition also reflects the need for masculinity to reproduce itself in the 1990s. So it is that three discrete levels—the text itself, the gender context, and the national context—are brought carefully into alignment. This isomorphic approach to the relationship of the text to its contexts is the object of Jameson's critique in *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 22-30.

[18] Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 4.

[19] Tasker coins the term 'musculinity' to indicate 'the extent to which a physical definition of masculinity in terms of a developed musculature is not limited to the male body within representation' (*Spectacular Bodies*, p. 3). The muscular female heroes of the 1980s, such as Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor (and Melina and Lori, in *Total Recall*, we could add), are thereby defined 'in terms of masculinity'. On this view, the equation of muscle with masculinity is strong enough to masculinise even female bodies. The muscle becomes the defining property of the man.

deeds, independent of the spaces it inhabits. It thus expresses a utopian wish to escape the capital-relation in a period in which enclosure—the spatial articulation of that relation—becomes once again a basic structuring force of our social world.

Total Recall also elaborates this utopianism by thematising Schwarzenegger's stardom. As Linda Ruth Williams suggests, Schwarzenegger's move from villain to hero between *The Terminator*, in 1984, and *Terminator 2*, in 1991, is emblematic of 'a shift enacted by many a Hollywood male at the start of the 1990s', the broader development of male stardom following Schwarzenegger's personal trajectory.[20] The Schwarzenegger of *Total Recall* therefore expresses a kind of metastardom insofar as the film recapitulates in miniature this very shift between hero and villain, between Quaid and Hauser. Additionally, as Williams goes on to note, Schwarzenegger was never ordinary, not even in his (public) private life;[21] Quaid's effort to rise above the mundane and the everyday, to reject the drudgery of manual labour, and his decision to take Rekall's 'ego trip', therefore serves as an ironic comment on the Schwarzenegger phenomenon itself, on a stardom so total it even carries over into the star's private life. Schwarzenegger is surely the last person would who need an ego trip. Hence, in the same way that the muscular body carries its identity, its masculinity, across different contexts, so *Total Recall* drops Schwarzenegger *qua* Schwarzenegger into its own context; it requires its audience to read Quaid as Arnie, the character as the star. Once again, identity seems to exist at the level of the body itself.

Schwarzenegger was also decisive in the transformation Dick's short story undertook on its journey to the final cut of *Total Recall*. Dino De Laurentiis owned the rights to the film when it first went into production, and while Schwarzenegger was interested in the lead role at the time, De Laurentiis insisted on a different kind of protagonist.[22] When De Laurentiis's company went bankrupt, Schwarzenegger approached Mario Kassar of Carolco Pictures and asked him to buy the script. The earlier script had Quaid much closer to Dick's Quail: an accountant whose physicality is unremarkable. It was Schwarzenegger, then, who turned Quail into Quaid. As Schwarzenegger himself says, 'I thought that that switch from being powerful physically and then being put in the position of being vulnerable is a stronger kind of contrast. That's why I thought that the character should be played by me rather than by someone that is an ordinary kind of a looking guy'. To ask whether Schwarzenegger was the appropriate actor for the Quaid role is therefore to miss the point: Quaid became what he is

[20] Williams, 'Arnold Schwarzenegger', pp. 19-20.
[21] Williams, 'Arnold Schwarzenegger', p. 20.
[22] I rely on *Imagining 'Total Recall'* for the information and quotation in this paragraph.

only through Schwarzenegger's intervention. Schwarzenegger is the character's referent, as though Quaid were playing him, rather than the other way around.

Yet the significance of the Quaid's body in *Total Recall* is not exhausted by its intertextual reference Schwarzenegger. It also takes its meaning from intratextual reference—from comparison and contrast to other kinds of body existing in this diegetic universe. For instance, as Linda Mizejewski notes, Kuato is Quaid's antithesis: unlike Quaid, Kuato is 'the feminized man and the acknowledgement of a previous symbiosis, the reminder that every male body as hard-edged as Quaid's (and Schwarzenegger's) was once merged with a woman's'.[23] I would add that this difference between the hard and soft bodies also highlights the utopian function of Quaid and anti-utopian function of the mutants. If the immutability of Quaid's body is utopian because it shifts easily between different spaces, then the mutants of Venusville signify the opposite: their fleshly deformations are evidently social and political in character, their soft bodies contorted by their contexts. These people have become mutants, we learn, because of the poor air quality in Venusville and the cheap glass protecting them from the sun. Such are the consequences of Cohaagen's domination of his subjects, and therefore of the social structure obtaining on Mars. The mutants' appearance is indissociable from their locale, their entrapment in Venusville, and the contextual conditions obtaining there. In their experience, alienation from nature is not shelter from its vicissitudes, but rather a greater exposure to them.

Figure 6: Bodies mutable and immutable

[23] Mizejewski, p. 30.

But the deformations of this dystopia go beyond mere marks on the skin. *Total Recall* also tries to signal the degeneracy of its future society through images of infertility, which haunts Earth and Mars alike. While the film opens with a love scene between Quaid and Lori, a snapshot of perfect pair-bonding, their relationship is sullied when we learn that Lori might actually be the partner of Richter (Michael Ironside), that she might be pretending to love Quaid, their intercourse mere dissimulation.[24] Shortly after this scene, Quaid and Lori sit at the table next to a fertile landscape, but we know that its fecundity exists only as an image on a television screen, compensating for the greyness and tedium of Quaid's real life. In Venusville, meanwhile, sex exists insofar as it is a commodity, a good to be sold for the reproduction of one's own livelihood, not for procreation. This is also the place where Benny (Mel Johnson Jr.), the cab driver, lies that he has five children to feed, offspring serving as a fiction to help him sell his labour. When Cohaagen decides to turn Quaid back into Hauser, he assures Quaid that he will be able to use Melina as an object of sexual pleasure, the reproductive aspect of intercourse again clearly secondary. This is not to forget that Mars's own landscape, arid and barren, is the ultimate augury of a childless human future. In this context, the one person who can promise a future, Kuato, must appear as a child, though even he is conceived through corporeal deformation, not sexual intercourse.

On the other hand, *Total Recall* seems to treat the human body as the privileged locus and betrayer of truth. There is no knowing which of the two versions of events offered by *Total Recall* is real, but if we were able to discover the truth, it seems likely we would find it on the body. For example, when Quaid sees Dr Edgemar perspiring, he interprets this as a sign of Edgemar's fear for his own life. Now Quaid takes the leap of faith, assuming that events on Mars are real, that he is not still in a chair at Rekall, and kills the doctor. This is a crucial moment in the plot, the point where Quaid favours one version of events over the other. Edgemar's perspiration is, at least for Quaid, a mark of the real; it is the real breaking through fantasy.[25] Perspiration plays a similar role in Dick's short story. When Quail returns to Rekal, claiming that the implantation did not work and demanding a full refund, McClane does not mention Quail's revelation: that he really used to work for Interplan. In this moment

[24] 'When *Total Recall* trivializes or repudiates the erotic, it severely circumscribes fertility,' Wood notes ('Remembering the Body', p. 38). Incidentally, Lori's various kicks to Quaid's crotch also seem to call his fertility into question.

[25] Its function is the same in *Alien*, where Ash's white perspiration reveals that he is an android.

of pure dissimulation, McClane 'had begun to perspire', as though the truth were seeping through his pores, the body unable to lie.[26] Yet there are also dangers associated with reading the body, scrutinising it, making it speak the truth: Benny offers his mutated hand as proof he is sympathetic to the rebel forces, but this turns out to be false. Benny supports Cohaagen in spite of his mutation; the film depicts the black body as untrustworthy.[27]

Still more profoundly, *Total Recall* questions whether one can keep the simulation separate from reality in the first place. It poses this question through Lori: if she is indeed a simulacral wife in partnership with Richter, the possibility remains that she genuinely enjoys sexual congress with Quaid, that she really comes to identify with the woman she is meant to be playing. Helm (Michael Champion) says to Richter, 'I wouldn't want a guy like Quaid porking my old lady.' Richter replies, 'Are you saying she likes it?' and Helm jokes, 'No, I'm sure she hated every minute of it.' Even in the version of events where Quaid is a spy, where Lori pretends to be his lover, their intercourse might be real, the simulation exceeding itself, tipping over into reality. As Baudrillard suggests, the interpenetration of simulation and reality is one of the former's essential features. You could try to simulate a holdup, say, and take every precaution, but it will not work:

> the network of artificial signs will become inextricably mixed up with real elements (a policeman will really fire on sight; a client of the bank will faint and die of a heart attack; one will actually pay you a phony ransom), in short, you will immediately find yourself once again, without wishing it, in the real, one of whose functions is precisely to devour any attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to the real—that is, to the established order itself, well before institutions and justice come into play.[28]

Similarly—to transfer Baudrillard's thought experiment into our own context—you can try to create the perfect trap: you can try to convince Hauser that he is Quaid, and you can embed Quaid deep in a network of your own employees, working undercover, but you will fail. Your henchman will get jealous and try to kill him, or his wife will actually start to find him attractive, or Quaid will refuse to return to Hauser, his 'true' self. The body especially is

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[26] Dick, 'We Can Remember It for You Wholesale', pp. 313-4.
[27] Of course, whether Benny actually identifies with Cohaagen's cause is unclear. Perhaps he agrees to work as an agent simply for the employment.
[28] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 20.

unruly and threatens to disrupt the plan. Kuato, the insurgent outgrowth of a mutant male, is the culmination of such logic.

So it is that we have been able to distinguish two polar opposite bodies in the film, each defining the other by its contrariety. We have, on the one hand, Quaid's (or Schwarzenegger's) utopian body—utopian because it seems to bear its identity within itself, such that the body becomes relatively autonomous from its social context—and on the other, the anti-utopian mutant bodies—anti-utopian because, unlike Quaid, their bodies are enclosed, are branded by that enclosure. More generally, I have tried to suggest, the body is the primary source of *Total Recall*'s narrative uncertainty; it offers clues to the answer to Quaid's dilemma without ever resolving it. What remains to be examined, in the last section of this chapter, is how these two kinds of body, one hard and the other soft, correspond to two different positions within the social structure: one essential to the survival of humanity, the other apparently disposable.

6.4 Necessary and Surplus Populations

We know that enclosure is a precondition of the capitalist mode of production, that it creates a landless proletariat who must sell their labour-power merely to survive. But as Marx points out,

> [i]t is not enough that the conditions of labour are concentrated at one pole of society in the shape of capital, while at the other pole are grouped masses of men who have nothing to sell but their labour-power. Nor is it enough that they are compelled to sell themselves voluntarily. […] The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of a relative surplus population keeps the law of the supply and demand of labour, and therefore wages, within narrow limits which correspond to capital's valorization requirements. The silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker.[29]

[29] Marx, *Capital*, I, 899.

If all the displaced workers find jobs, wages are likely to be high: the supply of labour would be low, so labourers would have great bargaining power. In constituting its labour force, therefore, capital must also produce a 'reserve army' of the unemployed, whose purpose it is in part to cheapen the cost of labour. It is only with the formation of this class that the worker's dependence on the capitalist, and thus the foundation of the capitalist mode of production itself, is fully secured.[30]

While capital thus threatens to make its workers surplus throughout its life, it does so especially at moments of crisis. One of the main functions of the reserve army is to accommodate capital's shifting valorisation needs as it passes through phases of expansion and contraction. Marx puts it this way:

> The path characteristically described by modern industry, which takes the form of a decennial cycle (interrupted by smaller oscillations) of periods of average activity, production at high pressure, crisis, and stagnation, depends on the constant formation, the greater or less absorption, and the re-formation of the industrial reserve army or surplus population. In their turn, the various phases of the industrial cycle recruit the surplus population, and become one of the most energetic agencies for its reproduction.[31]

The period after the 1970s economic crisis was, accordingly, one in which the reserve army expanded relative to the active army, as a glance at the relevant data reveals. In the United States, unemployment was 4.9% in 1970, but reached nearly 10% in 1981 and 1982, before gradually declining over the rest of the decade, down to 5.5% in 1990.[32] The unemployment rate of the EU15 grew in the wake of the crisis: from around 2% in the 1960s to 8% in the 1980s.[33]

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[30] 'But if a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation, indeed it becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production' (Marx, *Capital*, I, 784).

[31] Marx, *Capital*, I, 785.

[32] OECD Unemployment Rate (Indicator) (2018) <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate.htm> [accessed 14 June 2018]. We should note that the reserve army of labour, in Marx's conception, includes not just the unemployed, but also the 'partially employed' (Marx, *Capital*, I, 794).

[33] Olivier Blanchard, 'European Unemployment: The Evolution of Facts and Ideas', *Economic Policy*, 21.45 (2006), 7-59 (pp. 8-9). Sassen sees the expansion of this reserve army worldwide as characteristic of (in her terms) 'advanced capitalism', itself distinguished by renewed primitive accumulations: 'there is a rapidly growing surplus of people—in the form of distinctive populations: the displaced by proliferating civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa, prisoners in the US and a growing number of other global North

Total Recall attends to the plight of those whom the social structure makes surplus; it depicts a human population whose perceived importance is sharply unequal. For the insurgents, the survival of Kuato is paramount; Cohaagen would seem to agree that Kuato is the key to the revolutionary forces, that without Kuato he would face no challenge to his governorship. For this same reason, it is Quaid's survival that is essential for Cohaagen; his own hopes of getting to Kuato depend on Quaid. The archetype for these supremely essential figures is Douglas Quail, in Dick's short story, who alone keeps the aliens from invading, and who thus sustains the entire human populace on Earth.[34] But the importance of these characters to others' survival, I suggest, serves primarily to form a contrast with the swelling surplus populations on Mars. The inhabitants of Venusville are absolutely disposable: Cohaagen lets them suffer under the sun's intense rays, and he is also prepared to use them as hostages in his efforts to quash Kuato's rebellion. Cohaagen's cops seem to have no qualms about shooting bystanders in their attempt to kill Quaid, and Quaid himself almost becomes guilty of this charge when he uses someone just shot on the subway as a meat shield.

The composition of the film's surplus population is deeply inflected by gender and race. Many women in Venusville seem to procure the means for their subsistence in the informal economy, through prostitution, and not through waged work. The film begins to distinguish Lori's sexual intercourse with Quaid from prostitution by having Helm suggest that she enjoys it, that she does not do it merely as part of her job. This assumes that Lori is indeed the secret agent, married to Quaid as part of the surveillance operation on him; but if she is, in fact, his wife, then the notion of prostitution does not enter at all. Regardless of whether Lori is an agent or a dutiful wife, her acquisition of subsistence is never threatened. It is rather Benny who exemplifies the precarious worker: 'I have five kids to feed!' he repeats, underscoring the uncertainty of his future access to subsistence.[35] Even when we find out that

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countries, displaced people of all sorts assembled in refugee camps managed by the international humanitarian system (at best) financed by the taxpayers of the world' (Sassen, p. 26).

[34] Fernández-Menicucci reads this as something like the ultimate patriarchal fantasy. Quail takes the position of the phallus, she notes, but far from being feminised, he becomes the 'ultimate masculine Subject, who is everything at the same time, who contains everything, centre and margin, and does not then require a complementary, although inferior opposite to justify and structure his superior, all-comprehensive existence' (Fernández-Menicucci, p. 9).

[35] The black sidekick in the action film often serves to introduce the white hero to a criminal underworld, a trope that *Total Recall* adopts unreflectively. Its parody of the action film is thorough, then, but not thorough enough to challenge the associations most deeply ingrained in the genre. For a discussion of the link between blackness and criminality in the action film, see Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, pp. 35-53.

Benny is working for Cohaagen, his formal relation to the Agency remains unclear. Is Benny a permanent worker, or have they drafted him in temporarily?

This precarious character-type will be familiar to us by now because it features prominently in the other primary texts analysed in this thesis. It is central to *Alien*'s plot that the crew of the Nostromo are expendable, their lives valueless to Weylan-Yutani, such that the corporation can sacrifice them in order to capture the alien. *Blade Runner* is equally unthinkable without the surplus population crowding in the streets of its future Los Angeles. Trapped in the sphere of circulation, these crowds are incidental to the plot, but as I argue in Chapter 3, they play an essential role within the film's semantic system: to highlight by contrast the characters who can move around relatively freely (Deckard and the Replicants). The surplus population of Los Angeles thus has a similar function in that film as the inhabitants of Venusville do in *Total Recall*. In *RoboCop*, technologically-induced unemployment threatens the police department and prompts the police officers to strike. And the prospect of genocide that hangs over *Videodrome* expresses the becoming-surplus of human population in perhaps its most direct and brutal form.

6.5 Conclusion

It has been my primary contention in this chapter that *Total Recall* foregrounds the difference between two kinds of identity: one determined independently of its immediate context, the other bound to, even trapped in, a certain place: one belonging to Quaid or Hauser, the other belonging to the mutants of Venusville. It is through that opposition that the film demonstrates the articulation of social relations through space, this being the core effect of enclosure. It shows us, on the one hand, the comic ridiculousness of a body that carries its identity immanently, while also depicting, on the other, a group of bodies whose confinement in a certain space leaves its mark upon the skin. Finally, the film's basic narrative problem is comprehensible only in the context of enclosure: Cohaagen has enclosed humanity's means of subsistence, and Quaid must liberate them to free the ailing populace of Mars.

The seventh and final chapter of this thesis proposes to collate the various interpretations offered here and in the preceding chapters. It does so in order to formalise and define the distinctive *aesthetic* of enclosure that develops in Hollywood science fiction of the 1980s.

Though *Total Recall* ends on a utopian note, the tenor of these films as a whole is dystopian, and it will come as no surprise that I wish to characterise their aesthetic as such. Thus the concluding gesture of this thesis will be to identify still more precisely how the 1980s Hollywood dystopias function, and—drawing on Fisher's theory of capitalist realism—why their specific dystopian form belongs to that decade.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: Dystopia after Dystopia

The dystopias of the 1980s Hollywood science-fiction film are efforts to prolong the utopian project—the critique of enclosure and of capitalism, the desire for a non-alienated mode of existence—by other means. Their nightmarish images of dark cities, expropriation, and death serve ultimately to throw their utopian content (the alien's resistance to capitalist rationality, Deckard and Renn's self-directed flânerie, RoboCop's dreaming, Quaid's hard body) into relief. These films turn to the utopian form, I have argued, because they are produced at a specific moment in capitalism's history, when capital faces the problem of its overaccumulation and seeks to solve it through enclosing the commons. Utopianism being, at root, opposition to an enclosed and alienated society—one whose inhabitants are separated increasingly by the exchange-mechanism—it is reactivated in the science-fiction films of this period, which bear witness to the intrusion of enclosure at the level of daily experience. The destruction of national forests, renewed land grabs, expanding intellectual property rights, the privatisation of water—in short, the subsumption of ever greater zones of our collective existence by capital—form the core object and preoccupation of these texts.

The ways that the Hollywood film responds to such conditions form what I am calling its 'aesthetic of enclosure': a series of representational strategies that make the new enclosures visible. Drawing from the previous chapters, this conclusion will first clarify the various features of that aesthetic: the portrayal of surplus populations and waste, a tendency to individualise conflict, the conflation of public and private, and a proclivity for euphemism, primarily. It will then pose a key question implicit in my project: what comes next, after the

1980s, with the rise of capitalist realism? Is utopianism possible, even in dystopian guise, when the commodity has become a world?

A central part of the aesthetic of enclosure is the image of the surplus population, the unemployed and destitute, whose access to wages is fitful at best. They receive attention in part because they feel most acutely the effects of dispossession (they have little means to reacquire their subsistence), but also because capital uses the surplus population itself to bloat the supply of labour, driving down wages, a process that 'sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker' and enhances primitive accumulation.[1] The most memorable examples in the texts I have examined here are *Blade Runner*'s crowds and the inhabitants of *Total Recall*'s Venusville, but superfluity hangs over all of these films, from the threat of technologically-induced unemployment in *RoboCop*, to the crew's expendability in *Alien*, to the prospect of genocide in *Videodrome*. The population is not used as a character-type or narrative actor in its own right (*Blade Runner*, I have argued, concerns itself with that very impossibility), but the figure of population itself—of the masses—is an indissociable part of the dystopian vision of the 1980s Hollywood science-fiction film.

Counterbalancing these portrayals of the masses is, however, a tendency towards individuation, as the encounter with, and struggle against, enclosure occurs at the level of the private citizen. Douglas Quaid is the most obvious example, as he singlehandedly restores the commons to Mars, liberating its population and its air supply. The revolutionary vocation of the proletariat is here bestowed firmly upon the individual. Similarly, I have argued that RoboCop's dream is but the individual and psychological expression of the police officers' strike. It is also worth recalling how often the labour contract—the very nexus between individual and corporation—is at stake in these films. *Alien* and *RoboCop* engage with the nature of the labour contract explicitly, especially insofar as they depict strike action (or debates over such action). But even where the contract is absent, the forces of compulsion underlying it are dramatised—say, when Bryant forces Deckard to return to the police force, or when Hauser (working for Cohaagen) tells Quaid, 'I'm counting on you, buddy,' tacitly securing Quaid's compliance with Cohaagen's elaborate plan. In these cases, as a substitute for direct reflection on the contract, the dynamics of interpellation come to the fore.[2]

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[1] Marx, *Capital*, I, 899.

[2] Althusser's famous study of interpellation is published as an appendix in his *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. by G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), pp. 232-72. For a useful recent discussion of the term, and of its initial translation by Ben Brewster as 'hailing', see Warren Montag, 'Althusser's Empty Signifier: What is the Meaning of the Word

Also central to these films' aesthetic is a breakdown or erosion of the specificity of public and private. The main example is *RoboCop*'s boardroom, which, as we have seen, conflates Reagan's administration with the executives of a private company. But we should also note *Alien*'s diminution of the state. Set sometime in the twenty-second century, *Alien* projects a more distant future than the other films examined in this thesis do; it thereby absolves itself of the responsibility for explaining why a corporation is interested in amassing its own military force (Weylan-Yutani's weapons division shows interest in the alien), as though it were itself a state. *Total Recall*'s institutions likewise float somewhere indeterminately between a state and a private company. While Cohaagen is the 'administrator' of Mars and implements martial law during a period of unrest, he behaves as a CEO: his political position depends on the successful commodification of Mars's environment, in particular its reserves of terbinium ore.[3] Meanwhile, it is never clear what 'the Agency', mentioned several times in the film, actually is—whether it is an arm of the state or a branch of a company. Possible references, on the pink notes Quaid retrieves from a briefcase, to a 'federal' bank on Mars, and on Quaid's television, to Northern and Southern 'blocs' on Earth, suggest that some sort of state or super-state system lingers in the background. In general, however, the state-enterprise distinction seems anachronistic on Mars in 2084, where the state's disciplinary function shades into the corporation's profit-making function (Cohaagen sells his air), and where the commodification of air is now as effective a means of control as the Agency's repressive apparatus.

The euphemistic strain in these texts also implies the existence of something new and unutterable—an expanded logic of capitalist accumulation, whose violence is too great to be articulated explicitly. It is because the RoboCop programme invents a whole new way of oppressing and exploiting the human organism that Bob Morton must refer to Murphy's death as a kind of 'volunteering'. And it is because the Replicants are already almost human that the blade runner is said to 'retire', rather than to 'execute', them.[4] The notable exception

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"Interpellation"?', *Mediations*, 30.2 (2017), 63-8. Montag's gloss of 'interpellation' as 'a violent tearing them away from the crowd', and Althusser's use of 'recruit' as a near-synonym, seem particularly pertinent to Bryant's 'interpellation' of Deckard, which raises Deckard above the 'little people' and returns him to his job as a blade runner.

[3] Contextually, as Mizejewski notes, 'both the Africaaner name of the industrialist villain—Cohaagen—and his mining industry specifically suggest South Africa' (Mizejewski, p. 28). Intertextually, Cohaagen blurs into OCP's Vice President, Dick Jones, also played by Ronny Cox.

[4] The fullest demonstration of this euphemistic tendency in the 1980s science-fiction film is found, however, in Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985). Bureaucrat Mr Kurtzmann is looking to pass on a troublesome refund cheque, originally addressed to Mr Buttle, but cannot because 'the population census has got

here is *Videodrome*, which does quite the opposite: it generates its estrangement through hyper-literalisation. Max Renn's stomach wound, in which videotapes can be inserted, directly embodies our fears about mass media's ability to influence or control us. Similarly, when Nicki Brand claims that she was 'made for' 'Videodrome', we do not yet know that she literally exists for us, and for Renn, only because she appeared on that programme. Yet the point being made in *Videodrome* is the same as in *Blade Runner* and *RoboCop*: the kind of horror implicit in these nightmarish visions of near-total commodification could not be expressed in plain speech.

We have seen that Marx defines the commodity as a non-use-value for its owner, a use-value for its non-owner: a good produced to be sold, not consumed by its producer. So it is that the projection of such non-use-values into the figure of waste also becomes a signal feature of the aesthetic of enclosure. *Blade Runner* is the obvious example here: in its diegetic world, waste is elevated to the status of an ontological principle, such that humans (J. F. Sebastian) as well as androids and objects belong to an entropic universe of degradation and decay. This is also the universe of *Alien*, whose spaceship Scott designed to be grotty, dirty: 'At the culmination of many long voyages, each covering many years, these ships—no doubt part of armadas owned by private corporations—look used, beat-up, covered with graffiti, and uncomfortable. We certainly didn't design the Nostromo to look like a hotel.'[5] *Alien* simultaneously presents the human world in resistance to waste: the Nostromo's crew would idle away their time in space were it not for the hypersleep containers. I have also noted the film's attention to the company's need for efficiency, signalled primarily in the Nostromo's lighting, which activates only when the crew wake up. The underside of this corporate obsession with efficiency is the detritus of Los Angeles in 2019, where non-use-value has taken over, become the city's organising principle.

The aesthetic of enclosure is then a catastrophic aesthetic, abounding in visions of oppression and marginalisation. It involves the portrayal of an increasingly reified and alienated state of affairs, captured best by Debord's concept of a society of the spectacle; extrapolated visions of enclosure itself (OCP's effort to privatise everything); images of surplus populations, pushed to the brink of survival; the depiction of waste, in humans as

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him'—Buttle—'down as "dormanted", the central collective storehouse computer has got him down as "deleted", information retrieval has got him down as "inoperative". There's another one: security has got him down as "excised", administration has got him down as "completed"'. Mr Buttle has, in fact, died.

[5] Danny Peary, 'Directing *Alien* and *Blade Runner*: An Interview with Ridley Scott', in *Ridley Scott*, pp. 42-55 (p. 44).

much as objects; individualistic heroism, as the battle against capital is focalised through a single agent (Quaid and RoboCop, most notably); a conflation of public and the private; and finally the satirical deployment of euphemism. As the preceding paragraphs imply, the primary object of these films' criticism is not—as in the classic Orwellian dystopia—the state, or even the capitalist state, but capital itself, as it infiltrates hitherto uncommodified regions of our social world. These films are concerned less with the accumulation of state power than with the devolution of that power to those who accumulate capital: to OCP, Cohaagen's 'Agency', or Weylan-Yutani.

Yet this aesthetic did not come into being, full-blown, with *Alien* in 1979. My claim here has been that these films show an increasingly explicit awareness of the new enclosures as the decade progresses. I have suggested that they do so because the 1980s was a privileged phase in the trajectory of the new enclosures: long enough after their inception (in the 1970s) for them to be registered in consciousness, but not so long that they have come to seem natural and unremarkable 'facts of life'. The question implicit in this narrative is what happens next, in the 1990s, with the emergence of Fisher's capitalist realism:

> the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it. Once, dystopian films and novels were exercises in such acts of imagination—the disasters they depicted acting as narrative pretext for the emergence of different ways of living.[6]

But, Fisher goes on, the realist dystopia of the 1990s (and after) is quite different: having lost belief in the possibility of socio-economic change, it portrays an increasingly banal and nihilistic repetition of the same. Fisher identifies three causes of this shift, this dramatic drawing-in of our imaginative horizons: the defeat of socialist alternatives to capitalism, the loss of modernism as a productive cultural antagonist, and the total cooptation (or 'precorporation') of all dreaming and desiring by the demands of capital accumulation.[7] Hence, while capitalist realism can be 'subsumed under the rubric of postmodernism as theorized by Jameson', Fisher suggests, it also moves beyond the Jamesonian diagnosis, which—we can see with hindsight—was itself a product of the 1980s.[8]

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[6] Fisher, p. 2.
[7] Fisher, pp. 7-11.
[8] Fisher, p. 7.

It seems to me that the new enclosures could be adduced as a fourth contextual cause of capitalist realism. First, Midnight Notes suggests that the defeat of socialism was itself one aspect of the new enclosures, as 'the aim of Enclosure could not be realized unless there was a dramatic increase in the international competition of workers and thus an enormous expansion of the world market'.[9] Second (and relatedly), enclosure functions to eliminate non-capitalist areas, whose mere existence attests to the possibility of change and the reality of alternatives. It is responsible for that expansion—even universalisation—of capitalism that Jameson sees as the root cause of the waning of historicity.[10] And third, as Marx notes, accompanying the original forms of primitive accumulation was an effort to portray capitalism as a natural process, rather than a social one: the working class, he argued, would have to '[look] upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws'.[11] In much the same way, capitalist realism is the ideological concomitant of the *new* enclosures: it is the contemporary renaturalisation of capitalism's laws. Now, as then, the process of enclosure can be completed only with the assistance of capitalist ideology.

Capitalist realism does not then merely follow the 1980s dystopia; it also brings to completion the attenuation of the utopian impulse that we have already witnessed in the science-fiction films of that decade, which use dystopia mainly to foreground this diminishing utopian content. Capitalist realism comes into being when the aesthetic of enclosure is no longer possible, when the forces of enclosure have so decreased our belief in structural change that not even a utopian impulse seems to survive it. The uncertainty of *Total Recall*'s final scene—where Quaid looks over the renewed landscape of Mars and wonders whether it is all a dream—marks a historic moment of hesitation between the utopian dystopias of the 1980s and the 'realist' dystopias to come.

We might begin to sense the distance between this 1980s moment and our own by comparing both of Verhoeven's films examined here with their remakes, Len Wiseman's *Total Recall* (2012) and José Padihla's *RoboCop* (2014). In Wiseman's remake, the antagonism between Earth and Mars has been displaced; now the opposition exists between

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[9] Midnight Notes, p. 4.

[10] 'If postmodernism, as an enlarged third stage of classical capitalism, is a purer and more homogeneous expression of classical capitalism, from which many of the hitherto surviving enclaves of socio-economic difference have been effaced (by way of their colonization and absorption by the commodity form), then it makes sense to suggest that the waning of our sense of history, and more particularly our resistance to globalizing and totalizing concepts like that of the mode of production itself, are a function of precisely that universalization of capitalism' (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 405).

[11] Marx, *Capital*, I, 899.

the United Federation of Britain and the Colony, located in Australia, these being the sole survivors of a global chemical war that has made the rest of the planet uninhabitable. While theirs is still an imperialist rivalry, Wiseman's switch entails a different plot resolution: the image of planetary renewal and emancipation at the very end of Verhoeven's text (the closest we come in any of the films analysed here to a utopian vision) is replaced with a merely a sense of relief, as Douglas Quaid (Colin Farrell) manages to stop Britain's imminent invasion of the Colony. The antagonism here is, in other words, geopolitical, and its resolution does not seem to imply a fundamental shift in the nature of society. We should also note that Wiseman changes not just this resolution, but the narrative's motivating conflict: the problem of overpopulation now takes the place that commodification held in the original. It is because Britain has become overcrowded that its Chancellor determines to engineer a conflict with the Colony. The Marxist problematic is thereby replaced with a quasi-Malthusian one, capitalism disappearing in the process.

Padihla's *RoboCop*, meanwhile, severs the link between the robot's subjectivity and the police department's resistance to capital: there is no such protest forthcoming from the police officers in the remake. This is itself only the consequence of Padihla's elision of the concept of privatisation, which leaves the officers nothing to protest against. In the original, OCP's efforts to acquire public contracts are metonymic of privatisation as such; it is clear that the shift in the provision of certain services from the local government to the corporation bears significant political implications. In the remake, on the other hand, there is no sense that OmniCorp's production of cyborg and robotic law enforcement involves anything as contentious as privatisation. The state and the company are treated as continuous, as one body, with little critical emphasis placed on the intimacy of their relationship. Moreover, it is not OCP but the police department itself that colludes with crime, as RoboCop busts two officers and the police chief for working with Antoine Vallen (Patrick Garrow), the remake's answer to Clarence Boddicker. OmniCorp is now guilty only for its callous maltreatment of Alex Murphy's (Joel Kinnamen's) wife and son. Padihla's *RoboCop* insulates the corporate world from the satiric impulse that drives Verhoeven's original.

These two texts give us a sense of what Fisher means by 'capitalist realism': both excise the critical and utopian impulses of their originals, and both seek to naturalise capitalism, to shelter it from the viewer's judgement. Yet I now want to suggest that an informative analysis of this kind of material is to be found in Jameson's work, too, in a serious of lectures he gave in 1991, printed as *The Seeds of Time* in 1994. The first essay in the book, on the 'antinomies of postmodernity', examines the primary logical binds of postmodern thought:

Identity and Difference, subject and object, space and time, and utopia and anti-utopia. These concepts, Jameson shows, cannot sit inertly at their respective poles, but rather slip into one another, Identity turning into Difference and back again, with little prospect of resolution. Most interesting for us, however, is Jameson's discussion of the relationship between utopia and dystopia, which, it turns out, is not as fluidly antinomic as these other pairs. Jameson in fact declares his intention to 'disjoin' utopia from dystopia, to separate the one from the other, in a way that is seemingly incompatible with my own argument—in the introduction to this thesis—that dystopian texts are merely formal mutations of earlier utopian ones.[12]

Jameson proceeds to distinguish dystopia from utopia as narration from description, though here the primacy one might expect a follower of Lukács to attach to the former is now conferred on the latter, on the descriptive nature of the utopian text.[13] The dystopia is predicative—it is 'generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character'—and mimics the 'near-future' science-fiction novel, which 'tells the story of an imminent disaster—ecology, overpopulation, plague, drought, the stray comet or nuclear accident—waiting to come to pass in our own near future'.[14] The utopia, meanwhile, lacks a subject-position, and takes as its central task the description of 'a mechanism or a kind of machine'; 'it furnishes a blueprint rather than lingering upon the kinds of human relations that might be found in a Utopian condition'.[15] More precisely, the utopia depicts the kinds of apparatus or constraint that would allow the inhabitants of society to be free. In this sense, I would add, the elementary form of utopia is to be found not in More or Fourier, but scrawled in one of Marx's notebooks, in the so-called 'Fragment on Machines', which argues that the full automation of labour is the condition of the worker's emancipation.[16]

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[12] Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, p. 55.

[13] See Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', in *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays*, trans. by Arthur D. Kahn (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), pp. 110-48.

[14] Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, pp. 55-6.

[15] Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, p. 56.

[16] For the 'Fragment on Machines', see Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 690-712. (Marx seems to revise and correct the 'Fragment's line of argument in *Capital*, as Michael Heinrich suggests in 'The "Fragment on Machines": A Marxian Misconception in the *Grundrisse* and its Overcoming in *Capital*', in *In Marx's Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the* Grundrisse, ed. by Riccardo Bellafiore, Guido Starosta, and Peter D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 197-212.) We find a similar idea in Volume 3 of *Capital*, where Marx argues that the realm of necessity forms the essential foundation of the realm of freedom: 'Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true

Yet Jameson's analyses here may not be as alien to our own prior discussions of utopia and dystopia as at first they seem. What essentially differentiates the two, in his model, is not so much whether the image of the future is positive (utopia) or negative (dystopia), better or worse, but whether it attends to mechanisms and causes (utopia) or not (dystopia). We ought now to be able to register, latent in Jameson's binary, the distinction between a *critical* dystopia and a dystopia: between a dystopia that focuses attention on the causes of society's ills and one that exploits catastrophic iconography merely for narrative purposes. Such was the source of the disagreement between Penley and Fitting on the status of *The Terminator*: for Penley, Cameron's film begins to comprehend the causes of our problems; for Fitting, it uses a worse diegetic society as the pretext for its narrative. Finally, this allows us to restore the sense of development or continuity between utopia and dystopia, as critical variants of the latter involve an expansion or hypertrophy of the machinery that was the main object of description in a utopian work, such that the (implicit) world of freedom and happiness that this machinery makes possible is erased entirely, leaving only the machine itself *qua* image of oppression and constraint. Meanwhile, the non-critical dystopias, the 'near-future' fictions that Jameson has in mind, take the repressed half of the utopia, the individual stories of happiness and plenty, and invert them, turning them into so many narratives of disaster. Jameson's mistake is not so much his analysis of the dystopia as his failure to recognise that this is only one form of dystopia, and ought itself to be contrasted with the critical dystopias of the 1980s, whose attention to cause and effect—to the mechanism or the constraint—make them closer to utopias proper.

Such, in brief, are the formal mutations that generate the critical dystopias of the 1980s and precipitate their decline into the near-future or 'realist' dystopias of the 1990s and the new millennium, of which Padilha's *RoboCop* and Wiseman's *Total Recall* stand as clear examples. Of course, this narrative implies a further question, which I cannot attempt to answer here: namely, whether the anti-utopian dystopias of our own time have one more surprise in store for their critic, whether the utopian impulse has not altogether disappeared, but rather absconded to a still deeper and less perceptible level of the text, where it is virtually undetectable to the critical gaze. Has utopia vanished completely, or are our critical tools simply now insufficient for its detection? But to phrase the question this way is already to proscribe the giving of a rigorous or effective response, since changes in utopian form are

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realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is its basic prerequisite' (*Capital*, III, 959).

ultimately motivated from the outside; they are reflexes of a socio-economic context that massively exceeds them. Such is one of the main implications of this thesis, which has tried to show that the dystopian and utopian content of the 1980s science-fiction film is configured to respond to the new enclosures, to the efforts to resolve the crisis of overaccumulation facing capitalism hardly a decade before.

More broadly, however, I have tried to make a case for the continued vitality of Marx's thought in the study of visual culture in general and the Hollywood film in particular. This thesis is ultimately an attempt to fulfil perhaps the most fundamental, but also the most demanding, of Marx's methodological postulates: to coordinate the base with the superstructure; to sketch out the means of their mediation; in short, to comprehend the relationship between the 'material transformation of the economic conditions of production' and the 'ideological forms in which men become conscious of [class] conflict and fight it out', to use Marx's classic expression.[17] The 1980s Hollywood science-fiction film is one such 'ideological form', of course, and as I have argued, it does indeed attest to a kind of coming-to-consciousness, the new enclosures looming ever larger over their narratives as the decade proceeds. Most importantly, this consciousness is not the passively contemplative type criticised in the anti-reification polemics of a Debord or a Lukács. Its dystopian visions and utopian impulses bear witness to something else: the eclipse of one moment of struggle—crushed by the force of the new enclosures—and the determined, dreaming anticipation of another.

[17] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by S. W. Ryazanskaya (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 21.

Filmography

2001: A Space Odyssey, dir. by Stanley Kubrick (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968)

Alien, dir. by Ridley Scott (20th Century Fox, 1979)

Aliens, dir. by James Cameron (20th Century Fox, 1986)

Blade Runner, dir. by Ridley Scott (Warner Bros., 1982)

Blow Out, dir. by Brain De Palma (Filmways Pictures, 1981)

Blow-Up, dir. by Michelangelo Antonioni (Premier Productions, 1966)

Brazil, dir. by Terry Gilliam (20th Century Fox, 1985)

Buck Rogers, dir. by Ford Beebe and Saul A. Goodkind (Universal Pictures, 1939)

Chinatown, dir. by Roman Polanski (Paramount Pictures, 1974)

Close Encounters of the Third Kind, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Columbia Pictures, 1977)

Crash, dir. by David Cronenberg (Fine Line Features, 1996)

The Dead Zone, dir. by David Cronenberg (Paramount Pictures, 1983)

Double Indemnity, dir. by Billy Wilder (Paramount Pictures, 1944)

Flash Gordon, dir. by Frederick Stephani and Ray Taylor (Universal Pictures, 1936)

The Fly, dir. by David Cronenberg (20th Century Fox, 1986)

Frankenstein, dir. by James Whale (Universal Pictures, 1931)

Forbidden Planet, dir. by Fred M. Wilcox (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1956)

Imagining 'Total Recall', dir. by Jeffrey Schwarz (Artisan Entertainment, 2001)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers, dir. by Don Siegel (Allied Artists Pictures, 1956)

The Invisible Ray, dir. by Lambert Hillyer (Universal Pictures, 1936)

Jaws, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Universal Pictures, 1975)

Just Imagine, dir. by David Butler (Fox Film Corporation, 1930)

Metropolis, dir. by Fritz Lang (Universum Film, 1927)

RoboCop, dir. by Paul Verhoeven (Orion Pictures, 1987)

RoboCop, dir. by José Padilha (Columbia Pictures, 2014)

RoboCop 2, dir. by Irvin Kirshner (Orion Pictures, 1990)

Shivers, dir. by David Cronenberg (Cinépix Film Properties Inc., 1975)

Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope, dir. by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1977)

Taxi Driver, dir. by Martin Scorsese (Columbia Pictures, 1976)

The Terminator, dir. by James Cameron (Orion Pictures, 1984)

Terminator 2: Judgment Day, dir. by James Cameron (TriStar Pictures, 1991)

Total Recall, dir. by Len Wiseman (Columbia Pictures, 2012)

Total Recall, dir. by Paul Verhoeven (TriStar Pictures, 1990)

The Thing, dir. by John Carpenter (Universal Pictures, 1982)

A Trip to the Moon, dir. by Georges Méliès (Star-Film, 1902)

The Truman Show, dir. by Peter Weir (Paramount Pictures, 1998)

Videodrome, dir. by David Cronenberg (Universal Pictures, 1983)

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