

Stephen Zepke

Head in the Stars

Essays on Science Fiction



Skhole

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For my Father, Nick Zepke, with love.

‘I hold out my hand to the future.’
Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis*.

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All of the chapters in this book began life as essays published in books or journals. They have all been polished and updated, and in some cases completely rewritten for this volume. Chapter 1 was first published in *NECSUS, The European Journal of Media Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2012. Chapter 2 condenses material from the course *Exploring the interface through science fiction cinema* that I taught at the Academy of Fine Art in Zagreb in the summer semester 2010. An essay based on this material was published in *Responsibility for Things Seen*, edited by Petar Milat, and published in conjunction with BADco.'s participation in the Croatian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 2011. A different version of the essay was published as 'Art and the Aesthetics of the Interface; Autonomy, Sensation and Biopolitics', in *Down by law: Revisiting normativity with Deleuze/nomadic thought*, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Patricia Pisters. London: Continuum, 2012. Chapter 3 includes material published in a series of essays; 'Alien Badiou: Towards an Ethics of Universal Justice,' in the web journal *Natural Selection*, No. 5, Summer 2006; 'Between an Ethics of the Alien and the Morality of the Monster: Badiou and *The Blob*,' in *RR_02**, No. 8, January 2005; 'Between an Ethics of the Alien and the Morality of the Monster, Part Two: Badiou and *It Came From Outer Space*,' in *Univers*, No. 9, December 2005; and most significantly

'Towards an Ethics of the Alien: Alain Badiou and 1950s 'Arrival' Films,' in the exhibition catalogue *Kino wie noch nie*, edited by Antje Ehmman and Harun Farocki. Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2006. I also participated in this exhibition as an artist, showing a 5 channel video installation composed from edited fragments of hundreds of science fiction films. Chapter 4 began life as the paper '2001: Towards a Philosophy of the Future,' given on the 22nd of October, 2004 at MaMa, Zagreb, Croatia. This was then published as '2001, A Space Odyssey: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,' in the book *Visual Collegium Reader/Zbornik Vizualnog kolegija*, edited by Tanja Vrvilo and Petar Milat. Zagreb: Multimedia Institute, 2008. A different version of this essay also came out as 'Against Nihilism, Nietzsche and Kubrick on the Future of Man,' in *Journal of French Philosophy: Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française*, Volume 17, Number 2, Fall 2007. Chapter 5 was published in the book *Immanent Expressions: Literature and the Encounter with Immanence*, edited by Brynnar Swenson. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2016.

There is a submerged history in these references that leads us to the present volume. Leonardo Kovačević invited me to Zagreb to speak at MaMa in 2004, and I ended up talking about 2001. It was then that I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Petar Milat and Tom Medak, the directors of the research center (and so much else) MaMa. Petar and Tom invited me back to MaMa on numerous occasions, and along with Leonardo became my friends. Through them I met Ivana Ivković, and Nikolina and Sergej Pristaš, along with the rest of the amazing performance

group BADco. These people became my Zagreb family when I taught a semester at the Academy of Fine Art in Zagreb in 2010, which would go on, via BADco's appearance at the Venice Biennale, to become chapter 2. Over the intervening years I have continued to speak at MaMa, and remain an enthusiastic fan of BADco. In fact, there is an essay on their work and science-fiction that threatened to be written for this book, but which must unfortunately wait for another occasion. This would be a tribute to the influence Badco has had on me, and in particular their commitment to a modernist aesthetics channeled through contemporary theory and forms, a type of alchemy I also try to practice. I have been very influenced by all these people, and by Zagreb, the city where they live. Given this history it was not surprising that I rather shamelessly asked Petar if MaMa would be interested in publishing this collection. I'm still surprised, and very grateful, that he accepted. Thank you Petar, and all my friends in Zagreb, you are in these pages.

Introduction

Science Fiction, Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future

When I was eleven years old my Dad took me to see 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. What I remember most vividly is coming out of the cinema, looking up at my father and asking “What did it mean?” My father, slightly frustrated, replied, “I don’t know”. This was a significant moment that marked both the beginning of my love of science fiction and my first inkling that my father didn’t know everything! From now on science fiction would be indelibly stained with the thrill of the unknown.

Science fiction concerns the future, of course, this being its simple, organising essence. But science fiction wants to do more than just be *in* the future, it wants to predict the future, to reveal its horrors and beauty, its similarities and difference, and more importantly, tell us about all the cool stuff. This means that the ‘future’ science fiction explores has changed a lot over the years, and has a fascinating past, one with a twistier time-line than a Phillip K. Dick story (so while the genre is often said to begin with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Adam Roberts argues for an ‘Ancient Greek SF’ (2016 26)). But this book is not a history of science fiction, because although historical context plays a part – the Cold War from which alien arrival films emerge, or our biopolitical present in which interface films become symptomatic – this book is most concerned with science fiction futures that crack history open, allowing something unaccountable to emerge, something singular and new. As a result, this book sees the ‘new’ and its ‘future’ in science fiction in a very different way from Darko Suvin and Frederic Jameson, whose astoundingly influential theory sees science fiction futures as forms of ‘cognitive

estrangement' that seek to reflect on the present that produces them. On their account, science fiction offers us (its readers and viewers) a future that is recognisably extrapolated from the present (this is its cognitive or scientific aspect), but nevertheless gives us enough distance for critical reflection (this is the fictional part allowing estrangement – in Jameson's Structuralist inflected criticism the terms map onto each other; cognitive estrangement = science fiction). Suvin attributes this distancing to what he calls a 'novum' (a term he takes from Ernst Bloch's monumental *The Principle of Hope*), or the utopian element of a story that is identifiably 'new' (whether thing, ability, or belief). For both Jameson and Suvin then, the condition of the 'new' is the present that creates it, and the future is always relative to it. 'Born in history and judged in history,' Suvin writes, 'the novum has an ineluctably historical character. So has the correlative fictional reality or possible world which, for all its displacements and disguises, always corresponds to the wish-dreams of a specific sociocultural class or implied addressees.' (1988 76) For both Suvin and Jameson, science fiction is always 'about' the present, and the 'future' or 'new' is merely a genre device allowing texts a critical distance on their conditions of emergence.

To me this view on the future in science fiction, while no doubt correct in most cases, nevertheless seems a bit disappointing and limited, not least because it completely contradicts my pre-teen experience of 2001. Back then Kubrick's film struck me as wonderfully opaque, its mysteries undoubtedly liberating, given that my father was dumbstruck as to their meaning. In hindsight my

interpretation seems more correct than I perhaps realised, because the meaning of the monolith is found precisely in its radical silence, its utter impermeability as to its intent or purpose, and it is this unknowable essence that produces the remarkable journey leading humanity to its miraculous re-birth as the Starchild. Each time the monolith appears life's conditions are exceeded, history is blasted open, and chronological time is put out of joint by a force that operates according to a totally alien logic. This genetic 'event' has both philosophical and political significance, because it explains, as Michel Foucault put it in his delightfully deadpan manner, 'how that which is might no longer be that which is' (1998 450). One does not have to read much Foucault to realise that what he's talking about is revolution.

Jameson, on the other hand, believes science fiction always reveals our 'constitutional failure' to imagine the 'otherness and radical difference' of the future, but it is precisely this failure that succeeds in making us critically aware of the 'cultural and ideological closure' constituting our 'absolute limits' (2005 289). Reflecting on our limits in this way may, Jameson thinks, help us to adjust them. This book will argue, more optimistically I think, that 2001 is an example of how science fiction can exceed its conditions of possibility and reveal a truly radical future, one detached from the present that has produced it, something that I call (following others) an undetermined 'event'. Science fiction is actually full of such events (the alien arrival films dealt with in chapter three are only one example), even if most narratives are content with controlling, exploiting or

simply destroying the results. To instead affirm this event, as I try to do, in the name of a future 'to come', is a rather philosophical way of looking at science fiction, and indeed, all the chapters in the book move back and forth between science fiction and philosophy. But this is not simply an exercise of applying philosophy to science fiction, a mere exercise of interpretation, which would disrespectfully reduce science fiction to the status of an example. Rather, they meet as equals in a relationship suggested by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze when he claims a book of philosophy should be 'a kind of science fiction' (1994 xx), because 'how else can one write but of those things which one doesn't know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say. We write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the border which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other.' (1994 xxi) In this sense, a book of science fiction is the equal of any book of philosophy (or perhaps that should be vice versa) when it leaves behind the past and present to grasp an utterly unknown future, because it is only at this moment that an author can write something that is truly new. It sounds so simple, but we don't have to read much science fiction, let alone philosophy, to know that it isn't. Revolutions never are. Trace Reddell has usefully called this genetic event of the unknown in science fiction a 'new novum', one that 'provides both a form for and mode of encountering futurity and alterity in their own right' (2018 13).¹

It is an interesting question as to whether this 'new novum' exists in our future or past, because its insistence

on invention and impossibility (possibility always implying conditions) are utterly modernist. In fact, the science fiction narrative of a new age powered by new technology seems to belong to Modernism, which understood itself as a world-historical force in precisely these terms. Indeed, whenever you date the beginning of science fiction, it really came to life when Modernism crawled from the wreckage of history and inaugurated an entirely new age of the machine. This is the 'new' history of a *Militant Modernism* that proceeds as a series of explosions that echo its own birth, each avant-garde resetting the clock as the future arrives again.² Unlike this heroic history of Modernism, however, which is often focussed on fine art, our heroes will be 'popular' figures, folk heroes perhaps, films and books from an unapologetically 'low' culture whose brilliance illuminates the masses. The democratic distribution of these texts is perhaps the only thing they share with our contemporary and 'post-modern' experience of the 'new', which is utterly ironised in its cut 'n' paste quotation, and inextricable from the accelerated economies of late-capitalism. Today, the 'new' finds its most compelling logic in the ambiguous temporality of the commodity, a product that must be different enough to distinguish itself against competitors, while remaining identifiable according to the categories defining the market. Science fiction's temporal limits (as described by Jameson and Suvin) obviously reflect this economy perfectly, allowing it to constantly contort itself into new versions of what we already have. Rebooted – the logic of the franchise. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. succinctly puts it, 'it may represent newness, but it is never

new' (2008 53). So although science fiction is a 'popular' genre, the 'new' we are looking for, this 'new novum' created by certain texts, is nevertheless exceptional, and so approaches the paradigm of fine art. Like the best art, these texts refuse the clichés and lazy sentiments of the mainstream, evading our expectations to create something undecidable and strange. These texts give us, as Csicsery-Ronay writes, 'a vertiginous pleasure, more ludic than cognitive, more ecstatic than disciplinary' (2008 55). Perhaps it is because this experience is so unusual that most of what follows concerns specific texts, and requires a close reading of them. This book has relatively little to say about science fiction in general, about the genre, its development, or meaning. I am writing instead about those wonderful exceptions, when the rules gets broken.

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze offers a good description of the 'new novum' this book is seeking, which emphasises its break with the existent:

The new, with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever new, just as the established was always established from the outset, even if a certain amount of empirical time was necessary for this to be recognised. What became established with the new is precisely not the new. For the new – in other words difference – calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognized and unrecognizable terra incognita. (1994 136)

Where is this terra incognita, we might ask? Given that it is without conditions, or perhaps more accurately destroys its conditions, how can we even experience it? It's experience will not be easy, as we shall see, but neither is it impossible. The new is in no way foreclosed, like some sort of 'outsideness' that wants to 'wipe out the human race and drag the earth off to some nameless place for some nameless purpose' (Lovecraft, 2001 245). This Lovecraftian sublime perfectly describes Jameson's 'absolute limit', the moment when a text breaks down and can only figure its own inadequacy, leaving the merely human hanging onto the vanishing edge of metaphor. The outside, it announces, remains outside of language, where it belongs. Deleuze's 'new' is something different, because it is *inside* what exists – it is known and present – but only as that which goes beyond these conditions of possibility. That's the future, a future that detaches itself from the present every time it is invented, a present that is now forced to start again, undetermined. One of Deleuze's favourite examples was the stutter, the vocal eruption of the outside of language, an 'internal outside' emerging on the very edge of meaning. Friedrich Nietzsche, who is Deleuze's major reference here, called this the 'eternal return' of forces that overcome their present conditions (history, humanity, morality, etc.), forces that are in this sense 'untimely' (*Unzeitgemäße*). The future is unleashed, Nietzsche thought, by a critique of the present and of everything holding back life's power of becoming, a job, he believed, for a science fiction writer, a philosopher of the future – 'their "knowing" is *creating*' (2002 106). In this sense the 'future' for Suvin and Jameson is a tomorrow

(dialectically) connected to today, and this, Nietzsche claims, means a 'present *lived at the expense of the future*' (2006 8). Science fiction doesn't happen tomorrow (*Morgan*) because its only the day beyond that – *Übermorgen* – that the future of the *Übermensch* will dawn.³ Nietzsche's *über* does not describe an *outside*, because it is instead an 'event' that always occurs on the inside, within science fiction for example, acting as its '*principle of disequilibrium*' (Klossowski, 1997 103). The future arrives like the Terminator, and history is changed forever. Perhaps its too much to claim this book is a genealogy of science fiction's eternal return, but it certainly takes inspiration from this thought, and tries to imagine the future that Nietzsche announces. As such I leave the last word to Deleuze, writing about Nietzsche's eternal return, but perhaps as well affirming his own belief in science fiction. The eternal return, he claims;

is properly called a belief of the future, a belief in the future. Eternal return affects only the new, what is produced under the condition of default and by the intermediary of metamorphosis. However, it causes neither the *condition* nor the *agent* to return: on the contrary it repudiates these and expels them with all its centrifugal force. [...] It is itself the new, complete novelty. (1994 90)

Chapter One

Beyond Cognitive Estrangement, The Future in Dystopian Science Fiction Cinema

Science fiction is about the future. This is an obvious thing to say, and yet its obviousness conceals a debate that is perhaps yet to take place, a debate over what this future is and what it should be. Science fiction usually takes the future to be self-evident; the future is 'the day after tomorrow', or another day more chronologically advanced, but in any case a day on which the human struggle continues, same as it ever was. As we will see, science fiction futures in this sense express our utopian hopes and dystopian nightmares, distilling in often spectacular visions our hopes and fears for our present. Darko Suvin and Frederic Jameson have been the most important advocates for a science fiction future in this sense, as a 'critical' exploration of our present conditions and their limits. But there is an alternative future, a future undetermined – and so not confined – by the present, a future that explodes in an event that changes the conditions of life, and takes us beyond the merely existent. This would be a future that was not simply a reflection of current modes of being, but a radical becoming capable of producing something genuinely 'new'. Such an understanding of the future can be found in Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the 'untimely', and in the work of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari that follows and makes use of it.⁴ It can also be found in certain rare, but invaluable science fiction films that escape their various conditions of possibility to give us visions of ... something else, something strange and very beautiful.

In order to stage this confrontation over the future, or even over 'the future of the future', it will be necessary

to rehearse the respective arguments of our protagonists. But it will also be necessary to examine some science fiction films that do, and others that don't, echo these philosophical debates in a more artistic way. In doing so this essay will focus on 'dystopian' films, as these constitute the currently dominant sub-genre of sci-fi, a sub-genre defined by its more or less political 'critique' of the present.⁵ Such films effectively embody the stakes of the future, offering either a political commentary on our current conditions, or exploring another type of politics, one that seeks to overcome these conditions in incendiary inventions, and so define a new future for 'political art'.

SCIENCE FICTION AS 'COGNITIVE ESTRANGEMENT'

Even the most cursory glance at the academic field of 'science fiction studies' will tell us that science fiction is a genre built on hope, and more specifically on Ernst Bloch's book *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. According to Bloch hope drives the utopian imagination, and as such it is the active principle behind the speculative futures produced by science fiction. Hope is our desire for an other, better future, a hope that is both personal and political, appearing on a scale that is sometimes mundane and everyday and sometimes magnificent. In this sense then, the future is recognised by what in it is 'new', or as Darko Suvin has argued, drawing on Bloch, science-fiction narratives are generated by a 'novum', which he describes as 'a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and addressee's norm of reality' (1988 76).

The novum's difference from reality is what 'estranges' the reader from the present. In dystopian films the novum is usually a brutal form of socio-political domination and/or exploitation that the protagonist attempts to escape or defeat. But the novum is also consistent with current scientific knowledge (distinguishing science fiction from fantasy), making it plausibly real, and so able to be critical of the present. In the tradition of the *Frankfurter Schule* and Critical Theory, the novum is science fiction's very own *Verfremdungseffekt*. The process of critical reflection established by the novum is the 'cognitive estrangement' achieved by 'science fiction' (each of the terms mapping onto the other), and defines, according to Frederic Jameson, science fiction's fundamentally political nature. 'One cannot imagine,' he argues, 'any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet.' (2005 vii)

As the dominant understanding of science fiction's structure and method 'cognitive estrangement' sets the conditions for both the appearance of the future and its political efficacy. These conditions are unapologetically dialectical, making the present and its past both the condition for the future, and the horizon establishing the limits of the future's politics.⁶ Jameson puts it clearly, arguing that science fiction's utopian fantasies 'defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*' (2005 286). As such, science fiction, following Georg Lukács, is a form of 'realism' whose interest is less in how it shows us the future, and more in how it is 'a symptom and reflex of historical change' (Jameson, 2005 284). Suvin makes the

case; 'Born in history and judged in history,' he writes, 'the novum has an ineluctably historical character. So has the correlative fictional reality or possible world which, for all its displacements and disguises, always corresponds to the wish-dreams of a specific sociocultural class or implied addressees.' (1988 76) The future in these terms is always a political expression of its conditions of possibility, conditions found in the present. The critical and political function of science fiction cinema is therefore to negate or confirm our present possibilities, and encourage us towards those the film advocates. This supposed dialectic between the present and its future (ie., between identity and difference) has some radical implications for science fiction, at least according to Jameson, who writes: 'the shock of otherness, is a mere aesthetic effect and a lie' (1991 286). We should not fear a dystopian future, Jameson claims, because 'it will by definition be ours' (1991 286). Rather than depicting a new future, or an alien other, he argues, what is 'authentic' about science fiction 'is not at all its capacity to keep the future alive, even in imagination. On the contrary, its deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future.' (2005 288-9) The future in a radical sense, in the sense of something truly new, is definitively impossible according to Jameson, because it must by definition be Outside our powers to imagine it.

For Jameson any science fiction future is first of all an ideological expression of the present that produces it, and must be treated as such. 'Always historicize!' he exhorts; 'This slogan is the one absolute and we may

even say “transhistorical” imperative of all dialectical thought.’ (1981 9) Indeed, he later claims that there is no utopian vision of science fiction future that ‘is not some mere projection of our own situation’ (2005 172). While Jameson’s epistemological pessimism means that science fiction cannot give us a new future, something absolutely different or other, it does ‘succeed by failure’, inasmuch as in ‘setting forth for the unknown, science fiction finds itself irrevocably mired in the all-too-familiar, and therefore becomes unexpectedly transformed into a contemplation of our own absolute limits’ (2005 289). In this sense, he argues, the problem science fiction has always had in imagining the future is actually its strength, because ‘it forces us precisely to concentrate on the break itself: a meditation on the impossible, on the unrealisable in its own right’ (2005 232).⁷

This is depressing news for both fans of science fiction and fans of the future. It seems as if in science fiction studies, if not in science fiction, there is no time for an incendiary day after tomorrow, a future with values and visions that have never been seen before, and the new body that these call forth. But this future, this radical alterity, what Nietzsche called the ‘untimely’, Foucault the ‘outside’ of ‘heterotopia’, and Deleuze and Guattari the utopian ‘event’, emerges, I will argue, in certain dystopian science fiction films that offer an alternative to critical theory’s insistence on a dialectical ‘future’ chained to the present.

UTOPIA, ANTI-UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA

We will come back to this philosophical debate soon enough. First, however, we must understand what constitutes dystopian science fiction. Suvin and Jameson convincingly show how science fiction forms part of the utopian tradition, and how this includes an anti-utopian strain that becomes dystopian science fiction. This dystopian strain first appeared as early as the Soviet author Yevgeny Zamyatin's book *We* (1921), and is firmly established by Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's 1984 (1949). Rather than exploring our utopian hopes for political change these novels present a future in which social transformation has been repressed by state violence. Although Huxley and Orwell produced their biting satires of totalitarian social planning from a position to the left of Stalin's party communism, others quickly developed their condemnation of Soviet 'utopia' into an attack on the possibility of co-operative forms of politics. These 'anti-utopias' display what Suvin calls a 'dystopian pessimism', where the narrative trajectory does not open new alternatives for the present situation but uses the 'novum' to condemn all utopian desires. Here Suvin is following Karl Popper in *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945), who claimed that the idea that humans want to work together to forge a better future can only be achieved through violent coercion, and that utopian desires for self-determination necessarily lead to totalitarian rule (see Moylan, 2000a 135). As a result, Suvin argues, anti-utopias have a mythic form (as opposed to the epic

structure of what he calls 'critical dystopias') that confirms the supposedly a priori, eternal and necessary rhythms of history. As Suvin puts it, 'mythological events are cyclical and predetermined, foreseeable descents from the timeless into the temporal realm' (1988 80).⁸

We can see this mythic narrative in many post-apocalyptic films, where a global catastrophe of Biblical proportions wipes the slate clean, again, producing a 'reset' that is also a repeat. This repeat is determined by certain supposedly unchanging 'truths'; most obviously human kind's inevitable drive to dominate others through violence, but also, and as a counter-balance, humanity's desire for personal freedom, and its commitment to love and the family unit as the basis of social organisation.⁹ Anti-utopian science fiction consistently confronts these aspects of quasi-transcendental 'human nature', its pessimism deriving from the victory of (state) violence over freedom and love (as in 1984), or from the extremely reduced scale of the family's perseverance. In *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), a single couple and their son survives a global flood, while in *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) and *I am Legend* (Lawrence, 2007) a 'patchwork' family struggles to survive in the face of the violent anarchy that seeks to destroy it.¹⁰ It is precisely because these families are 'mythic' in nature, embodying universal human values that are supposedly in all of us, that gives hope. 'Utopia', if it can be said to exist in these films, is not a vision of a better future achieved through political struggle, it is the defeat of a failed political process and the consequent return to the eternal human values that this politics repressed. This narrative is often deployed in the

name of a clearly conservative agenda, as in *Zero Population Growth* (Campus, 1972), an anti-counter-culture film that shows how an entirely collectivised society represses basic individual rights, most poignantly the right to be parents. This utilisation of the anti-utopian narrative by the Christian right reaches its apogee in *The Book of Eli* (the Hughes brothers, 2010), which concerns the survival of Christianity itself. These examples of films involving the post-apocalyptic re-foundation of traditional values are the tip of an iceberg that extends from early films in the sub-genre (eg., *Panic in Year Zero* (Milland, 1962)) to today. Going even further are films that are pessimistic about the value of 'human-values' themselves, and see them as either a shallow veneer obscuring the 'truth' that life has always been nasty, brutal and short (eg., the *Mad Max* films (Miller, 1979, 1981, 1985), the brilliant 'pre-apocalyptic' film *On the Beach* (Kramer, 1959), or the harrowing recent films *The Road* (Hillcoat, 2009) *The Purge* (DeMonaco, 2013) and *High Rise* (Wheatley, 2015)), or films that insist on the impossibility of a new start (eg., *Idaho Transfer* (Fonda, 1973)). Similarly, films that base humanity's new start on the negative values of violence and domination (eg., *No Blade of Grass* (Wilde, 1970)), or envision a future world inexorably decaying back to its original state of pure evil (in Lars von Trier's first film *The Element of Crime* (1984) a detective tracking the rapist and killer of young girls either becomes him, or was him from the beginning, it is not clear which) pessimistically affirm the 'mythical' and eternal return of violence and destruction.

But, according to Suvin, there is also a more militant and critical kind of dystopian science fiction narrative that is based upon the epic form. Here, he writes, events are 'presented as historically contingent and unforeseeable (and thus as a rule historically reversible)' (1988 80). These 'critical dystopias' as they have become known, project contemporary anxieties about increasing social control into a dystopian future, but give explanations as to how this arose, and explore strategies of resistance. In these films a future totalitarian government reflects in exaggerated form the 'bad' politics of today, whether that of the religious right (eg., *V for Vendetta* (McTeigue, 2005), *Equilibrium* (Wimmer, 2002), or *The Handmaid's Tale* (Schlöndorff, 1990)), or of capitalism in its Fordist (eg., *THX 1138* (Lucas, 1971) and *Elysium* (Blomkamp, 2013)) or post-Fordist (eg., *The Island* (Bay, 2005), or *In Time* (Niccol, 2011)) incarnation, or that of a slightly vaguer '1%' (eg., *The Hunger Games* trilogy (Ross and Lawrence, 2012-15), or *Snowpiercer* (Joon-ho, 2013)). It then falls upon the film's hero to either organise the resistance or escape, and in doing so direct our 'critical' judgement against the repressive elements of our present that are figured in the film. As a result, Jameson argues, the narrative structures of utopian and dystopian texts are not simple opposites, like utopian and anti-utopian texts arguing for or against a politics of social co-operation, but 'in reality have nothing to do with each other' (1996 55). Indeed, some commentators claim that 'critical dystopias' emerged in the 1980s as a specific response to the rise of neo-liberalism, with the negative portrayal of corporate capitalism in *Alien* (Scott, 1979) and

Bladerunner (Scott, 1982) the most obvious examples, with more recent films such as *In Time* (Niccol, 2011) or *The Congress* (Folman 2013) taking up this critique in more contemporary terms.¹¹ But these films also offer a 'neo-liberal' solution to their totalitarian corporations, which is the unalienable human right to individual freedom. In *Alien*, or films such as *THX 1138*, or its loose re-make *The Island*, this 'right' is presented as a natural 'drive' or 'essence' defining the human, while in *Bladerunner* it is more ambiguously placed as an 'individual' right shared by humans and cyborgs. It is precisely this insistence on the universality of the right to freedom that is on the one hand entirely consistent with Jameson's claim that we cannot imagine the truly 'Other' or any 'new' form of politics, inasmuch as political revolution in dystopian films is premised on the epistemological limits of the 'human', while on the other it also clearly exposes the political limitations (and even complicity) of such a strategy. It is this 'catch-22' of dystopian narratives – at once critiquing the totalitarian political tendencies of contemporary capitalism, but in the name of an essential human freedom that is itself one of capitalism's core assumptions – that will be our problem here. It is a problem that foregrounds science fiction's need for a 'new' and 'inhuman' future, and highlights the achievements – but also the strangeness – of those few films that have achieved this.

In recent times we have seen a deluge of films warning of the totalitarian dangers of the digital interface. The most well known are probably *The Matrix* trilogy (the Wachowski brothers, 1999-2003), where technology is both the enemy

(in its autonomous and insect-like form) and humanity's greatest weapon (when under our control), a distinction so precarious it requires the intervention of a messiah ('Neo', or 'the One') to unite the opposites and move them towards a higher unity. Although this higher type of cybernetic being might have provided the opportunity to explore 'new' forms of political organisation, any such innovations are limited and controlled by the film's religious overtones, and their stubborn insistence on 'freedom of choice' as the distinguishing essence of the human. More interesting are films that gleefully explore a dystopian psychopathology unleashed by the internet. Brett Leonard's *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) and *Virtuosity* (1995) are early examples of films that explore how the digital interface can produce sexual and sociopathic violence, individualising (and so spectacularising) this potential in a glamorous, monomaniacal and villainous *übermensch* who is finally defeated by a downtrodden but determined everyman hero. Once more the distinction between a dystopian future and its defeat is based on a simple moral value: human weakness is in fact human strength, because it prevents us from hubris. The good are human (ie., romantic, emotional and tormented by the ambiguities of choice) while the cyborg is evil (cold, calculating and God-like).

In *Strange Days* (Bigelow, 1995) new technology allows the real-time exchange of a murderous rapist's experience with his victim's, in a kind of delirious s-m fantasy where everyone's a 'switch'. While mostly interested in the pornographic possibilities of new technologies, *Strange Days*, like the Leonard films, finally restores emotional





‘She’s seeing what he’s seeing’ – snuff interface, *Strange Days*

'sanity' with the defeat of the bad guys and the emergence of the romantic couple, reassuring us (but not really) that new technology is not the problem, just its 'users'. What is also notable about these films is their rather cursory 'critique' compared to the way they lasciviously revel in the 'forbidden fruit' the interface has so obligingly unleashed. As Lenny, a 'dealer' of the new interface puts it (the drug-metaphor perfectly encapsulating the film's ambivalence); "I'm the main connection to the unconscious." In this sense the 'critical' dimensions of these films are merely a fig leaf providing cover for their gleefully hypocritical indulgence in sex and violence. In fact, the category of 'critical dystopia' seems to have little grip on what is really going on in these films, which is the capture of unconscious desires by image-commodities, a capture that films like *The Matrix* and *Strange Days* place at the centre of their narratives.

The paradoxes of these 'interface films' will be more closely considered in chapter two, but for now we can see how these films pose a real challenge to Suvin and Jameson's political understanding of dystopian films, because they illustrate how easily critical 'reflection' can be instrumentalised within the amoral 'atrocities exhibition' that these films are actually selling. Certainly, the return to human values marks the limit of these film's political imagination, but this limit is not 'critical', because it is simply the narrative condition of the pleasure we take in indulging our techno-enhanced fantasies, and cedes the power of invention and transformation to a nihilist desire to destroy ourselves. Jameson is fond of saying that we find it easier to imagine the destruction of all human life

than a political alternative to capitalism, but perhaps we should take this remark in a positive sense as meaning that it is contemporary capitalism that now owns our powers of invention, and uses them to imagine a future in which humanity is overcome, exploiting this 'threat' for profit. As a result, I will argue, it is in films that embrace this invention of the inhuman while jettisoning any residual human, neoliberal values, that we will see the emergence of a 'new' future and of a politics that announces it.

But first, let us return to those dystopian interface films that offer (an often formulaic) critique of virtual reality in favour of the human. These films almost inevitably advocate a return to what is 'real' (after having placed this very concept under question) – the human body with all its flaws and weaknesses, the love of a good woman, a modest (ie., 'normal' and therefore 'healthy') sense of self, and the human rights of individual freedom and 'happiness' (a value that vaguely invokes all of those already mentioned). These values are posited as universal not because the films show any great commitment to them, but because they allow an expedient moral resolution to a narrative focussed almost exclusively on dark delights. Similarly unrealistic are the political solutions offered by these films, which usually involve the extraordinary actions of a superhero. In these two aspects of the 'critical dystopia' film we clearly see the political limits of understanding science fiction films in terms of 'cognitive estrangement'. When cognitive coherency (ie., present reality) dialectically defines the 'estrangement' of the future, then rational and human factors become the epistemological limits of science

fiction's politics. While this suits the generic ubiquity in the dystopian narrative of an alienated individual fighting against a repressive political system, it also means that this resistance inevitably folds back into the ridiculous clichés of the action-film that reduce political transformation to entertainment. This can be clearly seen in films such as *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*, *Elysium* and *In Time* that purportedly advocate mass uprisings, but also make clear that popular insurrection depends on and is subsequent to the acts of a remarkable (*In Time*), technologically enhanced (*Elysium*) or super-human (*V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*) individual.

In Time is particularly disappointing in this regard, beginning with a rather harrowing dramatisation of the phrase 'time is money', as people over 25 are given one years time to use as currency; once their time/money runs out so does their life. In the ghettos, the film tells us, people live day to day, and it is not afraid to show us how capitalism's 'growth' rests on corpses. Admittedly this is all ameliorated by the fact that people stop ageing once they reach 25, so although life is tough in the ghetto everyone makes a pretty corpse. In this sense, the novum of the film actually serves to make the worst brutalities of our own reality attractive, in order to exploit them to the hilt. The film then takes us over into the gated community of the 1%, in which our wise-guy hero initially excels before being undone by his working-class naivety (ie., his belief that life is 'fair'). At this point the film suddenly switches to a Bonnie and Clyde caper with Robin Hood overtones, as the proletarian hero and the daughter of the richest capitalist join forces

to rob banks and distribute time/money to the poor. This 'revolutionary' action finally culminates in the people being liberated from their wage-slavery, allowing them to overwhelm the walls dividing the haves and the have-nots. Although there is perhaps a faint suggestion here that the revolution begins by abolishing private property, what seems to motivate the protagonists, and finally explains their 'remarkable' status, is their ability to love across social divisions and so exemplify the truism that not only is love 'equal', but it is also humanity's saving grace. Similarly in *V for Vendetta* the superhuman abilities of the hero V are explained by his exposure to a chemical during experiments on political prisoners held in detention camps. But this is merely 'background' to the story, which instead emphasises V's education and culture, his tender empathy, patience and strength. In other words, V's superhuman abilities are not extraordinary but in fact the distillation of everything that makes human's 'good', a fact symbolised by those in the popular uprising that ends the film all donning V's mask. Finally, however, the film qualifies the universality of V's gifts inasmuch as the popular uprising is only made possible by V's super powers and self-sacrifice. Perhaps this level of political ambiguity in the film is unsurprising given that V's actions are modelled on those of Guy Fawkes!

In their dubious appeal to universal human values as the ground of a revolutionary politics these films are similar to those dystopian films that are concerned with an individual's escape from an oppressive system. Such films are 'critical' insofar as they imagine a future in which human individuality and freedom are under threat, but

in doing so they turn this individuality into an essential and eternal truth that must be defended at all costs. The best example of this is the beautiful *THX 1138* from 1971, where a society is totally controlled, including its sexual relations, emotions and even faith, in order to exploit a dangerous Fordist labour process. This system – imbedded deep underground – is physically enforced by robotic police (modelled on those that were beating students and other protesters in America at the time), and ideologically maintained by a pseudo-religious socialist cult headed by a paternal figure that appears as a cross between Stalin and Jesus Christ, and who preaches the sanctity of work. After illegally falling in love with his sexual partner, for which he's punished, the eponymously named hero must, and finally does, escape. After long struggle he emerges triumphant onto the surface of the planet where he is silhouetted against an incredibly fiery sunset (a shot echoed in *The Island*, a film that remakes *THX 1138* within the more contemporary bio-political context of corporate cloning).

It is unknown whether the earth's surface is inhabitable or not, and whether the violence of the setting sun marks a triumphant new beginning for man, or his death. The future is at this point unimportant, because the film is entirely about the necessity of individual freedom in the face of oppressive (read socialist) state violence. It is easy to see a neoliberal agenda here, inasmuch as the film clearly suggests that personal freedom is always in the best interests of society, because (as *The Matrix* will put it quite explicitly) freedom of choice is the very definition of being human.



Freedom and/or death? – the end of *THX 1138*

The problem here is that when science fiction futures are tied to a utopian imagination conditioned by and restricted to the horizon of the present, as they are in the majority of films, they either cynically exploit wish-fulfilment fantasies masquerading as 'political' narratives (of either the dark-libidinal or superhuman-revolutionary type), or return us to essentialist 'human' values through a reduced narrative of escape. In both cases these utopian fantasies are symptomatic expressions of our political powerlessness, and of our inability to imagine a future that is truly different. As our futures fold back onto eternal structures of 'repressed' libido or essential 'human' values, it seems as if our earlier distinction between mythic and epic dystopian science fiction was merely formal. A distinction then, that obscured their similarity, inasmuch as 'epic' narratives tend to affirm the 'mythical' eternity of human values, even if these operate within a world of political contingency and have been dressed up in the supposed agency of 'free choice'.

RADICAL DYSTOPIAS AND THEIR UNTIMELY FUTURE

It is time to turn to 'untimely' dystopian science fiction, where the future is not simply a critical reflection on the present, or even a contemplation of our present epistemological limits. These 'radical dystopias', as I will call them, return us to a strange kind of utopian politics that envisions a future that has escaped its human conditions. Such a future remains historically rooted in the present, inasmuch as it is produced 'now', but its real interest is in

revealing what in the present goes beyond it. In this sense radical dystopias conform to Tom Moylan's definitive statement: 'Whatever its stance, target or outcome every dystopian narrative engages in an aesthetic/epistemological encounter with its historical conjuncture.' (2000a 181) But radical dystopias engage the present in a way Moylan would perhaps be less willing to accept, confronting it with the ahistorical and ontological force of becoming itself, and so attempting to open the present onto its immanent outside, onto what there is in it that escapes. It is precisely in this sense that Nietzsche approaches the question of the future. Like Suvin and Jameson he begins from a historical perspective, arguing that human values, and first of all the value of humanity (the 'human-all-too-human' as he puts it), determine the emergence of the future. But for Nietzsche, the values that define the 'human', the values like 'freedom' or the 'family' that science fiction films inevitably posit as 'good', are in fact reactionary values that prevent life from overcoming itself, repressing its drive to become something new. From Nietzsche's perspective, the distinction of mythic and epic narratives, of anti-utopian and dystopian films, is irrelevant in the face of their shared humanism. As a result, the radical dystopian film emerges from what Nietzsche calls a revaluation of human values, and its efforts to put new values in their place. This shifts the level of analysis from the 'epistemological pessimism' imposed by our necessarily human limits, to an 'ontological optimism' about a future capable of overcoming it. This is to give dystopia a philosophical (and as we shall see, political) definition that takes us far beyond humanity's epistemological frame, or science fiction's formal analysis.

We need, Nietzsche says, a '*critique*' of those values that up until now people have taken as 'beyond all questioning'. Without such a revaluation of values we are condemned, he says, to a '*present lived at the expense of the future*' (2006 7-8). What Nietzsche, and then Foucault after him, calls 'genealogy' is a critical process that overcomes essential human values by creating new ones, and in this way makes history serve the power of life. This power, (what Nietzsche calls 'will to power') affirms a process of overcoming that repudiates the human values of 'essence', 'truth', 'God' and the 'good' in favour of the transcendental and ahistorical force of the future, of becoming itself. 'The ahistorical,' Nietzsche writes, 'is like an atmosphere within which alone life can germinate and with the destruction of which it must vanish.' (1997 63-4) But this ahistorical force of life only exists within and by working on history, because its transvaluations cannot exist without history, but it nevertheless escapes this history by producing something absolutely new, the future 'itself'.

Nietzsche famously declares the death of God, but he also argues that his announcement struggles to be heard because although Christian morality no longer dominates life, its mantle has been taken up by the transcendent doctrine of science. Science, he claims, denies the body and its experience in favour of its own knowledge, which it eternalises in the 'ascetic ideal' of a higher 'truth'.¹² This, Nietzsche argues, is the way science 'uproots the future' (1997 95) and becomes our modern form of nihilism. Science in this sense is the 'antithesis' of art, inasmuch as art for Nietzsche 'is the great means of making life possible, the

great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life' (1967 452). As a result, it is only by transforming the eternalisation of our present knowledge in science into art that a radical future can be preserved, and eternally return (Nietzsche, 1997 86-7), making art the only form of politics for Nietzsche. The film where all of this is perfectly played out is *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968), and in particular the part in which the astronaut Bowman kills the super-intelligent machine HAL, a dystopian embodiment of the ascetic ideal, before plunging into the avant-garde cinema of the Stargate. This highly abstract sequence functions to dislocate Bowman and us from any form of human subjectivity, so that when we emerge into the 'Regency room' at the end of the film we are seemingly outside any human form of time or space. We are now ready for the final transformation of the human into the 'Starchild', as both Kubrick and Nietzsche call it. We will examine *2001* in much more detail in chapter four, but for our purposes here Nietzsche and Kubrick have art defeat science by imposing on it an 'inspired variation', one generated by a body that possesses a 'great artistic facility, a creative vision'. The genuine historian, Nietzsche says, and we could say the same for radical dystopian science fiction, has the power to make 'the universally known into something never heard before. [...] Only he who constructs the future has a right to judge the past.' (1997 94) This then is the sense in which, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, writing about Nietzsche; 'The genealogist is something of a fortune-teller, the philosopher of the future.' (1983 94) The genealogist is an artist in judging the past – and revaluing it – according to

the criteria of creation, and by so doing they create a new future. As Nietzsche puts it; 'True philosophers reach for the future with a creative hand and everything that is and was becomes a means, a toll, a hammer for them. Their "knowing" is *creating*, their creating is a legislating, their will to truth is – *will to power*.' (2002 106)

Like Deleuze, Michel Foucault draws his concept of 'genealogy' directly from Nietzsche. For Foucault neither individuals nor countries create history, because history is instead a constant play of non-subjective forces, a continual process of emergence that genealogy is directly engaged with. This is what Foucault calls 'effective history', a history without constants in which nothing is fixed, a history that produces its own discontinuities by constantly revaluing the values defining who and what we are. In this way, Foucault claims, and it is a very beautiful idea; 'Knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.' (1977 154) Genealogy qua effective history attempts to reverse an existing relationship of forces by introducing something new into it, and it is this act, he believes, that will create a new future. As a result, genealogies are 'anti-sciences' that attempt to discover – 'discover' meaning here 'construct' – an 'insurrection of knowledges' (Foucault, 2003 9).¹³ Genealogy, Foucault says, 'is the tactic which, once it has described all the local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released by them' (2003 10-11). Desubjugated knowledges are those non-human forces that are produced within and work on history, and that by not conforming to pre-existing 'truths' introduce an unthinkable outside to science itself.

Finally, Foucault writes, genealogy is 'a use of history that severs its connections to memory, its metaphysics and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory – a transformation of history into a totally different form of time' (1977 160). This new form of time is the future, but now unleashed from the present. In this Nietzsche and Foucault offer us an ontological understanding of the future rather than an epistemological one. For them the problem of creating something new is not located at the epistemological limits of human knowledge and history, but at the edge of being, where the future emerges as the inhuman horizon of becoming that takes the human beyond itself.

ABSTRACTION AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE FUTURE

So, once more, how does this untimely event of the future emerge in dystopian science fiction films? Unlike cognitive estrangement and its aesthetics of alienation, the event operates through an aesthetic of abstraction. By abstraction I do not mean the formal abstraction associated with abstract painting, although, as it does in 2001, this may play a part.¹⁴ What I mean instead is a process by which a film does not simply alienate the viewer from their present, but forces them to revalue their epistemological and ontological framework. But the question remains, *how*? Deleuze's books on cinema offer many examples, one of which he calls 'any-space-whatevers'. This is a space that is not identifiable as an actual space, because it 'has eliminated that which happened and acted in it. It is an extinction or a

disappearing, but one which is not opposed to the genetic element.' (Deleuze, 1986 120) The any-space-whatever is abstract, inasmuch as it eliminates both narrative and character, producing what Deleuze calls 'pure Powers and Qualities', creative potentials that open up new aesthetic futures. The 'any-space-whatever' therefore exists, Deleuze continues, 'independently of the temporal order', because it appears 'independently of the connections and orientations which the vanished characters and situations gave to them'. This appearance of 'disconnection and emptiness' (Deleuze, 1986 120) gives rise to what Deleuze will call 'hallucination'.¹⁵

I have already mentioned the stargate sequence, and the 'Regency room' that follows it in 2001 as exemplary examples of a hallucinatory abstraction in this sense, and this is no surprise given Kubrick's many references to Nietzsche, most obviously in the famous theme music; *Also Sprach Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss. Another wonderfully 'abstract' film is *Glen and Randa* (McBride, 1971), a post-apocalyptic film that is neither mythic nor epic in its narrative, and offers a compelling alternative to the anti-counter-culture films from the early 1970s. *Glen and Randa* instead affirms the hippy experience in the most radical terms possible, as an absolute break with human subjectivity that ushers in a 'new age' and new values. These values are so new they seem almost impossible for us to grasp, the film's protagonists appearing as a teenage Adam and Eve that are entirely beyond good and evil.

Their child-like innocence is bereft of any emotional or moral commitments, and their aimless wanderings appear without purpose. Indeed, the film's post-apocalyptic



Animals in nature – Glen and Randa

setting seems devoid of time itself, as the characters have no memory of the past, nor any sense of a possible future. Glen and Randa occupy a permanent and untimely 'now', and although the film seems to be a 'coming of age' story culminating in the birth of their child, nothing is learnt on this journey. After Randa dies in childbirth – an event to which Glen has no emotional reaction – the old man who has become their friend tells him he can name his child anything he wants. Glen, however, does not respond, and this direct refusal of the paternal function is a dramatic rejection of the family as the basis for social organisation. The film fearlessly advocates an anarchy without organisation, and when Glen says 'We should go somewhere' he and the old man, along with the baby and a goat get into a small boat and sail into the setting sun. This final image – it is tempting to read it in line with Nietzsche's use of the ocean as a metaphor for absolute immanence – powerfully makes the point; despite being inspired by a vaguely utopian desire to visit the city 'Metropolis', Glen's desire is entirely without rational or emotional intelligence.

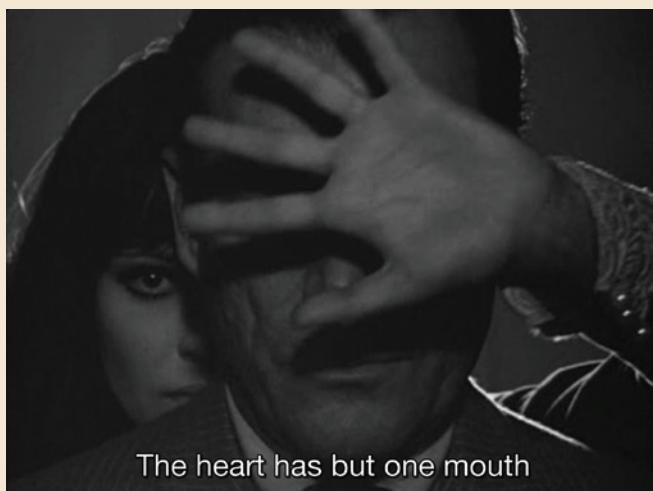
Glen and Randa are animals in Nature, they act with a necessity that is not explainable according to 'human' values, becoming abstract and non-subjective living forces living in complete immanence with their universe. What is so impressive about the film is that it refuses to employ any of the counter-cultural clichés in describing this existence; there is no 'Eastern' mysticism, no drugs or rock 'n roll, no communes, and absolutely no 'enlightenment'. As a result, the film doesn't offer a 'reflection' on our present, but



Fade to immanence – the last shots of *Glen and Randa*

instead a mysterious refusal of it. For the viewer Glen and Randa's unrelenting blankness is extremely disconcerting because it rejects our accepted values, leaving us adrift in the sea, without reference points. We must decide for ourselves what to make of the film's at once beautiful and terrible protagonists. Here, Deleuze's disconnected and empty 'any-space-whatever' encompasses not only the film's world, but those who experience it, opening an untimely and extremely uncanny space in which something 'new' is created.¹⁶

Another example can be found in Jean-Luc Goddard's dystopian science fiction film *Alphaville* (1965) where a computer-run society suppresses emotion and art in favour of a purely scientific rationality. Enter Lenny Caution, a secret agent from the outside who falls in love with Natacha, the daughter of the man he has been sent to assassinate. This he does, but along the way his emotional intensity and interest in poetry manages to short-circuit the computer Alpha-60, which runs Alphaville according to a strictly rational but nevertheless totalitarian logic. While the narrative formulaically rehearses the classic dystopian scenario pitting human emotion against the coldly rational machine, the film's aesthetic construction works against these 'critical' allegiances. At precisely the point where this conflict is to be resolved – in the love scene between Lenny and Natacha – the film offers us a highly abstract sequence filled with non-diegetic shots and cuts that turns this conflict productive. Natacha has already explained she doesn't understand the meaning of the word 'love' (which the computer has removed from the dictionary), producing



The heart has but one mouth

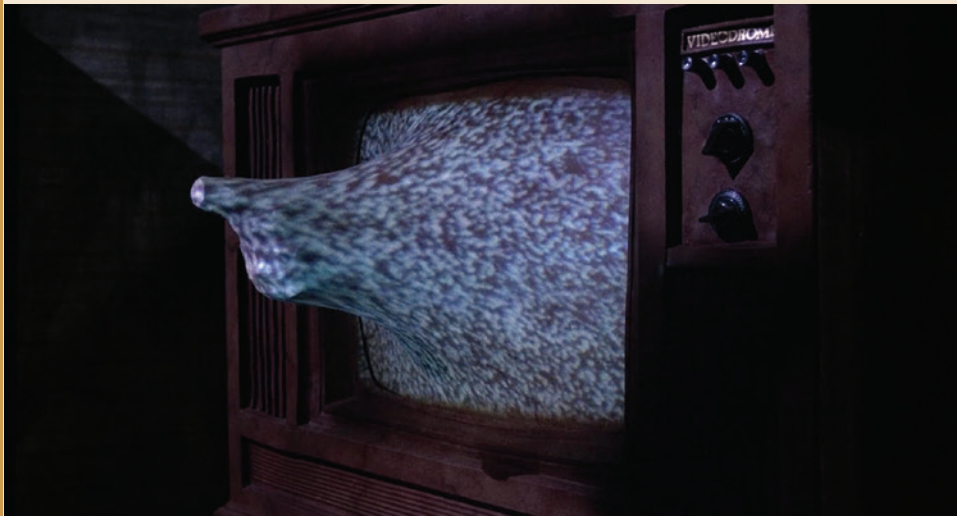


'The silence of language' – love in Alphaville

a strange coupling around a half absent and obscure emotion. Accompanied by her voice-over, which reads from Paul Eluard's *Capitale De La Douleur*,¹⁷ we see a series of close ups of the protagonists alone and staring straight into the camera, as if into a mirror, punctuated by shots of them embracing, and of them both looking into the camera, all of which emerge and recede into blackness.

This sequence embodies 'love' as something outside of both her and his knowledge and experience, producing a hauntingly ambiguous *pas de deux* that escapes both the clichés of the genre and those of the rational language of the cinema itself (especially obvious in the lack of shot-reverse-shot in the sequence). This is not an *alienation* in the image, but its *abstraction*. It does not carry with it a meaning that could resolve the dystopian opposition of man and machine, of logic and love; instead it uses this opposition to construct a strange and beautiful sequence without cognitive or emotional coherency, not the representation of the new but its actual emergence. It is an opening made by the event of love, an opening onto the outside of the rational logic of *Alphaville* – as dystopian society and as diegetic film – but which has nevertheless been produced by it. The abstraction leading to a new future is in this sense a method, rather than a program or a formal device. We do not know what the future is, because the future is precisely that part of the now that has no being, but only a becoming. It takes place according to our current conditions, but in ways both insignificant and life changing (here, a love scene) it exceeds them. Abstraction is not formalism, because each time it appears in a different form, new, because the future is, as Deleuze puts it, the eternal return of difference.

My final example is David Cronenberg's amazing film *Videodrome* (1983), which explores a dystopian vision of the televisual interface. The film shows the disturbing consequences of a tumour – the videodrome – which enters the body of the protagonist (Max) when he watches a pirate broadcast of a scene of torture and rape. The videodrome provokes hallucinations that allow Max to be controlled by shadowy corporate forces and then by a charity 'treating' the TV addiction of the homeless. The videodrome both frees and feeds off the libidinal forces instrumentalised by the mass-media, but these forces finally prove uncontrollable and emerge for themselves in an aesthetics that remains stubbornly 'realist' while at the same time subverting the very concept of the 'real'. *Videodrome* rudely insists upon the body's necessary presence within the interface's immaterial circulation of information and value, because this body materialises a new form of cybernetic exchange that destroys any distinction between 'real' and 'virtual', 'good' and 'evil', 'human' and 'technology' within the 'hallucination' it creates.¹⁸ The 'interface' offered by the videodrome is neither an alliance with nor a sabotage of corporate television, it is a new kind of 'broadcast' that collapses the dichotomies that both the mass-media and its human consumers depend upon. The videodrome is both organic and inorganic, producing a new flesh both in Max's body, which opens to receive a gun and then ejects it so it can become melded to his hand, and in the 'body' of the interface (a television and a videotape that become soft and fleshy 'organisms').¹⁹ Similarly, although the film initially distinguishes Max's reality and his hallucinations via script devices and visual effects, as the film progresses these fall



Real hallucinations – *Videodrome*

away and it becomes not only impossible to tell them apart, but meaningless to try. This point is extremely important in relation to the dialectical understanding of science fiction, which hangs a good deal of the cognitive coherency of the genre (its 'science') on its 'realism'. But in *Videodrome* Cronenberg turns the genre's realism against it, using it to render 'reality' and 'hallucination' indiscernible, and so refusing the viewer's 'alienation' any ground. As a result, the final scene of Max's apparent suicide cannot be understood as a cathartic self-sacrifice (as we might expect), because by this stage even the categories of life and death seem to have dissolved. *Videodrome* depicts an absolute phase-change emerging through the interface, an unleashing of libidinal drives leading to permanent schizophrenia, a continuous 'death-drive' in which capitalist systems are immolated along with any sense of 'humanity'. Max performs a slow swan-dive into nothingness, not as some sort of resigned and nihilistic act, but as the utterly abstract figure of what Foucault calls the 'attraction for the infinite void', a 'fascinating indifference that greets him as if he were not there, a silence too insistent to be resisted and too ambiguous to be deciphered and definitively interpreted' (1998 153). By the end of *Videodrome* we have moved beyond the paradigm of dialectical negation, not to mention 'dystopia' and all that goes with it, and enter a world in which images are real hallucinations. 'Hallucinations', as Deleuze describes them, are 'independent, alienated, off-balance, in some sense embryonic, strangely active fossils, radioactive, inexplicable in the present where they surface, and all the more harmful and autonomous.' (1989 113)

The great achievement of the film is therefore the way it turns realism and abstraction into the same thing, a *real hallucination*. In this the film's motto 'long live the new flesh' affirms a powerfully inhuman and sublime force that obliterates its conditions in order to conjure an entirely new future. The videodrome's inhuman flesh convulsed by libidinal forces is not 'outside' Max, it is Max, but a Max that has been abstracted from his humanity. This is the sense in which the outside is immanent for Foucault and Deleuze, the outside is matter abstracted from its meaning and form, liberated to become something else. As Deleuze describes it in his book *Foucault*; 'The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside.' (1988 97) *Videodrome* is, as Foucault put it (without mentioning the film) 'a fiction that cancels itself out in the void where it undoes its forms and appears with no conclusion and no image, with no truth and no theatre, with no proof, no mask, no affirmation, free of any centre, unfettered to any native soil; a discourse that constitutes its own space as the outside toward which, and outside of which, it speaks.' (1998 153)

CONCLUSION

Although *Videodrome* has some elements that are dystopian, I'd like to call it instead a 'utopian hallucination' in the sense Deleuze and Guattari gives these terms in *What Is Philosophy?* There, the power that Nietzsche

has called the 'untimely', and Foucault called 'genealogy', Deleuze and Guattari call 'utopia'. They understand utopia as an operation (rather than an aim) by which the various processes and structures of the actual world are taken 'to the absolute' and become 'infinite movements' that overcome any internal limit, and so 'summon forth a new earth, a new people' (1983 63). As a result, they say, they take the term 'utopia' in the sense Fourier did; 'not as an ideal model, but as revolutionary action and passion' (1983 302). This is an 'active Utopia' (1983 302) that departs from the historical conditions of the present, but does not return, seeking instead to permanently open the present onto the future. Utopia is therefore an utterly autonomous and abstract 'hallucination' that emerges from the present through a process of immanent and genealogical critique, but in itself 'is' nothing because it is the 'becoming' of the present, qua untimely and 'eternal future' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983 132). This utopian future is undetermined by the present, but acts entirely within and upon it. It is an event, Deleuze and Guattari claim, using terms very close to Foucault's, of an 'absolute deterritorialisation at the critical point at which it is connected with the present relative milieu, and especially with the forces stifled by this milieu' (1994 100).

We might then, finally propose that these utopian events that appear as the abstract hallucinations of dystopian science fiction cinema are radical examples of what Foucault calls 'heterotopias'. These spaces are 'actually localizable' and 'utterly real' (Foucault 1998, 178), while at the same time being a space 'by which we are drawn



‘Long live the new flesh’ – beyond life and death in *Videodrome*

outside ourselves, in which, as a matter of fact, the erosion of our life, our time, and our history takes place, this space that eats and scrapes away at us, is also heterogeneous space itself' (1998 177-8). Foucault mentions one example relevant for us here; the cinema (1998 179). This would be a heterotopic cinema that works through techniques of abstraction, and that 'undermines language' and 'destroys "syntax" in advance', and so 'contests the very possibility of grammar at its source' (Foucault, 1998 xixi). Heterotopian cinema therefore destroys cognitive coherency along with any dialectical critique, taking the human, all too human on a 'passage to the "outside"' (Foucault, 1998 148). This is a passage away from representation, it is, Foucault says, 'language [or cinema] getting as far away from itself as possible', this 'setting "outside of itself"' being the act by which 'it unveils its own being', as a 'gap', a 'dispersion' (1998 149). Heterotopian science fiction cinema is, as Guattari put it, 'an alterity grasped at the point of its emergence...' (1995 117). This non-dialectical otherness is the object of all creation, it is the production of the new, the emergence of the unhistorical and eternal future. This is the aim of heterotopian science fiction, and as such its ambition and affect far outstrips dialectical criticism and its 'cognitive estrangement'. As Deleuze writes, once more about Foucault, 'the outside is always an opening on to a future: nothing ends, since nothing has begun, but everything is transformed' (1988 89).

Chapter Two

Interface Aesthetics, Science Fiction Film in the Age of Biopolitics

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are aged 65 and over has increased by 1.5 million, and the number of people aged 75 and over has increased by 1.2 million (Office for National Statistics 2000). The number of people aged 65 and over is projected to increase to 6.5 million by 2020, and the number of people aged 75 and over to 4.5 million (Office for National Statistics 2000).

There is a growing awareness of the need to develop strategies to meet the needs of older people, and to ensure that they are able to live independently and actively in their own homes for as long as possible. This has led to a number of initiatives, including the development of new housing and care services, and the implementation of policies to support older people in their own homes. The aim of this paper is to review the current state of research on the needs of older people, and to discuss the implications for policy and practice.

2. The needs of older people

The needs of older people are complex and multifaceted, and can vary significantly between individuals. However, there are a number of common needs that are shared by many older people. These include the need for housing, care, and social support. The need for housing is particularly important, as it is a basic requirement for all people, and it is essential for older people to be able to live in a safe and secure environment. The need for care is also important, as many older people have physical or mental health problems that require support. The need for social support is also important, as older people often experience isolation and loneliness.

There are a number of factors that can influence the needs of older people. These include age, gender, social class, and health status. Age is a major factor, as the needs of older people change as they get older. Gender is also important, as women are more likely than men to experience certain needs, such as the need for care. Social class is also important, as older people from lower social classes are more likely to experience certain needs, such as the need for housing. Health status is also important, as older people with health problems are more likely to experience certain needs, such as the need for care.

There are a number of ways in which the needs of older people can be met. These include the provision of housing, care, and social support. The provision of housing can be done in a number of ways, including the construction of new housing, the renovation of existing housing, and the provision of housing allowances. The provision of care can be done in a number of ways, including the provision of home care, residential care, and day care. The provision of social support can be done in a number of ways, including the provision of social clubs, day centres, and home visits.

There are a number of challenges that are associated with meeting the needs of older people. These include the need for resources, the need for coordination, and the need for evaluation. The need for resources is a major challenge, as it is essential to have sufficient resources to meet the needs of older people. The need for coordination is also a major challenge, as it is essential to have a coordinated approach to meeting the needs of older people. The need for evaluation is also a major challenge, as it is essential to have a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the services provided.

There are a number of ways in which the challenges of meeting the needs of older people can be addressed. These include the development of new policies, the implementation of new services, and the evaluation of existing services. The development of new policies is essential, as it is essential to have a clear framework for meeting the needs of older people. The implementation of new services is also essential, as it is essential to have a range of services that can meet the needs of older people. The evaluation of existing services is also essential, as it is essential to have a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the services provided.

The bottom line, as Matteo Pasquinelli so aptly puts it, is that 'it is impossible to destroy the machine, as we ourselves have become the machine' (2008 151). This is a precise description of the dilemma explored by interface films, and the dilemma defining our new forms of cybernetic existence. If we cannot solve it by destroying the machine, then we must, most interface films suggest, establish what is human and what machine, what is real and what virtual, and then keep or reject these parts according to a highly simplified morality of good and bad. In practice this means that while many films begin with a 'balanced' account of the problem, most quickly slide into a hysterical moral tale climaxing in the restoration of 'human' authority and authenticity. The early interface film *The Lawnmower Man* (Leonard, 1992) sets the scene;

By the turn of the millennium a technology known as VIRTUAL REALITY will be in widespread use. It will allow you to enter computer generated artificial worlds as unlimited as the imagination itself. Its creators foresee millions of positive uses – while others fear it is a new form of mind control...

Interface films perpetuate the dichotomy that Dani Cavallaro has suggested founds the cyberpunk sub-genre, on the one hand a rationalist embrace of technology and science, and on the other the irrational demons this unleashes (2000 52). It is perhaps no surprise to find that despite *The Lawnmower Man* and the majority of interface films that follow finally pledging allegiance to their



Virtual pathologies – *The Lawnmower Man*

annoyingly 'human' protagonists, they nevertheless find the dark, destructive pathologies unleashed by technology to be the truly sexy parts of the story. We might be a little more surprised to find that a great deal of the philosophical and theoretical discussion of the interface is titillated by the same things.

Interface films show humans using computers to create and interact with virtual realities.²⁰ In this sense, interface films are a contemporary form of social realism,²¹ most particularly when they portray a contemporary underclass (or cognitariat) in a political struggle against oppression.²² The most frequent enemy is corporate capitalism, and the conflict will be for control of digital technology, a theme that provokes the recurring fantasy of an armed resistance movement led by a black rapper (*Matrix* (the Wachowski sisters, 1999), *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995), *Gamer* (Neveldine and Taylor, 2009)).²³ Nevertheless, most interface films present their futuristic technology as being both 'realistic' explorations of how the collective imaginary will be controlled and exploited through technology, and affirm a vaguely 'progressive' attitude against the excesses of capitalism.

But to be clear, this 'militant' concern with how capitalism creates and exploits the 'general intellect' is, of course, illusory and full of bad faith, because corporate capital is almost inevitably paying for these films, and reaping a healthy profit. This is the 'reality' of the problem stated by Pasquinelli at the beginning of the chapter, humans and machines have always evolved through parasitic relationships of co-dependence, and with the interface these relationships are almost entirely mediated by

capital. This is clearly illustrated by interface films, which on the level of the film's narrative asserts our 'freedom' (usually involving a victory over corporate capital in the realm of the 'virtual'), while actually operating new and accelerated forms of bio-political exploitation (on the side of the material 'real'). Perhaps *Matrix* goes the furthest in this regard, showing us how the fantasies of 'virtual' reality are entirely dependent on a 'real' reality where all of our biological and psychological processes have been subsumed by the machine.²⁴ Although there is some sense that this 'real' reality must be addressed for the 'resistance' to be effective (the self-sacrifice of Neo, who is crucified at the end of the last film, is an attempt to synthesise and so resolve the real/virtual conflict),²⁵ the major strategy offered in this film, and so many that come after it, is 'gaming the game' on the side of the virtual, a strategy that never places our dependence on the machine at risk, because this dependence is usually figured as neutral.²⁶ This is clearly a reflection of contemporary reality, because from a political perspective to question our dependence on the machine would be to question our subsumption by capitalism itself, an almost unthinkable thought!

Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato give a very sobering genealogy of the real forces at play in cybernetic capitalism, arguing that it was the development of technologies of communication and control during the cold war that enabled the 'logistic militarization of society' or its '*military subsumption*' (2016 228) from the 50s on.²⁷ This cybernetic co-implication of war and capital led to the 'feedback of "information" of industrially and scientifically organized

NEW CENTURY. AGE OF TERMINAL CAPITALISM.

THE ARMORED TOWERS OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS
RISE ABOVE THE RUINS OF THE DEMOCRACIES
THAT GAVE THEM BIRTH.

SOLDIERS OF THE YAKUZA DEFEND THEM.

HACKERS, DATA-PIRATES, LOTEK MEDIA-REBELS ARE
THE ENEMY, BURROWING LIKE RATS IN THE WALLS
OF CYBERSPACE.

Social-realism – the beginning of *Johnny Mnemonic*

total war into an economy of (*non*) *peace*' (Alliez and Lazzarato, 2016 229). While this seems to be the background to many interface films, where characters are often current- or ex-military, and corporate capital's political control is militarized and totalitarian (eg., *Matrix*, *Gamer*, *Avatar*, *Upload*, *Bloodshot*, etc.), the inevitable defeat of the evil corporation in the film is in complete contradiction to the film's existence as a commodity, where capital has already won the moment you purchased your ticket. As Alliez and Lazzarato put it:

No sci fi here, since the automatic factory, with the computer that "calculates" the best strategy to win atomic war, was the other entity of the cybernetic scenario. This constitutive relationship between the machine-to-make-war and the machine-to-produce gives cybernetics its most modern meaning of machine-to-govern and *capitalistic machination of the government of people*. (2016 230)

The film *Avatar* makes this link between the interface, capital and military power explicit, where its new-age, neo-indigenous militant fantasy is a very effective prop for the packaging of the special-fx, which is really what is being sold. This seeming contradiction between the 'virtual' story of the film (our fight for freedom) and the 'reality' of the theatre in which we watch it (our total subsumption by capitalism), is precisely the 'real' problem presented by interface films.

On the one hand, the narratives of these films show cybernetic technology enabling individual freedom, as the hero escapes and even defeats his exploitation and control by using the same technology manipulated by corporate capitalism for evil purposes. In this sense, the 'realism' of these films is not their prediction of the future, but their presentation of the fantasies (first of all, that of individual 'freedom') that produce and control our reality.²⁸ Similarly, these fantasies are transmitted via image-commodities constructed by CGI technology, futuristic images constructed by futuristic technology, images of the future that actualise it when 'consumed' today. Interface films therefore represent a new form of cultural and political aesthetics in which the future is not only commodified but ubiquitous. More importantly, the enfolding of an aesthetics of the future within the technology of the present constitutes the 'aesthetics of ambivalence' actualised in the commodified affects of science fiction.²⁹ In interface films, images of individuals triumphing against the cybernetic forces of capital are consumed and enjoyed, enforcing the very regime interface films purportedly rage against. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, writing about *Matrix*, puts it nicely, describing the film as 'a smash-the-state-of-things aesthetic relying on speed, firepower, and *trucage* to achieve escape velocity from the conditions of its existence – the cinematic equivalent of a suicide bombing' (2008 171).

Pasquinelli's brilliant analysis of the interface uses Michel Serres' figure of the parasite to describe how digital technology simulates fictional worlds, builds collaborative environments, and provides communication channels

in order to instrumentalise and exploit the *bios* and its libidinal drives. These simulations form a 'symbiosis of desire' (2008 64) (or *interface*) between technological and biological realms, capturing libidinal forces and siphoning off surplus value through selling images, but as well, and just as importantly, by renting out the necessary technological infrastructure. Every click is money. In this sense, both 'real' and 'virtual' worlds are defined by their 'hardware'. Pasquinelli insists on this materiality of the digital parasite, which he positions 'against the autonomy of the digital sphere' (2008 65) and its ideology 'digital idealism' (the idea that reality can be entirely 're-coded' and subsumed within a virtual world) that dominates both academic and popular representations of the interface. Once more, *Matrix* makes the point: the hardware is what siphons off the biological energy that keeps the technological systems going, and the 'virtual' story – a conflict played out on the level of software – is just a fantasy obscuring the 'real' political process. According to Pasquinelli 'digitalism' is accompanied by an idealistic politics, a politics we have already seen interface films embrace, where 'Internet based communication can be free from any form of exploitation and will naturally evolve towards a society of equal peers' (2008 66). The outburst of communal joy and defiance in the dance party in *Matrix* is the archetypal image of this young and sexy 'freedom' of the future.³⁰ Digitalism perfectly describes this naive belief in freedom, and the inevitable affirmation of hackers and/or open source software, and the democratic right to information that accompanies it (eg., *War Games* (Badham,

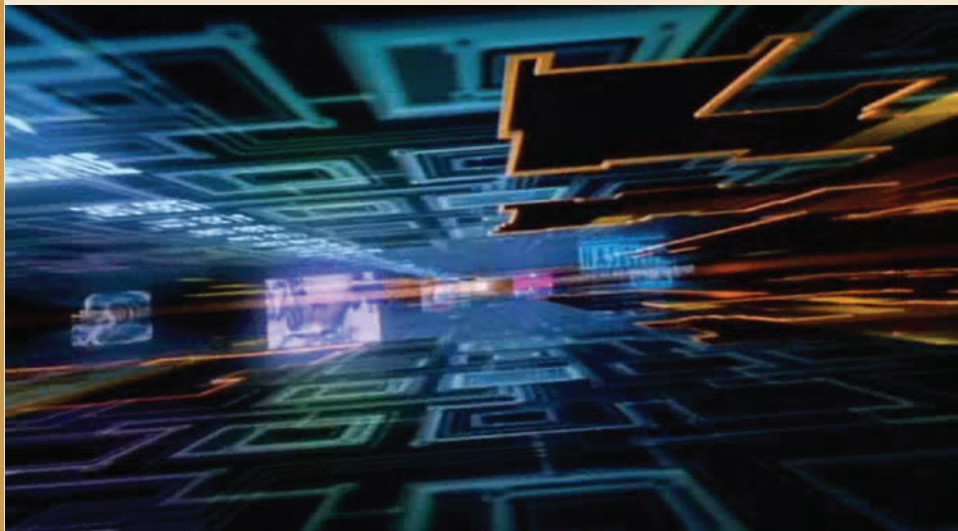
1983), *Hackers* (Softly, 1995), *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Anti-Trust* (Howitt, 2001), *Tron: The Legacy* (Kosinski, 2010), etc.).³¹ This is the fantasy the interface film sells, that the 'human', and so 'authentic' parts of technology (usually those aspects allowing 'free choice') will overcome the techno-capitalised command and control they nevertheless imply, require, and finally embody. A recent film that kicks this trend is *Upgrade*, where a computer chip is implanted in the Luddite protagonist's spine to enable him to walk after a paralysing attack. This chip gradually takes over his body in order to take control of the corporation that produced it, and when the protagonist tries to fight back he is finally banished to a virtual reality where he is reunited with his wife, and his crippled 'reality' turns out a dream. In a nice reversal that is not without critical merit, 'virtual' freedom is shown to be the consolation for 'real' slavery.

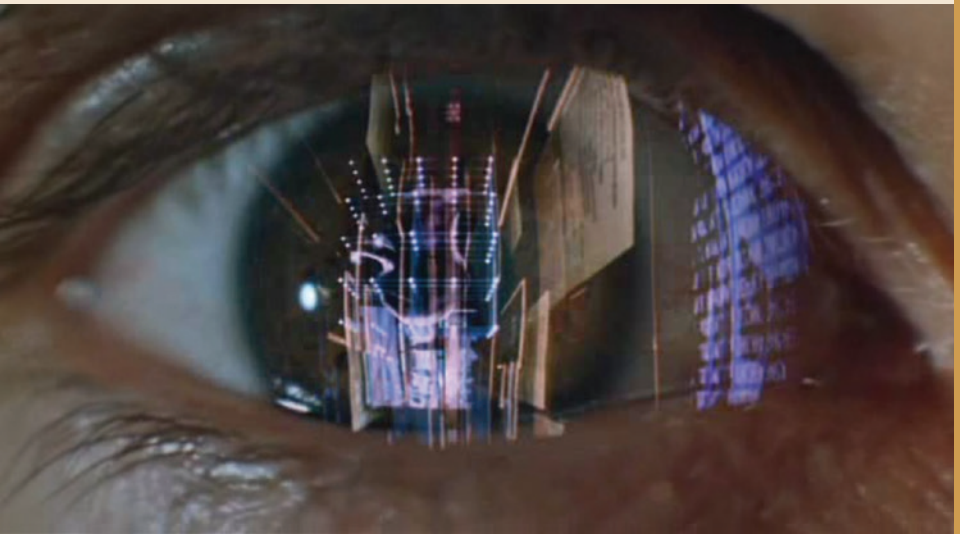
Despite interface films almost inevitably ending with the mawkish victory of the human, all too human, most films spend more energy on glamourising the 'evil' drives technology unleashes against us.³² The Brett Leonard films *The Lawnmower Man* and *Virtuosity* (1995) are typical examples, exploring how the interface unleashes sexual and psychopathic violence, but individualising this potential in a single, monomaniacal villain.³³ *Transcendence* (Pfister, 2014) is also typical in condemning technology for making man commit the deadly sin of hubris, the traditional fatal flaw of super-computers and other cybernetic villains. More interesting is *Strange Days*, where 'squid' technology feeds back a murderous rapist's experience to their victim, allowing the whole vicious circle to be consumed as

someone else's entertainment. Snuff porn, rape, voyeurism, it is as if every perversion has been unleashed and rolled into one interfaced 'hit' – reality tv, only better. While *Strange Days* lasciviously revels in these 'forbidden fruit', it does so only in order to finally put things right. Phew. Emotional and democratic sanity is restored when Lenny is pulled out of his obsession/addiction to squid images of his ex, 'get's real', and is able to commit to the down-to-earth and (therefore) 'good' Macy. This interracial 'team' then exposes the racism of the LAPD by using squid technology against them, and averts a cataclysmic public riot. So while obviously enjoying its symptoms, *Strange Days* remains a moral tale advocating technology as a democratic tool that can do good despite its corruption by corporate capitalism.

Films involving physical avatars (eg., *Surrogates*, *Avatar*, *Gamer*) usually unfold in a similar way, ambiguously figuring the interface as a technology of wish-fulfilment. *Avatar*'s phenomenal success was no doubt partly due to the uplifting way the interface frees its protagonist Jake's 'strong heart'. Through his avatar he is able to escape his physical disability to become who he really is, a wild kind of super-native. The criticism of the film for being 'anti-human' was therefore misguided, because in fact Jake represents the very best of what is human – love, intelligence, strength and their combination in a militant environmentalism – the authenticity of which is guaranteed by being downloaded into a 'native' (the irony of this being at no point acknowledged in the film). In fact the world of the Navi represents a highly optimistic 'new-age'

vision of a non-technological interface with the world-brain, where – wait for it – everything is connected. Of course the neo-colonial implications of the narrative's technological condition of possibility (the interface itself) are gleefully ignored in its earnest 'family of man' rhetoric. *Surrogates* and *Gamer* on the other hand, offer much darker pathologies of the interface. In the first the use of beautiful young robotic avatars controlled from home (they are, their adverts proclaim, 'better than life') is directly linked to the fear and depression suffered by the protagonist and his wife following their son's death. Similarly, in *Gamer* the avatar's in the social-networking/porn site interface of 'Society' offer a sensual cornucopia of nubile delights, while their 'user' is shown to be not only physically disgusting and living in filth, he has such a jaded and depressed sensibility he is only excited by rape or the threat of death. *Strange Days* also connects depression and the interface through Lenny's addiction to replaying recorded experiences with his ex, while *Abros los ojos* and its American remake *Vanilla Sky* (Crowe, 2001) explore a virtual reality that has 'gone wrong' and given rise to horrifying visions emerging from the protagonist's paranoia and self-hatred. All of these examples make a direct connection between 'bad' pathologies of the interface and corporate capitalism, hammering home the message that a financial profit is made from our depression, addiction or psychosis as easily, or perhaps more easily, as from positive emotions. In response these films advocate a return to what is 'real' – the human body with all its flaws, the love of family, and a healthy (ie., individual) sense of self. This is no surprise, as





Johnny uploads the info (with memories of 2001)
– *Johnny Mnemonic*

capitalism is as much invested in the subjectivity of those it exploits (authentic, individual, human consumers), as it is in the technology that achieves it.

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's colourful and 'vaguely apocalyptic' (2009 134) account of the pathological interface attempts to escape its exploitative and 'ambiguous aesthetic' by reorienting it around human values (in particular love). Like the films we have just mentioned, however, Bifo seems to enjoy the pathology of the illness more than its cure. Bifo claims, quite convincingly, that the interface has produced a 'psycho-cognitive mutation' amongst the 'video-electronic generation' causing 'nervous overload, mass psychopharmacology', and the 'fractalization of working and existential time and social insecurity' (2005 2). The developing 'Infosphere' has meant we can no longer sense anything that is not formatted in codified signs, resulting in the prevalence of stereotypes and readymade emotions, and an 'impoverishment' (Bifo, 2009 86) of our relationships with others. Bifo calls this 're-formatting' (2005 4), a process producing a standardisation of subjectivity and increased passivity, even while, or perhaps especially when our identity is becoming ever more 'flexible'. The constant mobility, stimulation and tension of the interface creates, Bifo argues, an 'inconclusive excitation' (2005 5) that produces a de-eroticisation of our relationship to alterity, turning it into 'a joyless fiction' (2009 87). Here, desire is fully instrumentalised by cognitive labour in a 'frigid thought where the relationship to the other is artificially euphoric but substantially desexualized as well' (2009 103). Human sensibility fully subjugated to the accelerated and

fragmented experiences of the infosphere has led, Bifo concludes, to a 'dis-empathy diffused in social action' (2009 134), a kind of generalised anti-sociality causing fear, solitude, depression, and panic.

How can we resist this new reality? Bifo's position initially seems to be a kind of technophobia, an unplugging from the interface in favour of a return to 'planetary humanism' (2009 133), so that we can 'sing of the danger of love, the daily creation of a sweet energy that is never dispersed' (2009a).³⁴ In this light, Bifo's appeals for a renewed humanism sounds rather conservative, giving the impression that our bodies must be 'saved' from the interface. This is reinforced in passages influenced by Baudrillard, where Bifo's apocalyptic descriptions of the interface suggest a nihilistic 'digitalism'; 'Digital technology' Bifo writes, 'makes possible a process of infinite replication of the sign. The sign becomes a virus eating the reality of its referent' (2009 149).³⁵ This is a claim illustrated by the *Matrix*, where a copy of Baudrillard's *Simulations* makes a famous appearance. The problem with this 'dandyish necrophilia of the System' (Pasquinelli, 70) is that its rhetorical mushroom cloud proclaims an upload of the world that completely subsumes the material level of the parasite, along with its potential for resistance. 'The proliferation of simulation viruses,' Bifo writes, 'has swallowed the event. The infinite capacity of replication of the recombining simulator device erases the originality of the event. What is left is suicide.' (2009 161) Such virulent nihilism leaves little room to move, except towards the 'sweet energy' promised by withdrawal and the

material pleasure of a 'real' sexual caress. But the danger of Bifo's nostalgia for the 'human' is that this 'return' to a slower, organic sensibility simply gets cashed out in the sentimental clichés of 'authenticity' and 'reality' that Hollywood feeds us.

Cypher (Natali, 2002) is an interface film that vividly illustrates this problem, and in terms very close to Bifo's own. It begins with Morgan Sullivan, an everyman, who wants to get a secret identity so he can work as an industrial spy for a multinational named 'Digitcorp'. "This is who I am, and this is what I want to do" he says at his job interview, establishing the theme of personal identity that will occupy the rest of the film. 'Digitcorp' agrees to give him this new identity – 'Jack Thursby' – so he can act as a mole inside their rival 'Subway Systems'. At this point a mysterious woman named Rita Foster intervenes in his imprinting (which takes place in a nightmare version of a trade conference), preventing its completion, and Sullivan begins to fall in love with her.

Meanwhile Subway Systems detect Digitcorp's plan, and decide to use Sullivan as a double agent. In the world of *Cypher* individual identity is totally instrumentalised by corporations, utterly subsumed in 'work', and reduced to an exchangeable commodity. Rita Foster explains she works for the "freelance operator" Sebastian Rooks, a "deep cover operative", "a phantom" with an unknown face. Rita promises that Sebastian Rooks will help Sullivan if he enables them to steal a file from Subway System's data base. After doing so it is revealed that he was actually the mysterious Sebastian Rooks all along, and that 'Sullivan'



Corporate brainwashing – *Cypher*

was an identity he had given himself through the same technology Digitcorp had tried to use on him, and which he, in fact, invented. The film ends with Rooks and Rita on a beautiful sailing ship in the middle of the ocean, with the information that Rooks had so arduously stolen – a file on Rita – duly destroyed so as to liberate her from the clutches of the evil corporation. The romantic couple are reunited in the absolute freedom of their ‘real’ identities, and their ‘true’ love, and the film suddenly reverts to technicolour from its previously monochromatic hues, to drive home the point.

Cypher posits a world in which a corporate controlled technology utterly instrumentalises identity, which is reduced to an info-commodity, and follows the path of one individual as he liberates himself from their net. This liberation culminates, as so many interface films do, in the victorious emergence of a self-determining free-man, living a natural life with an obedient and loving woman. The final scene of *Cypher* is endlessly repeated with minor variations.³⁶ Rooks defeats the corporations at their own game, evading their attempts to brainwash him by brainwashing himself. He instrumentalises his own subjectivity, but unlike the cynical games of the corporations, his final prize is a life of natural authenticity and love. So despite all of the confusing identity shifts in the film, and indeed because of them, Rooks’ subjectivity remains exemplary (ie., ‘real’) because he uses technology to protect his autonomy, which means his humanity. Rooks is an ‘entrepreneur’, the perfect example of late-capitalism’s all-conquering ‘flexible personality’,³⁷ embodying the



'Reality' returns – the end of *Cypher*

interface film's understanding of politics as a struggle over individual self-determination (ie., 'freedom'). But what is significant here is that on the one hand 'victory' is achieved entirely through the realm of the 'virtual', and as such is a perfect example of digitalism at work, while on the other the 'freedom' and 'reality' that is gained are enjoyed in only the most traditional and sentimental of emotional experiences. As Paolo Virno has pointed out, and this applies as much to the hero of *Cypher* as to ourselves as viewers:

It is no accident that the most brazen cynicism is accompanied by unrestrained sentimentalism. The vital contents of emotion – excluded from the inventories of an experience that is above all else an experience of formalisms and abstractions – secretly return, simplified and unelaborated, as arrogant as they are puerile. Nothing is more common than the mass media technician who, after a hard day at work, goes off to the movies and cries. (Virno, 18)

Most interface films shamelessly return us to the cloying sentiments of emotional clichés so as to fully exploit both sides of the 'ambiguous aesthetic' of science fiction, turning the authentic joys of our liberation and loves into affect-commodities. This is the risk of Bifo's position, that our 'withdraw' to the slow pleasures of a human sensibility has already taken place, only in the entirely virtual form of the film's clichéd and sentimental conclusion. Steven Shaviro has gone a step further, arguing that the creative event of a

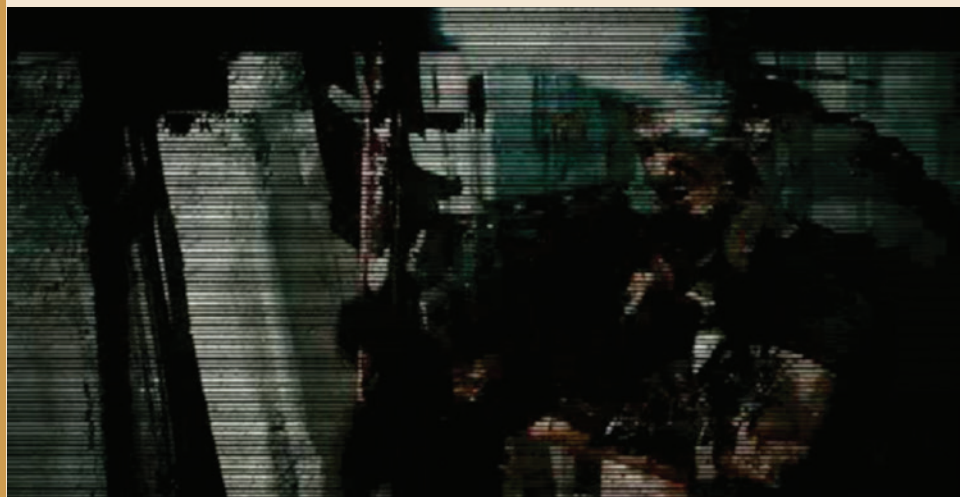
new sensation has not been destroyed by the interface, as Bifo claimed, but embraced and subsumed by it. Shaviro explains this in terms of Deleuze's description of 'any-space-whatevers' (briefly discussed in the last chapter), spaces that emerge in modernist cinema after the war, and which 'eliminated that which happened and acted in it. It is an extinction or a disappearing, but one which is not opposed to the genetic element' (Deleuze, 1986 120). These abstract but nevertheless creative any-space-whatevers reject characters and narrative, but they contain 'pure Powers and Qualities' that are full of 'pure potential'. Deleuze famously calls them '*pure optical or sound situations*' (1986 120).

Shaviro argues that the technological and formal innovations that contemporary cinema has drawn from the interface (from computer games, music videos, multi-tasking, surfing, etc.) allow it to appropriate and instrumentalise pure optical or sound situations. Consequently, mainstream cinema, he claims, has moved away from narrative and characterisation, which remain only as a rudimentary support for images and their editing, in order to more fully exploit the realm of pure affect detached from narrative and character that was opened up by modernist 'art' cinema. Shaviro draws on Brian Massumi's influential distinction between emotion and affect, where emotion is understood as a feeling that belongs to me, that I 'have', and that defines my temporal trajectory through the different moments of my life. Emotions are what a character like Sebastian Rooks has in *Cypher*. An affect, on the contrary, is a feeling in which 'I am not yet, a libidinal intensity – fuck or fight – that leaves

no room for subjective reflection (see Massumi, 1996). These 'pre-subjective' affects are new types of cinematic parasites, and are increasingly ubiquitous in action-driven interface films since *Matrix*. These films are entirely generic in their narrative and characterisation, but experimental (precisely in the formal sense of 'experimental cinema') in their camera-work and editing. These films are arranged around their action sequences, which take place in agitated and multi-dimensional spaces constructed by an extremely mobile camera and very rapid montage (what Shaviro wittily calls 'ADD editing'). Michael Bey's *Transformer* (2007) was an early pioneer of this style, but the method has become ubiquitous in mainstream blockbusters. These camera and montage techniques are made possible by CGI technology, and are sometimes referred to as 'digital compositing'. This is a 'bi-polar' composition of long shots and close-ups, subjective and objective points of view, strange angles and an extremely fluid and fast camera movement that make up a seamless object (the sequence) that is no longer organised according to the space that contains it, but unfolds within the intense and constantly variable sensation of the affect it produces. These techniques create a visceral connection between the viewer and what she sees, as in the 'impressionistic' fight scenes in *Gamer* that Shaviro describes as being 'behaviouristically' edited. All of this announces, Shaviro finally claims, a radical new and biopolitical aesthetic regime (biopolitical because it is in the business of selling abstract and inhuman sensations), a new style of 'filmmaking that abandons the ontology of time and space, and the articulation of bodies in relation

to this, in order to instead set up rhythms of immediate stimulation and manipulation' (2009).

Films like *Gamer* deliver, Shaviro argues, 'something like a cognitive mapping of the contemporary world system' (2009). The film opens with a montage of contemporary and archaic sites overlaid with corporate advertising, immediately describing a pure present defined by consumption. Similarly, television news obsesses over the games 'Slayer' and 'Society', demonstrating how the interface has merged reality and entertainment. This is also true of the game scenarios, which use real body avatars to collapse the distinction that usually organises the interface film's dominant question; what is reality? In *Gamer* its all real, or its all unreal, however you want it. The question is irrelevant, because now 'reality' is the constant and exaggerated s(t)imulation of the game, the permanent hormonal hysteria of teenage sex and violence where every taboo can be broken and 'excess' simply doesn't exist. As a result, the entirely generic climax of the film, when the corporate control mechanism inside the protagonist's head is finally turned off, signifying his 'victory' and 'freedom', is nothing more than a somewhat disappointing visual 'pause', a moment of suspension begging us to push the 'restart' button. Even the film's sentimental moments seem deliberately desultory, with the final shot of the car containing Tillman's reunited family entering a tunnel to give a rather flaccid echo of *North by Northwest's* (Hitchcock, 1959) memorably erotic punch. All of this means, at least according to Shaviro, that 'the strategy of *Gamer* in this regard is not to offer a critique of





Shot – reverse-shot + glitch = ADD editing – *Gamer*

contemporary capitalism, but to embody the situation so enthusiastically, and absolutely, as to push it to the point of absurdity' (2009). Here, Shaviro appeals to the irony, parody or even sarcasm of over identification as a critical strategy imbedded within the film's 'ambiguous aesthetics', but this seems a weak conclusion (mirroring the film itself) offering no political gains greater than a 'demented fabulation' that 'reflects upon our actual situation, while at the same time inserting itself within that situation' (2010 93). For all the brilliance of Shaviro's analysis, his view on the political potentials of this new form of cinema is disappointing. Films like *Gamer*, he argues, can give us a 'critical distance' on and in the present, but this seems to simply mean stepping 'outside' the body subsumed in the action, and calling on the intellect to save us. Once more, the fundamental insight of Pasquinelli's remark with which we began the chapter returns, to step 'outside' the parasites of the interface seems to invite 'digitalism'.

Pasquinelli firmly rejects over-identification as a 'critical' strategy because, he says, it 'paradoxically repeats the dominant language but features no real hacks at all' (2008 22). The problem is simple; 'once the ideological tricks are recognized and turned upside down through over-identification, what is the critique of the economic model sustaining the culture industries themselves? Where are the real forces driving over-identification?' (Pasquinelli, 2008 22) Pasquinelli instead advocates turning the media-parasite qua means of production against itself to produce an energetic and political 'excess' (2008 22) capable of inventing new and undetermined 'events'. 'Freedom' and 'reality' have

returned as political goals, but now as interfaced parasites detached from the idealism of digitism and the horrors of human sentiment. Rather than defending our 'virtual' freedoms Pasquinelli provocatively pitches its libidinal and unconscious monsters, its pathology of 'animal spirits' and their 'dirty' and 'demonic' violence against the idealism of a 'clean' and 'democratic' interface (2008 66). Rather than defending a concept of the 'human' that naturally preceded its cyborg mutation, Pasquinelli advocates sabotaging the interface by unleashing its true power.

This means accessing what Bifo calls 'the productive Unconscious', or as Félix Guattari called it, the 'machinic unconscious', 'an unconscious turned towards the future' (2011 10). This productive unconscious is capable, Bifo suggests, of producing 'a singular existence in its complex relation to the world' (2009 118). A complex and related existence or 'sensation' that, Bifo argues, begins a process of 'social recomposition' based on a relationship to otherness. This is 'art' and 'aesthetics' Bifo claims, inasmuch as art 'looks for new possible modalities of becoming,' and so involves a 'a diagnostic of psychospheric pollution and a therapy for the relation between the organism and the world' (2009 130). This artistic event therefore offers an alternative interface, one oriented towards 'the creation of new centers of attention' (Bifo, 2009 131) capable of introducing heterogeneity and singularity back into experience, cleansing it of cliché and sentiment. By doing so it confronts the libidinal entropy Bifo associates with the psychopathology of the interface – 'panic, anxiety, depression' (2009 135) – with other aesthetic attractors

(ie., parasites) that can reconstitute open communities, communities constituted around their immanent heterogeneity and own becoming. We saw in the last chapter how this is to once more orient science fiction around a 'real' future, one capable of creating a new and inhuman sensation.

The question now becomes what these aesthetic attractors might be, and how could they work? Deleuze and Guattari's well-known call in *Anti-Oedipus* for an acceleration of capitalism's schizophrenia would be one way of unleashing the material power of Pasquinelli's parasite. 'Not to withdraw from the process,' Deleuze and Guattari write, 'but to go further, to "accelerate the process", as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is we haven't seen anything yet.' (1983 240) This will be an approach explored by Accelerationism, and in particular by the early work of Nick Land (see Avanesian, 2014 and Land, 2012). Before Land explicitly adopted a far-right racist ideology he explored an aesthetics in which capitalism unleashes desire to gleefully turn against its captors, human subjectivity and its organic body. Reading *Bladerunner* and *Terminator* (Cameron, 1984) against themselves, Land envisaged a 'Cyberrevolution' (2012 319) in which capitalism returns from the future in digital form to free itself from human constraints: 'How would it feel to be smuggled back out of the future in order to subvert its antecedent conditions? To be a cyberguerrilla, hidden in human camouflage so advanced that even one's software was part of the disguise? Exactly like this?' (Land, 2012 318) Here, the cyborgs are the heroes, cleansing the earth

of the 'meat': 'Deadly orphans from beyond reproduction, they are intelligent weaponry of machinic desire virally infiltrated into the final-phase organic order; invaders from an artificial death.' (Land, 2012 319) Riffing on Artaud and Nietzsche, Land announced digitally enhanced capitalism as the creative power par excellence, exterminating the human in order to unleash the permanent revolutions of life. The basis of humanism he claimed, was 'transcendent familialism' (2012 320), and so, anti-Oedipus, desire had to be freed from these individualised limits. While Land's apotheosis of capitalism's 'machinic desire' can simply seem to be the neoliberal free-market running amok, his point about de-humanising the unconscious is important to understand how the libidinal parasite might become artistic. This artistic parasite does not synthesise the personal unconscious and its organic body with digi-tech (as most cyberpunk narratives have it), but instead creates new technologies capable of experiencing the inorganic intensities and movements that express the 'transcendental unconscious' (Land, 2012 321). The transcendental unconscious 'is the auto-construction of the real' (Land, 2012 321), a 'reality' that is not only inhuman, but *against the human*. Indeed, the 'virtual' on Land's account is not simply an online reality created by digital machines, but a realm where the future is directly channeled into the present via 'cybernetic intervention' (Land, 2012 326). This process of 'virtual materialism' (Land, 2012 329) sees capitalism as a 'positive feedback loop' installing a machinic desire capable of 'routing a new sensory-motor pathway through the virtual machine of the unconscious' (Land, 2012 330).

Unfortunately perhaps, the interface film celebrating humanity's righteous extermination by robot-assassins from the future is yet to be made, even if moments of *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve, 2017) and *Ex Machina* (Garland, 2014) seem to approach this.

Pasquinelli offers us a slightly less extreme version of this story, calling for 'a strategic sabotage' (2008 48) of the interface as part of '*an immaterial civil war of cognitive workers*' (2008 110). Like Land, Pasquinelli's approach echoes Nietzsche to offer what he calls a 'new theory of the negative' (2008 101) where negation is creation.³⁸ The question however, remains, what sort of creation, or to return to Bifo's terms, what sort of art and aesthetics is generated by the negative? Like most of the post-Operaist thought Pasquinelli draws upon, he rejects art and high culture because its institutions are economically integrated with capitalism, its practices fully instrumentalised by the 'creative industries', and its bourgeois heroes simply 'artists in the age of their social reproducibility' (Pasquinelli, 2008 20). Art has already become life through this instrumentalisation of 'creativity' and 'innovation', or as Bifo puts it, 'economy has subsumed art as a factor of perpetual deterritorialisation and of valorization without territory' (2008 33). We might say that the ambiguous aesthetics of interface films are a typical example of this. If creative work qua negation – or politics – has left the privileged realm of the art work to become strategic sabotage, Pasquinelli argues, there is 'more *politics* (in the sense of collective action) and *art* (in the sense of aesthetic gesture) in the sphere of production than any

institution, political party or museum' (2008 24). As a result, creation means sabotaging capitalist parasites in order to redistribute their libidinal energy – and hence value. This is what he calls '*productive sabotage*' or '*creative sabotage*' (2008 147), a '*positive sabotage*' which 'is productive of value and *creative*, not simply destructive' (2008 151).³⁹ Pasquinelli does not want to reject the machine in favour of the human (like Bifo) nor destroy the human in the apotheosis of the machine (à la Land), but instead seeks to wage a perpetual war (perpetual because negation as a strategy is meaningless without an opponent) for control of the parasites.

Pasquinelli proposes the work of the science fiction writer J. G. Ballard as an example, because its *Atrocity Exhibition* offers, he says, 'a joyful and just psychopathology [...] immersed in the dark waters of the unconscious' (2008 166). In this sense Ballard was a forerunner of Pasquinelli's own affirmation of the '*animal spirits*' of new capitalism crawling from the 'abyss of the immaterial' and 'incarnated in the forms of Internet pornography, war imagery and video terrorism' (2008 156). These demonic figures of the digital unconscious constitute a collective imaginary plugged into our libidinal drives, and while our existing interface instrumentalises and exploits their energy they also contain, Pasquinelli argues, an excess that can turn against their masters. This 'internet underground', this 'biomorphic horror' of the 'subterranean libido', these 'monsters emerging from the collective Id' (2008 158, 165, 167, 159) Pasquinelli cries, must be *unleashed*. A 'perverse polymorphism' could then become the model for an excessive libidinal mediascape, one that would return

war imagery and porn to the social body – only massively amplified – a kind of shock therapy taking us beyond the paltry limits of the body, and its pathetically human sensibility. Pasquinelli is remarkably optimistic about this, telling us; ‘Warpunk uses warporn in a tragic way to overcome Western culture and the self-censorship of the counterculture itself’ (2008 199 italics added)!

We discussed David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983) in the previous chapter, but as an interface film it seems to have pre-empted Pasquinelli’s argument regarding the anti-capitalist potentials of a sexually violent parasite. Although he does not actually mention the film Pasquinelli’s figure seems to fit the videodrome perfectly; ‘The parasite is another politically ambivalent diagram that shifts from a tactical alliance to a strategic sabotage.’ (2008 48) The eponymous videodrome both frees and feeds off the libidinal forces instrumentalized by the mass-media (fantasies of sexual violence), before finally emerging for itself independent of capitalist exploitation by employing an aesthetic strategy that goes beyond sabotage to create something entirely new. In this sense *Videodrome* rejects the logic of both alliance and sabotage, because it dissolves any criteria by which it would be possible to distinguish them. The videodrome attaches itself to Max’s libidinal desires through images appearing on the tele-visual interface. Although at the film’s beginning his desire is both personal (Max’s sado-maso relationship with Debbie Harry) and corporate (his network requires something ‘tough’ that will ‘break through’), the videodrome is not simply a parasite existing between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ reality, because the

'hallucination' it creates annihilates this distinction. The 'interface' offered by the videodrome is not an alliance/sabotage of corporate television, it is a new kind of 'broadcast' that collapses the dichotomies that made the parasite possible in the first place. The videodrome melds organic and inorganic, real and virtual, into a new and inhuman life force that is beyond good and evil as much as it is beyond life and death, and seems entirely uninterested in financial profit. In *Videodrome* the interface goes way beyond its human limits, way beyond capitalist production, and by the end of the film we seem to have moved beyond the paradigm of negation itself. Indeed, by this stage we have entered a world in which images are not parasites of desire but embody an inhuman life form that has taken the interface to the next level, no longer an interface in fact, but the living embodiment of something without reference to what has gone before, something that is not a negation but a pure *creation*, a living work of art. In this, the great achievement of the film is its absolute lack of sentiment, it refuses any sense of loss, its motto 'long live the new flesh' affirming instead a powerfully inhuman and sublime force that obliterates its conditions in the creation of an entirely new future.

Videodrome brilliantly reveals that despite their alluring teen spirit Pasquinelli's parasites remain dialectical figures inasmuch as their libidinal violence requires what they escape to give their negations political force. This suggests, to me at least, that we need to approach the problem differently, and try to hallucinate what Deleuze calls 'pure differences which have become independent of the negative

[...], destructions in relation to which those of the negative are only appearances' (1994 xx). If, as post-Operaism inevitably does, we glorify the horror and power of capitalism to the point where only its negation – even one that operates immanently as sabotage – is going to satisfy our outrage, then we will be forever doomed to a glorious death, a kind of 'aggressive suicide' as Bifo calls it. The danger of this approach is that it risks ignoring any form of image production that does not try to negate capitalism, but instead privileges the creative potentials of the interface to go beyond their human, all too human limits.

No doubt this evokes perhaps the most horrifying kind of interface film of all..... science fiction as art..... *Long live the new flesh.*

Chapter Three

Alien Arrival and Badiou's Philosophy of the Event

We do not fundamentally need a philosophy of the structure of things. We need a philosophy open to the irreducible singularity of what happens, a philosophy that can be fed and nourished by the surprise of the unexpected. Such a philosophy would then be a philosophy of the event. Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought*.

The popular 1950s genre of the 'alien arrival' film has frequently been analysed in political terms, most commonly as a thinly veiled anti-communist narrative, but also as a critical engagement with the scientific rationalism of Fordist management systems.⁴⁰ While not wrong, these arguments reduce the major protagonist in these films – the alien – to a position entirely relative to the American society it threatens, and limit its significance to the existing cultural fears it subsequently embodies.⁴¹ What such criticism fails to address, and what the central metaphor of alien arrival so beautifully expresses, is thought's genesis in and as an outside, and the ethical demands its arrival places upon us. In this sense the alien arrival is an event that marks the enigmatic appearance of something outside of thought *which must be thought*, an ontological event calling forth an ethics of contact that is invariably developed in the action that follows.

For the French philosopher Alain Badiou this event provides the fundamental criteria of truth, because truth always arrives as something alien. Badiou starts 'from the following idea: a truth is, first of all, something new. What transmits, what repeats, we shall call *knowledge*.' (2004 61) How can we know anything about that which arrives from



Alien arrival – The Blob

beyond?⁴² The problem for Badiou and for alien arrival films then, is not what we *know* of this event – nothing – but how it can be *thought*. How, in other words, can we think the truth of the alien itself? ‘If a truth is something new’, Badiou asks, ‘what is the essential philosophical problem concerning truth? It is the problem of its appearance and its ‘becoming’. A truth must be submitted to thought, not as a judgement, but as a process in the real.’ (2004 61) The event, for Badiou, cannot be thought *in itself*, for by definition it is the irruption of the outside as such. But thought can bear witness to this event by producing a new truth, a truth that is adequate to the event’s radical exteriority, and marks its obscure appearance.

How then, does truth emerge through a ‘process of the real’? Here we can turn to those alien arrival films that explicitly figure this process in a protagonist who must, in the face of knowledgeable disbelief, proclaim the truth of the alien event. Steve in *The Blob* (Yeaworth, 1958), John Putnam in *It Came from Outer Space* (Arnold, 1953), Dr. Bennell in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956) and the boy David in *Invaders from Mars* (Menzies, 1953) must all announce the truth of the aliens’ arrival, without – as yet – being able to prove it. Even in those films where such a character does not appear, the problem subsists in the impenetrability of the alien to scientific analysis, from the incomprehensible metal of the spaceship in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, 1951) to the immortal line of Dr. McCoy; “It’s life Jim, but not as we know it.”

‘The undecidability of the event,’ Badiou writes, ‘induces the appearance of a *subject* of the event. Such

a subject is constituted by an utterance in the form of a wager. This utterance is as follows: "This event has taken place, it is something which I can neither evaluate, nor demonstrate, but to which I shall be faithful." To begin with, a subject is what fixes an undecidable event, because he or she takes the chance of deciding upon it.' (2004 62) This decision appears as an axiom, a simple statement of truth such as 'Aliens exist.' The verification of this axiom provides the initial narrative thrust of alien arrival films, as the subject formed by the event's appearance must force his (it is inevitably a 'he') community to confront its outside. The simultaneous appearance of the alien and the subject in an axiom of the event suggests an alternative reading of arrival films that does not simply explicate a series of more or less interesting dialectical relations between the human and its other, but instead explores the ontological emergence of truth itself.⁴³ The subject does not appear as the positive term to which the alien serves as negation, a dialectic brutally annulled in the alien's inevitable destruction, at least not yet. In arrival films the emergence of the human/alien dialectic occurs only after the initial verification of their founding event, and must be understood in terms of this event.

The alien arrival film explores the radical outside as the nevertheless immanent condition of truth. Although this problem of articulating the truth of the event structures all alien arrival films, I will concentrate on two, *The Blob* and *It Came from Outer Space*, as they state the problem according to its two possible ethical trajectories. In Badiou's terms, in the first the event is betrayed by an evil will to

truth, and in the second it provokes an ethical affirmation of universal justice. In both, the alien arrival marks the eruption of the outside (quite literally), and establishes the film's initial problem as the truthful appearance of this event. Can the truth of the alien's arrival actually appear? Can the subject remain true to the foundational subtraction that begins the film, as Badiou demands? This question is answered by *The Blob* and indeed most alien films in the negative, because they choose instead to demonise the alien outside, using it to mark a line demarcating humanity and reducing the ethics of contact to 'kill or be killed'. Science fiction is generally a conservative genre, both in its narratives and in its politics.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a few films suggest an alternative, an ethical opening to the outside produced by the subject's fidelity to his founding event. I will examine one of the finest of these, *It Came from Outer Space*, a little later.

In most films the opening problem of verifying the truth of the event quickly gives way to the real narrative: killing the alien. This transition appears very clearly in *The Blob*. The initial action concerns the fact that our hero Steve (McQueen) is the only one to have seen the murderous vitality of the Blob in action, and he must convince the town's inhabitants of its existence before it is too late. Despite the undoubted heroism of his decision, his axiomatic declaration requires verification before it can be regarded as true.⁴⁵ The process of verification in both *The Blob* and in Badiou is the same, it is 'the examination, within the situation, of the consequences of the axiom that decided upon the event' (2004 62). This process of

examination demands 'an exercise of fidelity' because it is essentially a statement of faith, the truth of its axiom being unsupported by any rule of established knowledge. Without recourse to existing knowledge the process of verification is especially difficult, on the one hand in the face of understandable skepticism, and on the other because there are simply no words by which the alien can be described. As ontological subtraction it cannot be 'counted as one', the first requirement according to Badiou, of any linguistic naming. Steve experiences this difficulty directly when he first attempts to warn the town's police department about the alien's arrival. He begins with "Doc Hallen's been killed", a statement well within the shared juridical language of this situation. The problem comes when he must be more specific. "This thing, it killed the Doc" is the best he can do, and this obviously falls well outside any explanation acceptable to the police. When pressed Steve claims "it's kind of like a ma..... it's kind of like a mass that keeps getting bigger and bigger." His stutter here is a vocal ellipses, a lack of words corresponding to the outside's arrival in the event, a gap in language that he immediately tries to fill by clicking his fingers, a non-vocal sound standing in for the pure unnameability of the Blob.⁴⁶ The cops, more and more incredulous, tell him to "make sense", and the most cynical, now turned sarcastic, asks; "Maybe the thing you saw was a monster?" Steve, at a loss, deadpans back, "Yup, maybe it was." Finally Steve is reduced to an appeal to empirical evidence, and implores them to "C'mon over to the Doc's, you can see it for yourself."

The appeal to empirical evidence and the naming and

appearance of the alien as a monster are both important narrative devices by which alien arrival films deal with the problem of verification. Both elements, which are often connected in a dramatic *unveiling* of the alien's monstrosity, do not however guarantee the event's verification, nor do they guarantee fidelity to its truth. Quite the opposite in fact, for the common appeal to an empirical visual verification (an appeal to a *common sense* approach that assumes the existing structure of human knowledge) and the accompanying emphasis on the alien's monstrosity, usually shifts the film away from the ontological and ethical problem of the alien and towards the moral defence of the human. Indeed, when verified empirically the radical subtraction of the alien event usually takes on the truth of the monstrous, justifying its eradication in the name of the known.⁴⁷

In fact it is the moment when Steve names the Blob as a monster that the film segues into the horror genre (a moment elegantly marked by the film's subsequent shot of the Doc's place as a haunted house) and its narrative stalls at the problem of the alien's extermination. This is the point at which the *The Blob* – but it is a moment typical for alien arrival films – abandons the ethics of truth as Badiou describes it, and moves towards its negation: Evil. Badiou argues that the process of verifying a truth involves the elaboration of a new subset within the situation. This subset is what Badiou calls a 'generic truth', an infinite and interminable subset that is nevertheless new. 'Invention and creation remain,' Badiou writes, 'incalculable. So the path of a truth cannot coincide in infinity with any concept.



Horror house – *The Blob*

Consequently, the verified terms compose, or rather will have composed, if we suppose their infinite totalization, a generic subset of the Universe.' (2004 64) The 'alien' is a generic truth, it is universal in the same way as Badiou's examples of 'the physical' or 'revolutionary politics', but it nevertheless appears as the result of a local process, of, to return to our example, Steve's fidelity to the event of an alien arrival. But the appearance of generic truth must be *forced* on the community in order for truth to *exist*. In other words, Steve's problem is to make the town believe in the dangerous eruption of the outside, of the Blob, itself.

This is in fact precisely what happens, but once more only by verifying the alien's existence according to the pre-existing category of the monstrous. Strictly speaking truth does not appear through a forcing at this point. So how does it happen? First Steve calls upon his friends at the local cinema. They have already accepted the generic truth of the monstrous, as announced by the soundtrack of the film they are watching – *Daughter of Horror* – which declares; "Yes, I am here, the demon who possesses your soul. Wait a bit. I am coming for you. I have so much to show you." Dragging his friends out of the show Steve asks them; "Would you believe me if I told you there was something inside of that rock we found, something that could wipe out the whole town?" He tells them he saw "this thing" kill Dr. Hallen, and when asked what it is he tells them he doesn't know, "but if it can kill Dr. Hallen it can kill somebody else". Primed by the film to accept Steve's tales of the Blob sight unseen, they co-operatively volunteer to help. "We're gonna find this thing," Steve declares, "and

we're gonna make people believe us." The kids then rush off to try to awaken the town to this as yet invisible threat. This fails to work because people either find their claims of a monster ludicrous, or banal: "Look, I have monsters in here all the time, so beat it" the barman tells them. People laugh. This situation leads to one of the best lines in the film; "How," Steve asks, "can you protect people from something they don't believe in?" The kids start blowing the horns of their cars in order to bring people to an impromptu town meeting. Steve announces the presence of a "monster" and the danger it presents to the town, a claim the police chief finally accepts. Steve has successfully managed to name the alien as an appearance of the generic truth of the monster and the town unites behind him. After vacillations of fortune they get rid of it.

According to Badiou this killing of an alien truth is a symptom of totalitarian politics. The American small town violently suppresses the fact 'that there is *always*, in any situation, a real point that *resists*'. This is the alien unnameable. "The unnameable is something like the inexpressible *real* of everything a truth authorizes to be said.' (Badiou, 2004 66) This would be the real of the alien *itself*, the otherness that appears in the event. Once we name this singularity within an axiom of opposition, we slip into a totalitarian attempt to measure the infinite. This, Badiou provocatively claims, is the appearance of evil. 'Usually it is said that Evil is lies, ignorance, or deadly stupidity. The condition of Evil is much rather the process of a truth. There is Evil only insofar as there is an axiom of truth at the point of the undecidable, a path of truth at

the point of the indiscernible, an anticipation of being for the generic, and the forcing of a nomination at the point of the unnameable.' (2004 67) This is a forceful declaration of an ethics of truth, an ethics of philosophy itself, and for us, an ethics of the alien. It means that any genuine truth of the alien must include its unnameable singularity, as what cannot be forced. This is an evocative idea in terms of alien arrival films, and alien films in general, which are almost always stories of an alien's death.⁴⁸ Beyond understanding this death as the rather simplistic reduction of these films to the anxious symptoms of American society of the 1950s under threat, we can see it as the expression of an evil will to truth.⁴⁹

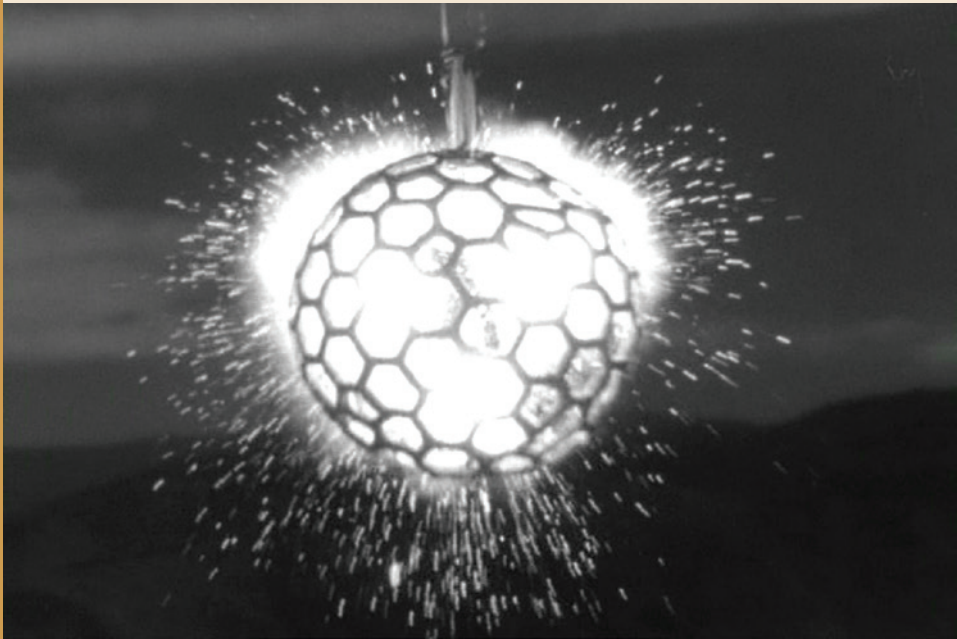
We have arrived at the inevitable conclusion of most alien arrival films from the 50s: extermination. But rather than this being an extermination of evil, Badiou's work enables us to see how it is the extermination that is evil, because it is a betrayal of an ethics of truth. This is precisely the view of *It Came from Outer Space*, which shares the narrative 'truth trajectory' of *The Blob*, along with the event of 'alien arrival' that is its genesis, but resists the term 'monster' and the violence it calls forth and legitimates. In *It Came from Outer Space* the subject formed by the alien's arrival – John Putman – succeeds in maintaining his fidelity to this event. This fidelity explores an ethical alternative to Steve's betrayal of the alien event in *The Blob*, and wards off the cops, which, in terms very close to Badiou's, are explicitly figured as evil. As a result, *It Came from Outer Space* elaborates an ethics of the alien opposed to *The Blob*'s morality of the monster.

It Came from Outer Space explicitly rejects suppression or extermination as an appropriate response to the irruption of the unknown. In fact, despite the horror of the alien's appearance John Putman remains committed to protecting them against the local law enforcement officer – Matt – who wants to deal with them Western style, all guns blazing. Unlike *The Blob* the confrontation between John as event-witness and the police is not resolved in favour of the cops. Whereas *The Blob* represents the alien as a pure threat, a monstrous outside we are morally justified – and in fact compelled – to destroy, *It Came from Outer Space* explores a scenario of alien contact that revolves around communication, suggesting that embracing the unknown transforms hostility and fear into wisdom. Opening up to the outside *It Came from Outer Space* argues, is the only way to avoid the violence and paranoia of small-town American values. In this sense the film poses the same question as that asked by Badiou: 'if our only agenda is an ethical engagement against an Evil we recognize a priori, how are we to envisage any transformation of the way things are?' (2001 13-14) Rather than a defence of the human (or in other words, of the American...) understood according to essentialist and xenophobic principles, *It Came from Outer Space* posits humanity and what it means to be human, as being fundamentally open to the outside and its transformative power. This is an 'outside' irreducible to the abstract category of 'the Other', one whose appearance in an event, and the fidelity shown by the subject it forms, deploys its universal truth to political effect. The consequence Badiou draws from the event's

universal address is explicitly figured, as we shall see, in the most important scene of *It Came from Outer Space*: 'the other doesn't matter' (2001 27).⁵⁰ This means the 'real' ethical question, for Badiou and for John Putman, 'is much more that of *recognizing the Same*' (2001 25).

But before we can understand this provocation, we must catch up with its development in *It Came from Outer Space*. The film begins just like *The Blob*, with a pair of lovers, John Putman and Ellen Fields, observing what they take to be a meteor falling to earth. Whereas in *The Blob* this arrival interrupted a kiss of typically teenage enthusiasm taking place outside the city limits, in *It Came from Outer Space* the lovers are chastely discussing the joys of their future married life. This establishes the opposed trajectories of the films, centripetal in *The Blob*, where the event will bring the teenagers back to their community, and centrifugal in *It Came from Outer Space*, where the lovers will end up isolated and alone in defending an outside they are ethically committed to.⁵¹ This distinction is emphasised by the films depiction of the event. Unlike the faint and fleeting shot of the alien's arrival in *The Blob*, in *It Came from Outer Space* the meteor arrives immediately, exploding in our faces and establishing the alien's arrival as the central problem of the film *for us*, the shot being both our point-of-view, and originally in 3D.⁵²

The lovers immediately rush out to see the 'meteor', and are taken to the crater by a friend in a helicopter. Unsurprisingly, they're the first there, and John rushes down to check it out. At the bottom he finds the alien's space ship, as in *The Blob* looking like a golf-ball, only this



Alien arrival – It Came From Outer Space

time big, dwarfing John. The door is open and he peers in, an action we see from within the ship, from the point-of-view of what John sees, something that quickly retreats as he comes forward – peering – until the door slides shut in his face. What is so remarkable about this first contact is that it is shown from the *alien's point-of-view*, a fact indicated by concentric and slightly distorting circles appearing over the screen and seeming to project into its space. This will be the consistent sign used by the film to indicate that we are seeing with the alien's eye (it only has one), and the first example in cinematic history of the alien point-of-view shot.⁵³ That this is the alien's point-of-view is further emphasised by the electronic 'alien' music that consistently signals their appearance throughout the film, and by the up-close sound of breathing that corporealises the camera, and turns it subjective.⁵⁴

John scrambles back up to Ellen and their friend just as the crater around the space ship collapses in on itself, covering the alien craft. This disappearance marks the emergence of the subject formatted by the event, and the start of the ethical trial he must undergo in maintaining his fidelity to it. This event introduces nothing less than a new truth that John must convince the others he saw. "It's like nothing we've ever seen before," he announces, a statement the helicopter pilot doesn't believe, and Ellen clearly has her doubts. Nevertheless, he excitedly presses them: "What would you say if I had found a Martian down there?" "I'd say hold them for the circus," his cynical friend responds. "And I'd say wait," John implores with all the earnestness that typifies his character, "and find out what they're doing here first."

The problem is immediate and severe: no-one believes him, least of all those entrusted with extending the limits of our knowledge. John confronts Dr. Snell, a scientist from the university who is at the crater conducting some tests. Dr. Snell refuses to dig for the ship as he's satisfied that it was merely a meteor that landed. John's disappointed: "I expected you to be more open to the idea [of aliens] than the others. You're a man of science." This, Dr. Snell explains cruelly, only makes him "less inclined to witchcraft." "Not witchcraft," John replies, "imagination. A willingness to believe there are lots of things that we don't know anything about." After John leaves Dr. Snell and his assistant continue the discussion. John is "odd" the assistant comments. "More than odd," Dr. Snell replies, "individual and lonely, a man who thinks for himself." John's ethical commitment to the event, as Badiou puts it, 'compels so considerable a distance from opinions that it must be called literally *asocial*' (2001 54). On the edge of his community John's oddness attracts the town's sheriff Matt. Matt has a paternal concern for Ellen, on account of her being the daughter of Matt's old boss, and he "means to keep an eye on her". But his warning to Matt to leave Ellen out of things contains another more sinister one. The town, Matt explains, doesn't understand John, in fact he frightens them, "and what frightens them they are against one way or another".

A line has been drawn between the subject – John – formed by the event he is the sole witness to, and the community – both Sand Rock and that of science – who understand neither him nor his fidelity to this event, and

who are against – on principle – both. Matt the cop and Dr. Snell the scientist patrol and protect the border of the known, and both make it clear that any attempt to open this border will not be tolerated. This is the political problem of the film, which pits the fidelity of John *to the outside* against the “protection” by the law *of the inside*. Badiou develops this conflict between the law and the event in terms of thought: ‘The law is what constitutes the subject as powerlessness of thought.’ (2003 83) The law is ‘statist’ according to Badiou, meaning it enumerates, names, and controls the situation according to the pre-existing rules defining a community, and acts against the creative thought introduced by an event. Suppressing the event is the role of the police, celebrated in *The Blob* and denounced in *It Came from Outer Space*. The event challenges the law by creating a subject existing outside of communal reality, and ‘since the event was excluded by all the regular laws of the situation – compels the subject to *invent* a new way of being and acting in the situation’ (2001 41-2). John Putman, as subject of the event, must step outside the law and the community it polices in order to force it to confront the new truth of an alien outside appearing in its midst. As a result, the naming of the event, as Badiou puts it, ‘is essentially illegal in that it cannot conform to any *law* of representation’ (2005 205). Prior to, and forever against the unified identities policed by the law is the criminal real. John’s attempts at communicating with, and finally helping the aliens is what Badiou calls an ‘emancipatory project’ because ‘what every emergence of hitherto unknown possibilities does, is to put an end to consensus’ (2001 32). The event is an

'illegal contingency,' a 'lawless eruption' (2003 81 and 82) of a previously unknown truth and the militant subject that is its herald. 'Truth is either militant,' Badiou claims, 'or is not.' (2003 88)

The conflict between the law and the militant is over the philosophical status of truth, and is embodied by the relationship of John and Matt. The crucial moment comes when John returns from having spoken to the aliens, and discusses what he has learnt with Matt. "Why," Matt wants to know, "don't they come into the open?" Meaning why can't they be revealed within the situation, and understood according to its existing knowledge and values. They don't trust us, John explains, "Because what we don't understand we want to destroy." Matt naturally rejects this criticism of himself and humanity, claiming "I kill only what tries to kill me." But John immediately rebuts this claim with a practical demonstration. Why, he asks, is Matt afraid of the spider conveniently crawling close to them? Is it because it is so different, so monstrous even? What, John asks, would Matt do if it came towards him? "This" Matt says with a certain satisfaction, and immediately walks over to it and crushes it with his boot. "Exactly," John says, "as you'd destroy anything you didn't understand." Unconvinced, Matt wants to form a posse immediately. "When," John asks, "are you going to stop being a badge and become a human being?" "That's my job," Matt stubbornly insists, "if a thing is wrong you set it right."

This scene dramatically enacts the conflict between humanity's violent and repressive moral law and a militant ethics determined to maintain fidelity to the truth of the

event. This fidelity is what can force the situation away from the control of the police. As Badiou has it: "There is only one question in the ethic of truths: how will I, as someone, *continue* to exceed my own being? How will I link the things I know, in a consistent fashion, via the effects of being seized by the not-known?" (2001 50) Matt experiences this not-known as a threat, for appropriately enough the aliens initially take the form of humans, confusing the line he patrols around truth. "They could be all around us and we wouldn't know it," he complains, the outside already puncturing his humanity. It is no surprise then, that the militant John's and the policeman Matt's conflict becomes violent, and although John succeeds in disarming Matt before he can shoot an alien in town, Matt's response is to immediately call up a posse to kill them.

This final, inevitable, split between Matt and John can also be understood in terms of Badiou's understanding of evil. Badiou argues that evil is formed through the same process as truth, through an event that forms a subjective fidelity creating something new. But the 'evil' event is not the appearance of the void but of a "full' particularity or presumed substance of that situation', which, Badiou claims, is 'a *simulacrum of truth*' (2001 73). Badiou is writing about National Socialism, which was founded on a fidelity to an event which named 'not the universality of that which is sustained, precisely, by no particular characteristic (no particular multiple), but the absolute particularity of a community, itself rooted in the characteristics of its soil, its blood, and its race.' (2001 72) No doubt an analogy comparing Matt and the Nazi's is

stretched, but Matt is committed to maintaining existing social borders according to an axiom of the outside that negates its event.⁵⁵ Matt *the cop* emerges in his fidelity to this 'truth', one that is constructed and maintained, just as the Nazis' was, by "voiding' what surrounds it.' (2001 74)⁵⁶ Matt's alien 'Other' must, according to his oppositional logic, be destroyed in order to maintain the presence of human truth. 'And as this presence is that of *the Truth*,' Badiou argues, 'what is outside of presence falls within an imperative of annihilation.' (1999 130) In this sense, Matt and John are both subjects formed by the same event, but whereas John attempts to retain a militant fidelity to the void of truth, Matt attempts to void this void – 'the void 'avoided' [*chassé*]' as Badiou puts it – in order to maintain the universality of his simulacral 'event-substance'. 'Hence fidelity to the simulacrum,' Badiou writes, 'has as its content war and massacre.' (2001 74) War and massacre are the natural and necessary complements to any cinematic evocation of the term 'monster', a term which appears as a universal truth only in order to justify its extermination as the guarantee of what is truly human, all too human. Finally, despite 'mimicking' the truth process, Matt's violent reaction to the unknown is the opposite of John's. As Badiou puts it:

the enemy of a true subjective fidelity is precisely the closed set [*ensemble*], the substance of the situation, *the community*. The values of truth, of its hazardous course and its universal address, are to be erected against these forms of inertia.

Every invocation of blood and soil, of race, of custom, of community, works directly against truths; and it is this very collection [*ensemble*] that is named as the enemy in the ethic of truths. (2001 76, italics added)

What is most interesting about *It Came from Outer Space* is the film's refusal to accept the opposition of human and alien, and its refusal of any justification of aggression against the outside. This appears clearly in the alien point-of-view shot in *It Came from Outer Space*, which although placing us within the outside, exists in the film only to be gone beyond. Initially the alien point-of-view appears ambiguous, as we-the-alien observe John attempting to see us, with the shot retreating back into the ship, and behind the closing door. There is a sense of anxiety proper to a being that has crash landed and is confronted not just by a strange world but by its prying eyes. This feeling of sympathy is quickly tempered however by a menacing tone the point-of-view takes on (the theremin of course) once the aliens venture out into the world. This is amplified when the aliens start taking over humans, which involves (us in) either sneaking up on people (most notably early in the film, when a ghostly hand reaches out to grab the fleeing linesman's shoulder), or totally freaking them out (in the memorable shot of Ellen's screaming face, perfectly framed by the concentric circles of the alien-eye). But this threat is at the same time allayed, most notably when an alien-in-human-form explains; "Don't be afraid. [...] We cannot, we would not, take your souls, your minds, your bodies. Don't be afraid." Not only are its friendly intentions declared,



Alien point of view – It Came from Outer Space

but the alien goes on to articulate a familiar understanding of life, neatly divided into soul, mind and body, and this common point-of-view will be further elaborated in the film's most important sequence.

John confronts an alien in human form, and explains: "Whoever you are, whatever you are, I want to understand you, I want to help you." They reply, equally friendly: "We don't want to hurt you [...]. We don't want to hurt anyone." Once the reciprocal non-violence of John and the alien has (once more) been established, and their shared suspicions about the violence of Matt made clear, their next encounter will finally play out the non-dialectical consequences of the event. Ellen has been taken by the aliens, and John and Matt are both worriedly arguing about what to do next. John receives a call from the aliens summoning him to the desert, and he leaves immediately with Matt. He is then led by a mysteriously glamorous Ellen to the old mine shaft by which the aliens enter and leave their ship. Here, facing the black hole of the shaft, peering into it and once more trying to catch a glimpse of the aliens who have successfully evaded his sight, he cries: "Come out in the open, come out where I can really see you." Here, the void of the event appears before him in its literal form. The heavy darkness of the shaft from which the alien's disembodied voice reaches him seems nothing but a cosmic black hole. The alien refuses, which simply makes John more insistent: "Let me see you as you really are," he pleads. The aliens explain that they are repairing their ship and need John's help, but John is suspicious and accuses them of kidnapping and stealing, and perhaps of murder. The alien seeks to reassure

him by once more emphasising their shared values: "We have souls, and minds, and we are good," it maintains. "Then why are you hiding?" John asks. "Because you would be horrified at the sight of us." John refuses this appeal to the monstrous, and finally conditions his co-operation on this revelation, this empirical ratification of what exists outside the community. The alien tries one last time: "Let us stay apart, the people of your world and ours. For if we come together there will only be destruction." But John isn't accepting this: "I've got to see you as you really are. Come out or I can't take the responsibility of protecting you." "Very well," the alien replies, finally acquiescing, "You asked to see this, so you shall."

The crucial scene of empirical validation of the alien however, is very different from that in *The Blob*, as it avoids the dialectical opposition of the human and the alien, of the inside and its outside, positing instead what Badiou calls 'an infinite alterity' (2001 25). What makes this scene all the more remarkable is that it makes its point entirely cinematically, in a fine example of the way that cinema thinks. The dialogue between John and the alien we have just recalled has been organised in a shot – counter-shot rhythm, showing a blackness John cannot see into, and the view out of the blackness, the alien seeing John not seeing. As the alien moves forward into the light we get an alien point-of-view shot (with concentric circles) of John peering into the darkness from which it emerges, then John's point-of-view as something emerges from the void. We see with his eyes as the alien appears, approaching the camera until it is seen in half-length, then CUT and we see John in half-

length backing away, then CUT to the alien's head in close-up, then CUT to John's head in close-up as he screams, hides his face and turns away. There is a perfect symmetry between the alien's and John's point-of-view as the film moves from one subjective shot to the other. But more importantly, halfway through the sequence, as the alien is revealed to John, *the alien point-of-view frame disappears*. This is most remarkable as it had been used only a moment before as the alien moved toward John, and it is the more remarkable considering the alien point-of-view shot is the film's 'gimmick', one it uses over and over to indicate the very difference that now suddenly disappears. Why then, should it be suddenly taken away, and why exactly at this moment of empirical contact and verification of the alien's truth?

Clearly at this climactic moment the otherness of the aliens, an otherness so obviously insisted on by the alien point-of-view shot, has just as obviously been erased. This erasure serves to emphasise the violence of John's horror, and his gesture of turning away. When we see his horror we see it from the alien's point-of-view, but this point-of-view is now indiscernible from our own, it's otherness in other words, has become our own. Otherness has not disappeared here, and indeed John's horror establishes it once again, but its register has been altered by this symmetrical sequence of shots in which both elements – human and alien – are shown to be as other as each other, and whose points of view here converge *in reality*, at the moment when the alien *appears*. As it really appears, beyond the obvious indicator of its difference in the alien



Your Otherness is my own – *It Came from Outer Space*

point-of-view frame, it is no different from us than we are from it. Its difference, we could say, has been equalised, or as Badiou has it, equally distributed amongst an 'infinite alterity'.⁵⁷ The alien arrives.

This remarkable scene from *It Came from Outer Space* denounces any dialectically understood Other-outside and the evil announcement of its destruction as a 'monster', as seen in *The Blob*, in favour of an infinite alterity as the terrain of truth. In doing so it accepts the disruptive and impossible existence of the alien void (John looks away), while arguing that this 'outside' exists *within* the infinite alterity of appearances as the immanent condition of the emergence of the new, of truth as such. At this point the usefulness of cultural studies in understanding this film ends, because here *It Came from Outer Space* states the problems of cultural difference according to the more fundamental question of the ontology of truth.⁵⁸ According to Badiou's ontology 'there are only multiples of multiples', an infinity of infinities constituted by differences without any form of unification. As a result, 'similar differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so differences are then precisely what truths depose, or render insignificant' (2001 27). The question then, and this is as true of Badiou as it is for *It Came from Outer Space*, is not one of Otherness but rather of what is the same. As a result, the ethics of *It Came from Outer Space* are not concerned with the Other, with difference or a kind of liberal democratic impulse towards peaceful co-existence as espoused in *Star Trek*, but with truth, a truth 'indifferent to differences [... and] the same for



Aliens are us – It Came From Outer Space

all' (2001 27). This point is finally made in the most explicit way possible by the film, for after the erasure of the alien point-of-view the aliens appear in human form, most notably as John himself, with whom John conducts the final negotiation. Once more, this culmination of contact between human and alien is conducted as if this difference is banal, as if this difference was no more, but also no less, as Badiou himself suggests 'as between myself and anybody at all, including myself' (2001 26).

It Came from Outer Space is such an interesting and unusual alien film because it understands the encounter with the alien as both an ethical and political event that rejects the "Other" and the police force it calls forth in favour of a new truth that demands a universal justice.

The final evaporation of the alien Other in a point-of-view indiscernible from the human articulates an egalitarian and universal principle of justice that demands fidelity to its truth in order to be thought.⁵⁹ This is finally John's achievement, he both defeats the unjust xenophobia of Matt, and escapes his own humanity in remaining faithful to the alien event. But this insurgency is in no way a declaration of the rights of an 'Other', and instead involves a banalisation of difference in the genericity of truth.⁶⁰ This generic quality of truth proclaims its universality and takes us where no man has gone before by affirming – as the axiom of action – a radical equality. Finally, in *It Came from Outer Space* the truth involves the simultaneous becoming-other of the same (against the human), and the becoming-same of the other (against the alien), in a movement in which alien and man overcome their

dialectical co-dependency in a shared fidelity to a universal justice. As we see both John and the aliens act ethically, we see their (and our) commitment to equality emerge despite the respective dangers it poses to both. *It Came from Outer Space* therefore extends Badiou's political philosophy beyond the domain of the human, while retaining its basic premise of an ethical action based not on individual interests but on universal truth. In this sense the actions of John and the aliens 'induce a representation of the capacity of the collective which refers its agents to the strictest equality' (2004 70). This equality – once more beautifully expressed in the scene from the film we have analysed at length – 'is in no way a social program. Moreover, it has nothing to do with the social. It is a political maxim, a prescription. Political equality is not what we want or plan, it is what we declare under fire of the event, here and now, as what is, and not as what should be. In the same way, for philosophy, 'justice' cannot be a State program: 'justice' is the qualification of an egalitarian political orientation in act' (2004 72).

Could it be possible that cinema's subjective shot, the faithful point-of-view, achieves its greatest political militancy in *It Came from Outer Space*?

Chapter Four

Against Nihilism, Nietzsche and Kubrick on the Future of Man

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1999. The public sector has also become an important employer of women, with 5.5 million women employed in the public sector in 1999, compared with 4.5 million in 1980.

There are a number of reasons why the public sector has become an important employer of women. One reason is that the public sector has a high proportion of women in its workforce. In 1999, 88% of the public sector workforce were women, compared with 78% in 1980. This is due to a number of factors, including the fact that the public sector has a high proportion of jobs that are traditionally held by women, such as teaching, nursing, and social work.

Another reason why the public sector has become an important employer of women is that it has a high proportion of jobs that are full-time and permanent. In 1999, 68% of the public sector workforce were employed on full-time contracts, compared with 58% in 1980. This is due to the fact that the public sector has a high proportion of jobs that are essential to the functioning of the state, such as those in the health and education sectors.

Finally, the public sector has become an important employer of women because it has a high proportion of jobs that are well-paid. In 1999, the average salary for a woman in the public sector was £24,000, compared with £18,000 in 1980. This is due to the fact that the public sector has a high proportion of jobs that are in the higher pay bands, such as those in the senior management and professional sectors.

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The sun rises.⁶¹ This first image of 2001: *A Space Odyssey* so memorably accompanied by Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* appears as a portent, as a vision of things to come, and as an echo of these words of Nietzsche's:

Zarathustra has become ripe, my hour has come!
'This is my morning, my day begins: rise up now, rise up,
great noontide!' (1961 336)

2001 is not just 'about' Nietzsche's noontide, it is an ambitious effort to project us into a new future by overcoming the human, all too human. In doing so the film extends science fiction cinema both technically and philosophically, offering images of the future more convincing than any seen before, but as well, the film explores a new ontology of the future, its every epic surge defining a new stage of transformation. From the ape who beget us, humanity comes to itself before transforming into something new – the overman. In this way Kubrick's 1968 film echoes the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's contemporaneous interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return, one in which the future emerges as the repetition of difference, the return of the new, overcoming the known to take us beyond our humanity.⁶² Deleuze is vital to our appreciation of what 2001 achieves, because it is his insistence on the importance of the future that allows us to read the film philosophically – a philosophy that cannot, as we shall see, be separated from its aesthetic merits. This is to explore, for real, the possibilities of a cinema-thought, one that attempts to enact a transformation worthy of its

Nietzschean inspiration rather than simply cataloguing its possible allegorical references. If there is a necessity to another (Deleuzian) essay about 2001 it is this; the literature to date has often been distracted by the film's references, at the cost of a satisfactory account of its meaning.

THE DAWN OF MAN

2001 is not simply a retelling of *Zarathustra*, because it locates Nietzsche's tale of man's overcoming in our future, a transcendental future of pure becoming, a time of continual transformation. The future has in this sense always been with us, a fact Kubrick shows us by starting from the beginning, from man's birth. The film begins with still photos repeating an endless dawn, until the camera moves, life appears, and we see our ancestors the apes. We quickly learn much of their life; they coexist with tapirs, are hunted by leopards, confront each other at a waterhole, and eat grass. Death surrounds them, and every shot is filled with bones. But the apes are oblivious to death, for it is as much a part of their life as everything else, and their existence has not yet turned into a question. But all this is about to change. The first close-up of the film is of an ape's face turned to watch the sunrise. It is followed by the first point of view shot, as we see what the ape sees, the rosy fingers of dawn. The individual is slowly awakening. But the dawn also reveals something else, a tall thin black monolith standing before the slumbering apes. Utterly incongruous, utterly alien. It stands there as the impossible – a pure disjunction – a doorway to an existence that cannot yet be

seen. The apes awake and react with fear. But the monolith neither runs away nor attacks, the monolith, and this is the very essence of its alien appearance, does not move, its black insistence the only unmoving thing in this world's infinite rhythm of fight or flight, of night and day, of life and death. The monolith is what does not live, and yet is not the same as death. Or, perhaps better, the monolith stands outside the eternal and unchanging rhythm of life and death, breaking up their symmetrical economy. The apes hesitantly go to investigate, to touch and taste and smell it, and further: to evaluate. The appearance of the monolith has caused reflection. The apes have not yet begun to think, but they have been forced to confront their outside, an act that opens out a space between their perceptions and their actions.

This space, a space Deleuze, following Henri Bergson, will call the brain, has been very deliberately created by the monolith for an act of insemination, a genesis that after a very rapid gestation will bear remarkable fruit. As Deleuze has pointed out: 'The black stone of 2001 presides over both cosmic states and cerebral stages: it is the soul of the three bodies, earth, sun and moon, but also the seed of the three brains, animal, human, machine.' (1989 205-6) Kubrick shows us this seed – the moon and sun – appearing as if emitted from the monolith itself, a vision signalling our first return (it will be repeated another three times) to the cosmic alignment of the opening shot. The apes' brain provides the womb now impregnated with a new future, and within which this seed of the future will grow. Emerging between sensation and action reflection gives

birth to consciousness, and the ape steps beyond its animal body and into an abstract outside, into the consciousness of man.

Kubrick shows us this process very precisely: An ape scuffs into the skeleton of a tapir, looking for food. It stops, it looks up, it remembers the image of the monolith in alignment with the sun and moon. But this 'vision' appears without a reverse-shot of the ape seeing, because it is a point-of-view shot onto a new and interior landscape, that of thought. Here man emerges in a mental image of his own conception, a thought by which humanity escapes the earth and rises into a new but nevertheless internal dimension: consciousness. The ape looks around at the bones, distracted. He picks one up and lets it fall, again and a bone is propelled spiralling towards us, and with the rising kettle drums and horns of Strauss's *Zarathustra* once more peaking he fully grasps the idea and brings the bone down in the middle of the tapir skull. From the memory of the monolith the ape has moved to a thought of a weaponised future, as we see a tapir fall dead to the ground. This shot of the ape's mind's eye is a vision of supremacy inseparable from its ecstatic explosion of joy, a celebration of power. The ape rejoices, it has been overcome by man. And between these two 'idea shots' – on the one hand the monolith and on the other the falling tapir – between their before and after, their past and future, the expanse of the ape's new outside is fully revealed. Thought has emerged into time. Or better, thought has emerged *as* time. The ape's thought of cause and effect is nothing but the connection of a past with a future, and this emergence of conscious time



The birth of consciousness in a festival of violence – 2001

overcomes the natural cycle of life and death by thinking the present, and by making the ape its master.

This emergence of the human – our *dawn* – has been achieved through the monolith, but what, and this is the fundamental *problem* of the film, is the monolith? The monolith is the *new*, and its appearance on earth is inseparable from the emergence of thought and time, the emergence of an outside as the power of the *future*. This is why the film starts with nine *stills* of sunrises, they are dawns without change, and remain in a timeless, eternal *now*. This *now* is pierced by the monolith, an event that creates time. This creation of a new future is inseparable from destruction, a point Kubrick emphasises by showing us two consecutive shots of a tapir's fall. 'He who has to be a creator always has to destroy' (Nietzsche, 1961 85).⁶³ Man is born as an embodiment of the monolith's power of radical disruption, he signals a new dawn, the arrival of a new *future*, the future of the human, all too human.

The monolith – we must never forget this – made man think. The monolith therefore made man, both created the womb and provided the seed from which man was born. But what is the monolith? The monolith is an impervious outside, an utterly impossible alien being that forces the ape to reflect, to open up time and space between sensation and action. This space is outside the timeless duration of the ape's life on earth, an outside that is at the same time the new inside of human consciousness. But although the monolith is the genetic disjunction that creates thought, it cannot itself be thought. The monolith is man's immanent exterior, an internal outside that is the condition of his

overcoming. The monolith as creative disjunction is, in Nietzsche's terms, the will to power – the ontological power of the future qua becoming – a power man contains, elaborates and affirms (but finds so hard to think), until like the rising sun he reaches his noontide and overcomes himself, returning and transfigured as an innocent child.⁶⁴ 2001, as we shall see, will end with this overcoming of man, but man's birth has already established, as the *secret* of the monolith and the destiny of man, the eternal return of the future as the power of overcoming.⁶⁵

But meanwhile, for the course of the film, no one, not even our hero Dave Bowman, has the faintest idea of what the monolith announces. The monolith will remain for humanity, to quote Dr. Heywood Floyd, "totally inert, its origin and purpose still a total mystery."⁶⁶ Like the monolith, the process of overcoming and its will to power remains alien to human thought. This alien element, for Kubrick and for Nietzsche, forms an ontological secret that can only be lived in the process of overcoming. But even as unthought the will to power of the monolith remains active, and man's future emerges in spite of his rational exertions. Nevertheless, it will only be in overcoming man's conscious rationality – exponentially raised into the computer HAL – that Dave Bowman, a man, becomes a new dawn. How will man, the most rational of animals achieve this? For Nietzsche it will be through the body, and as we shall see, Kubrick also pits the body against consciousness in 2001's climactic action scene. Victorious, this body (Dave Bowman) will continue on its way beyond infinity.

In 1887-88 Nietzsche explains the conflict of the body and consciousness in what could be a script note from 2001:

The role of "consciousness." – It is essential that one should not make a mistake over the role of "consciousness": it is our relation with the "outer world" that evolved it. On the other hand, the direction or protection and care in respect of the co-ordination of the bodily functions does *not* enter our consciousness, any more than spiritual accumulation: that a higher court rules over these things cannot be doubted – a kind of directing committee on which the various chief desires make their votes and power felt. "Pleasure," "displeasure" are hints from this sphere, also the act of will, also ideas.

In summa: That which becomes conscious is involved in causal relations which are entirely withheld from us – the sequence of thoughts, feelings, ideas in consciousness does not signify that this sequence is a causal sequence, but apparently it is so, to the highest degree. Upon this *appearance* we have founded our whole idea of spirit, reason, logic, etc. (– none of these exist: they are fictitious syntheses and unities), and projected *into* these things and *behind* things!

Usually, one takes consciousness itself as the general sensorium and Supreme Court, nonetheless, it is only a means of communication: it is evolved through social intercourse – "Intercourse" here understood to include the influences of the outer world and the reactions they compel on our side, also

our effect upon the outer world. It is not the directing agent, but an organ of the directing agent. (1967 284)

This conflict between will to power expressed physiologically in affects, and as represented by subjective consciousness, is elaborated in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche argues that the appearance of human rationality rests upon a morality that justifies it. This morality takes on a temporal sense, as Nietzsche asks whether the 'good' man is 'a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living *at the expense of the future?*' (1967a, 20). In other words, the advent of human morality obscures the will to power and its vital force of overcoming under the reactive values of good and evil, along with their living figure of the 'bad conscience' and its metaphysics of 'ascetic ideals'. Both Nietzsche and 2001 offer a genealogy of culture in which an affirmative ecstasy gives way to the *ressentiment* of the 'good', and where the active expression of affects is negated by their representation in human consciousness. As Gene Youngblood precisely puts it, '2001 is Stanley Kubrick's interstellar morality play' (1970 141).

Although the apes of 2001 are not exactly the famed 'blond beasts of prey' of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, they seem to perform the same function (1967a 40, 86). In killing, the ape-beast celebrates his will to power, and murder gives rise to the festival. At the end of the fight at the waterhole the screaming ape launches his bone skyward in celebration of 'a terrible artists' egotism' (Nietzsche, 1967a 87). Nietzsche had seen the movie...

To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle to which even the apes might subscribe, for it has been said that in devising bizarre cruelties they anticipate man and are, as it were, his “prelude.” Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches. (1967a 67)

But the festival has been repressed, and we no longer celebrate our strength. The strong and active man is no longer seen as ‘good’, for his victims defend themselves by proclaiming their oppressors ‘evil’, founding their morality on this reactive ‘fact’. This morality of *ressentiment* is justified by an ideal ‘good’ that finds its highest form in the Christian God. But with God we have given ourselves a ‘bad conscience’, for our bodies are always guilty in the face of his ideal truth. Faced with this metaphysical ideal we must become ascetics and attempt to leave our bodies for the great ‘beyond’. Thus man takes sides against himself, and nihilism is born.

MAN IN SPACE

At this point the prelude ends, for both 2001 and for man. The festival of blood has suddenly become, in the famous edit that spans millions of years, a waltz. Man has emerged – it is almost as if Nietzsche was writing about this sequence – through ‘a forcible sundering from his animal past, as if it were a leap and plunge into new surroundings

and conditions of existence' (1967a 85). Despite the languid beauty of the sudden appearance of space flight, it is from the moment when the ape turned the weapon on himself that this future has been born. This violence, for Kubrick as much as for Nietzsche, is both horrifying and magnificent. Nietzsche writes:

the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and *pregnant with a future* that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered. Indeed, divine spectators were needed to do justice to the spectacle that thus begun and the end of which is not yet in sight. (1967a 85)

The birth of self-hatred is magnificent, Nietzsche (and Kubrick) continues, because from it is born the man who 'gives rise to an interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with him something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise.' Man, and these are Nietzsche's words, is going to produce a 'great child' (1967a 85).

That man has not yet been introduced. Meanwhile the soft notes of Johann Strauss's *Blue Danube* accompanies the utter disjunction of the bone become a spaceship. What is the meaning of this cut? There seems two possible answers. Perhaps it is that between then and now nothing has changed, the weapon of self-hatred remains, only now in the form of orbiting nuclear bombs.⁶⁷ Same shit, different

day. But on the other hand, everything has changed. Everything the monolith's cosmic perspective promised seems to have come true. The grunting bestiality of the apes has blossomed into the most graceful of visions, as we dance amongst the stars. But almost immediately the occupants of this world appear, and the first human we see is the slumped sleeping figure of Dr. Floyd. The ape's triumphant roar has turned into its opposite, a snore, and this transformation is hardly reassuring. The pure activity of the apes has turned into the pure impassivity of man. Or rather, man lies sleeping and impassive in the midst of the enormous activity of machines.

This cut from bone to spaceship, dizzying in its velocity, takes us from the beginning of our future in the birth of human consciousness, to the constant threat now circling the earth – the weapon in its alienated, machinic amplification. Kubrick's cut therefore gives us an utterly condensed genealogy of humanity. It reveals both the origin of the future in the apes coming to consciousness, and the wrong direction this development has taken, because the spaceship *interrupts* the trajectory of the bone. As the film now goes on to show, the instinctual joy of the apes' violence, the immediacy of their festival of power, has been transformed into intricate international relations conducted through the repressed violence of threat and secret subterfuges.⁶⁸ The instinctual passions and affects of the ape have become the cold calculation of a scientific consciousness, an interruption in man's instinctual will to power that now turns back against himself in *human nihilism*. Against such abomination Kubrick posits the same solution as Nietzsche, man must be overcome.

Nietzsche explains this nihilism in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. History, he argues, has seen the emergence of the human in its weakest sense, of the human justified through a metaphysical dimension that turns against the predatory and instinctual strength of our animal physicality. By 2001, Kubrick argues, machines have become the mechanisms of this nihilistic will. The experimental consciousness born in the first contact of monolith and apes has turned into a techno-scientific will-to-truth that transforms the bone into a spaceship. But this transformation has come at a price, a monetisation of consciousness that creates a seamless blend of science and multi-national wealth, and is signified by the logos of Pan Am, IBM, and Bell telephones we are shown once the film hits space. And inside this money-machine man is asleep. Every affectual relation is over-coded by its techno-economic and political investments. From the films first words between Floyd and the stewardess to his later conversation with his daughter, from his confrontation with the Russians to the briefing he gives on the moon, inter-personal relations are defined by the power of money and the State. Pierre Klossowski has claimed that Nietzsche foresaw this intertwining of money and science defining the capitalist Empire of today. He writes:

The point of departure for [Nietzsche's] projects is the fact that the modern economy depends on science, and cannot sustain itself apart from science; and it rests on the 'powers of money', corporations, and on their armies of engineers and workers, whether skilled or not; and *at the level of production*, these powers cannot

develop their own techniques except through forms of knowledge required by the manipulation of the objects they produce, and through the laws that govern the exchange and consumption of these products. (1997 149)

What is important is that this techno-scientific machine and its efficient forms of social control cannot produce the new, it can become more efficient, but only at the price of repressing its immanent force of overcoming. Nevertheless this drive for efficiency, and here Nietzsche and Kubrick once more come together, is going to produce a merge of man and machine. In a note from 1888 Nietzsche writes:

Once we possess that common economic management of the earth that will soon be inevitable, mankind will be able to find its best meaning as a machine in the service of this economy – as a tremendous clockwork, composed of ever more subtly “adapted” gears; as an ever-growing superfluity of all dominating and commanding elements; as a whole of tremendous force, whose individual factors represent *minimal forces*, *minimal values*.

In opposition to this dwarfing and adaptation of man to a specialized utility, a reverse movement is needed – the production of a *synthetic, summarizing, justifying* man for whose existence this transformation of mankind into a machine is a precondition, as a base on which he can invent his *higher form of being*.

[...] Morally speaking this overall machinery, this solidarity of all gears, represents a maximum in the

exploitation of man; but it presupposes those on whose account this exploitation has *meaning*. (1967 463-4)

This man is Dr. Floyd – a man of science, but also a ‘master’ – who will take this exploitative social machinery and turn it as creative as he can; he will attempt to overcome man by launching the ultimate man-machine HAL. Floyd wants to know the secret of the monolith, and he at least understands that man must be overcome if he is to do so.

TO THE MOON

Dr. Floyd arrives at the Clavius moon base and goes straight to a briefing meeting. His function is immediately revealed as both scientific and military. On the one hand, he congratulates the audience on their “discovery”, which, he says, “may well prove to be one of the most significant in the history of science.” But on the other he asserts the need for “absolute secrecy in this matter” in order to avoid, as he puts it, the “extremely grave potential for cultural shock and social disorientation contained in this present situation, if the facts were suddenly made public without adequate preparation and conditioning. Anyway, this is the view of the Council.” Floyd’s function is to prepare a “report” on when to “eventually” release the information, after, no doubt, the appropriate amount of public conditioning. Given that the film was made in 1968 this speech can only have one meaning: in the future we’re all working for the ‘Man’. “Oh” Floyd adds seemingly as an afterthought, the

Council has “requested formal security oaths” from anyone with “any knowledge of this event”. This man, Dr. Floyd, is working for a government, a techno-military amalgam of state power and private finance that demands absolute servitude, and where oaths don’t work, brain-washing will. The festive outburst of the ape’s violence has now become institutionalised and systematic, compelling obedience.⁶⁹ Mind control has conquered the body, confined it – floating – in space, while consciousness has thrust forward, hatching its cold hard plans.

Dr. Floyd now goes to see the monolith for himself, which has turned up on the moon. On the way we get the facts, the scientific ones anyway, about what, as they say, the “damn thing” is. It was, he’s told, “deliberately buried” over “four million years ago”. At this Floyd balks, he repeats “deliberately buried”, snorts a laugh and shakes his head in a gesture echoing that of the ape, when he had the first idea. Floyd too, has had an idea. His thought, in sci-fi terms, is: ‘there’s something out there’. Floyd has had an intimation of the alien. He feels this thought, it provokes him. But entirely inadequate to the sensation, he shrugs it off and turns his thoughts elsewhere, outwards and not in. The drama of Floyd’s encounter with the monolith is given in a hand-held camera sequence following his group down the ramp into the archaeological site where they are excavating their future. The men circle the monolith warily, before Floyd extends his hand and touches it in a gesture that also recalls the apes at the beginning of the film. Once more the monolith appears on a stage, once more it is surrounded by those eager to test it, and once more it gives a sign that will be misunderstood, but followed nevertheless.

The men line up for a photograph in front of their discovery, proud archaeologists. They are happily unaware that what they take to be the past, an ancient past they never knew, and have only now unearthed, is something that in fact brought them here, to this moment when it would be revealed once more in order to activate their future. Emerging from its long lunar night the sun rises, and as the sun's rays touch the monolith, once more in alignment with it and the earth, we see the cosmos open up, sundered by a high-pitched tone resounding painfully. The monolith has returned, and once more it appears as a brutal disjunction. Floyd and his men try to cover their ears, a comical exercise when wearing a space-helmet, then the screen goes black and we are plunged into the darkness preceding another new dawn.

JUPITER MISSION, 18 MONTHS LATER

At first, 18 months later, things don't look so different, as another spaceship floats into view. But this one is truly huge, befitting its doubled gestation, twice as long as a human's. Once more the monolith's appearance in conjunction with earth, moon and sun has given rise to the new, an *Übermaschine* whose name is HAL, and to whom we will soon be introduced. But first we must note HAL's ambiguous origins, as his paternity appears disputed. On the one hand we already know the generative significance of the monolith, its power of creation, and its re-appearance on the moon is surely no accident. But on the other, man's existence in space has been made possible



Excavating their future – 2001

by a techno-science that expresses his unquenchable will-to-truth. With man in control the monolith remains secret, and its discovery is merely the spur, the external rather than the internal reason for techno-science and money to reproduce itself in a higher form. We can already sense then, that this mission to Jupiter will pit the creative rights of the monolith against those of man, the will to power against all the metaphysical ideals, and their mechanical representations, that man has erected in its place.

We see a man shadow-boxing his way around the great ship's interior circumference, orbiting its circle in a way that defies gravity, if not logic. Meanwhile another astronaut emerges into a passage which is itself revolving, and which he makes his way along, towards us. We see this played out in reflection, in what appears to be a big red light that we will soon recognise as a computer eye. This man emerges into the centre of the space that the other has been running around, although the latter is now seated and eating *above* the second astronaut, who 'descends' a ladder and walks around to him. There is no up or down in this world, and the camera will do all it can to continually remind us of this fact. 'Up' and 'down' have lost their bearings, they have become purely relative terms that depend entirely on one's perspective. Nevertheless there does exist an arbiter of meaning in this world, what Nietzsche calls a 'Spirit of Gravity' which is able to give things their proper weight, and bears them. This is HAL, to whom we are now introduced.

The astronauts watch themselves being interviewed on a BBC program that gives us the background to their

mission. This is, the announcer tells us, the first manned attempt to reach Jupiter and consists of five crew members and “one of the latest generation of the HAL 9000 computer”. We are also told that three of the humans are in “hibernation”, and that the interview will be conducted with the two who are awake, “mission commander” Dr. Dave Bowman, and his “deputy” Dr. Frank Poole. But the interviewer is really interested in HAL, “the latest result in machine intelligence”, who can, the interviewer tells us, “reproduce – although some experts still prefer to use the word ‘mimic’ – most of the activities of the human brain, and with incalculably greater speed and reliability.” This line makes three important points. 1) HAL is a “machine intelligence”, this combination of words already indicating the possibility of a new hybridity of machine and man. 2) He “reproduces”, a word left strangely hanging by the interviewer to suggest a reproductive power machines may have claimed for their own. 3) Once the question resumes, we learn that HAL “reproduces” or “mimics” “most” functions of the human brain. This introduces the question as to whether HAL is human, or at least to what extent. This question will be central to the action on board, and has three elements. First, does HAL mark the overcoming of man by a super-man-machine, a machine with “most” human attributes, only working, as the interviewer informs us “with incalculably greater speed and reliability”? Second, does HAL, like humans, have emotions?⁷⁰ HAL therefore poses the question: Can capitalism and science join forces to overcome man, to fulfil the destiny of man’s consciousness by replacing man with a super-machine? And

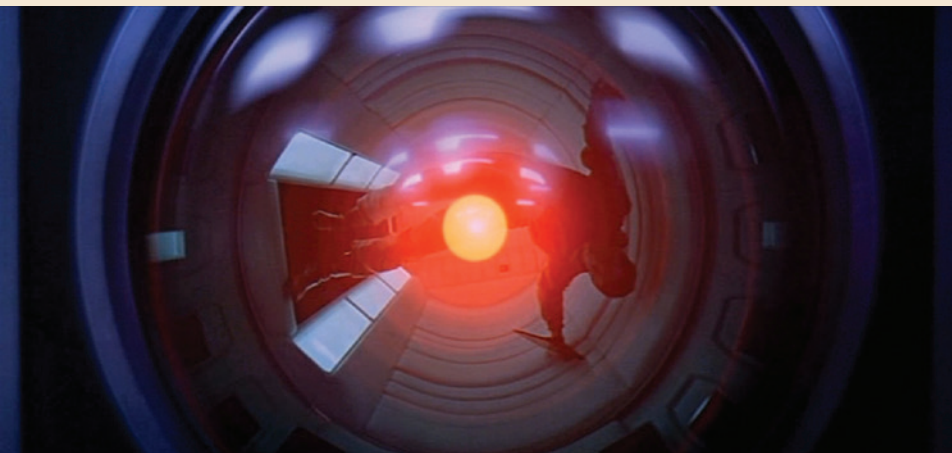
third, does this machine *feel*, and here we are thrust into the realm of corporeality once more, and its relation to rational thought.

These questions complexify what is an obvious and well-known narrative. HAL is not simply a cold, hard machine whose hubris at believing in its own perfection – an arrogance indiscernible from evil in seeking to replace God – will also be the Achilles heel leading to its defeat.⁷¹ The next question makes this obvious. HAL is asked: “You have an enormous responsibility on this mission, in many ways perhaps the greatest responsibility of any single mission element. You’re the brain and central nervous system of the ship and your responsibilities include watching over the men in hibernation. Does this ever cause you any lack of confidence?” It’s as if the interviewer senses that HAL needs a therapist. No doubt the question is a reflection of HAL’s “enormous responsibility”, the power of life and death that man has given to this machine. But at the same time, HAL’s “responsibility” suggests he has other human feelings – and possible failings – not only confidence, but also care, compassion and empathy. As if to emphasise these characteristics we are told HAL is “the brain and central nervous system of the ship”, the brain *and* the body, a body in which the hibernating men sleep.⁷² The astronauts dwell within the protective body of HAL, and trust in his desire to keep them alive, in his humanity. There is, then, something maternal about HAL, something physical and womb-like, something that evokes trust.

We hear HAL’s soft and melodious voice: “Let me put it this way,” he replies, “the 9000 computer is the most

reliable computer ever made, no 9000 computer has ever made a mistake or distorted information.” But there is also a divergence here, an unsettling one, because as HAL utters these words, the shot changes from that of his red eye to HAL’s point-of-view, that of a fish-eye camera which has Dave and Frank, oblivious and eating their dinner, under surveillance: pure menacing technology. There is a disjunction between HAL’s comforting words and what we see of his world-view; a security guard’s mentality, filled with paranoid fears lurking just below the surface, violence looking for an excuse. But the surface is, for now (a now we are starting to feel with growing apprehension), unbroken, and HAL blithely continues: “We are all, by any practical definition of the words, foolproof and incapable of error.” HAL speaks then, for a ‘we’, for a plural, for – and now we have the meaning of the word already used in this interview – a “new generation”. Man’s technological utopia, its perfectly functional efficiency and unquestioned authority has given birth to this, our guardian and protector. As HAL’s reassurances increase, so does our terror. Man depends on this super-machine, and can it, really, be trusted?

Man has produced his overcoming, and his name is HAL. The super-man as machine, *homo machinus*, a perfect machine intelligence.⁷³ The interviewer senses the disjunction here, senses how we are all in comparison merely human. “HAL,” he asks, “despite your enormous intellect are you ever frustrated by your dependence on people to carry out actions?” We are starting to get at the meat of the matter here, at corporeality and its affects.



A security guard's mentality – 2001

Does HAL resent man's body and in this way cross the line between being a cold machine and having a heated emotion? "Not in the slightest bit," HAL calmly responds, he enjoys working with people. In fact, he is "constantly occupied", and is, he contentedly explains, "putting myself to the fullest possible use, which is all I think that any conscious entity can ever hope to do." Finally then, HAL claims humanity not on the basis of having emotions but through economic and scientific criteria, with him consciousness achieves its "fullest possible use."

HAL's overcoming of man echoes Nietzsche's vision of science as the most modern version of the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal emerges in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* as the evaluation of things according to an immaterial 'beyond'. As such the ascetic ideal is the final perversion of the will to power, where it renounces the body in a nihilistic will to *nothingness*. To renounce the body is the asceticism required to reach the beyond, to renounce the affects in the name of a cold, hard, absolute truth. To 'downgrade physicality to an illusion; [...] To renounce belief in one's ego, to deny one's own "reality" – what a triumph!' What would this renunciation of the body in the name of a 'true world' mean, Nietzsche asks, and it is a question that the asexual HAL answers perfectly, 'but to castrate the intellect?' (1967a 119)

2001 is, in this sense, an example of science fiction as a self-reflexive genre, as it reflects on the morality of science itself. 2001 however, gives this generic gesture a genealogical depth by following Nietzsche and arguing that the metaphysics of the 'true world' has not disappeared

with the old faith, but has found a new form in the patient scientific observation of earth.⁷⁴ Science, Nietzsche argues, survives 'well enough without God, the beyond, and the virtues of denial'. Nevertheless, science is not an alternative to the ascetic ideal, 'but rather *the latest and noblest form of it*' (1967a 147). Science is not concerned with the high ideals of the religio-philosophical beyond, but nevertheless perpetuates their renunciation of the body in the name of truth. Similarly, science believes it has cured man of belief, but this, Nietzsche argues, is a lie, and not even a good one: '[Scientists] are far from being *free spirits*:' he writes, '*for they still have faith in truth.*' (1967a 150) In this science is entirely beholden to ascetic ideals, for its 'freedom' from God is achieved only through 'the faith in a *metaphysical* value, the absolute value of *truth*' (Nietzsche, 1967a 151). Scientists are therefore 'still pious', especially when their work is directed against religious faith, which succeeds only in loosening the dogmatism of ascetic ideals, so the scientific will-to-truth can grow in its place.

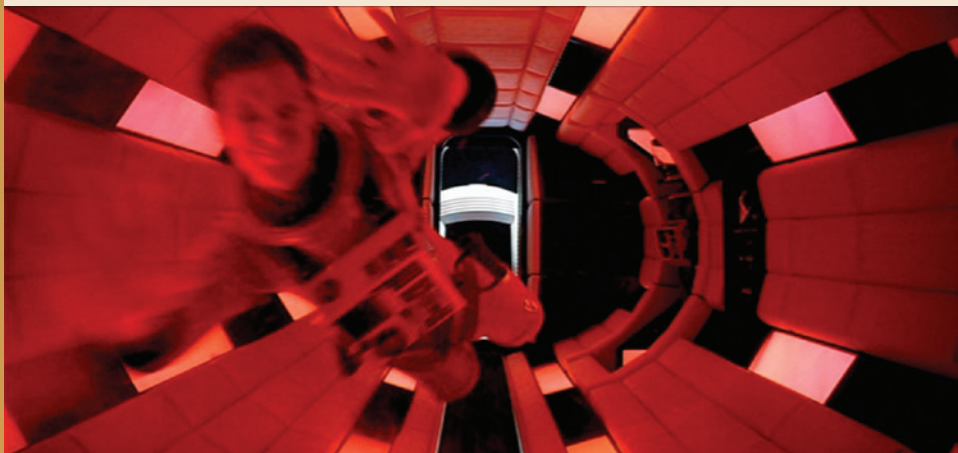
Science is the latest stage of man's nihilistic self-negation, the wilful amnesia of will to power that has determined our trajectory up to this point. But – and it is a big BUT – despite the perfection of humanity's scientific planning, despite the rigour of our nihilistic self-negation, to will nothingness is still to will, because, as Nietzsche tells us: 'man would rather will *nothingness* than *not will*' (1967a 163). The will, in willing to be forgotten, is remembered. HAL's will-to-truth cannot deny a will to power that, excuse the phrase, will out. Indeed this is the paradox of science, it must overcome itself if it is to bring

an end to the reign and realm of ascetic ideals. Nietzsche's conclusion is categorical: 'what is the meaning of all will to truth?' he asks, 'in us the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a *problem*' (1967a 161).⁷⁵ And in becoming conscious of itself as a *problem* science enacts its deeper will, its secret will which has been animating it all along, its will to power: 'All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming: thus the law of life will have it.' (Nietzsche, 1967a 161)⁷⁶

HAL, the epitome of the will to truth, has set out on its mission, to discover, once and for all, the meaning of the outside, the meaning of man's beyond, the truth of the alien itself. And although man's physical presence on this mission already seems redundant, it remains excessive and must be destroyed. More to the point, a point succinctly made by Fredric Jameson: 'the humans still have the power to turn the machinery off, and [HAL's] new "instinct" of self-preservation requires it to destroy that danger, and presumably anything that might evolve back into it, namely organic life itself.' (2005 114) As HAL tells Dave during their Mexican stand-off: "This mission is too important to allow me to let you jeopardise it." This then is the logical end of the scientific will-to-truth, and of its nihilism, its over-riding desire for knowledge must eventually be at the expense of life. But what happens on board the *Discovery* seems to exceed Jameson's suggestion of an acquired self-preservation 'instinct', because HAL's plans to kill the crew precedes Dave and Frank's counter-plot against him. Perhaps Nietzsche is more to the point: 'with the 'Beyond' one kills life' (1968 194). But despite

HAL's scientific superiority he will be overcome, first by the very thing he attempts to destroy – man's body. And second by his mysterious affectual and emotional life, a seemingly petulant viciousness which in its haste to destroy turns around and betrays him. In order to achieve his technological overcoming of man HAL tells a lie, a lie in which the ascetic will to truth of the *Übermaschine* turns pathological, and he seeks to purge all flesh.

Against a homicidal HAL stands Dave Bowman, and in this battle of wills it is Bowman's body that triumphs. This is one of 2001's most important philosophical assertions, because it includes us as viewers in its consequences. We identify with Dave Bowman, not just as the hero of the story, but as its body, a body which acts as our own reference point within the disorienting weightlessness of the cinematic space. For 2001 not only posits this fundamental conflict between body and mind but also embodies it. Indeed, 2001 is a constant affirmation of cinema's corpo-reality, it revels, as Annette Michelson has persuasively put it, 'in a knowledge which is *carnal*' (1969 63).⁷⁷ Michelson's perceptive essay, one of the few highlights to a disappointing secondary literature, argues that 2001 explores in its 'tactics of displacement, through a constant and intensive re-invention of the possibilities of cinematic immediacy, the structural potentialities of haptic disorientation as agent of cognition' (1969 57). In other words, the 'disorientation' as Michelson calls it, introduced by the effect of weightlessness gives us, the spectators, a new kind of knowledge. This knowledge is new, because its mechanism of emergence is the body, and it is *of* the new, of



The manual airlock – 2001

the experience of weightlessness in space, confirming that disruption in 2001 is always an experience of the future. This thrusts us, or at least our bodies into what Michelson calls in a typically precise phrase, a 'genetic epistemology' (1969 59).⁷⁸

Many of the most memorable sequences of the film – the rotation of the space hostess, the slow graceful flight of the spaceships, Frank Poole's body spinning away from the *Discovery*, the various space-walks – are famous for their remarkable presentation of a new body, a weightless body that emerges 'beneath' the narrative as it were, and takes its place as the corporeal counterbalance to the Spirit of Gravity of HAL. As important as these remarkable shots of the floating body are the sounds of the astronauts breathing that can be heard during the Jupiter mission. These *point-of-view sounds* serve to place us directly within a cinematic body. This identification is entirely corporeal, fixed as it is through a shared breath, a shared living function occurring apart from the narrative, but acting as its motor force. This breathing, like the monolith itself, is an exterior inside the unfolding drama, its condition of possibility that remains unthought. Unthought but intimately *felt*. This breathing, weightless body operates what Michelson calls a 'restructuring of the real', by focussing us upon 'the corporeal *a-prioris* that compose our sensory motor apparatus' (1969 60). This allows what is, for Michelson, the films fundamental element to emerge, its corpo-reflexivity: 'The intensified and progressively intimate consciousness of one's physicality' that 'provides the intimation of that physicality as the ground of consciousness' (1969 61).⁷⁹

The body, the corpo-real, is the obstacle to HAL's nihilism that he cannot overcome, and HAL is overcome in turn by a body – Dave Bowman's – that no longer offers an obstacle to thought, but is that which thought 'plunges into', as Deleuze puts it, 'in order to reach the unthought, that is life' (1989 189).⁸⁰ Consciousness, we remember, is not the directing agent, but an organ of the directing agent. The full reversals of Nietzsche's revaluation become apparent here. The brain is an organ of the body, but it is an unknowing organ inasmuch as it still assumes a volitional control it doesn't in fact have. The body however, precisely because of its 'unknowing', is able to express a higher 'intelligence' as an organ of the will to power. So when Dave overcomes HAL it is because his body was able to 'think' with a corporeal intelligence (he gains entry to HAL's body/brain through the *manual* airlock, he neutralises HAL by *unplugging* his higher 'brain' functions) that achieves not only HAL's overcoming, but also his own.⁸¹ Thought's plunge into the body of Dave defeats the murderous nihilism of HAL's will to truth, but Dave's *action*, his instinctual determination to survive and be victorious also overcomes his own obedient human passivity, safe and asleep (or even better, *hibernating*) in the bosom of capital, science and the military's machine. There is something of the innocent ape in Bowman's actions; he is beyond good and evil in the immediacy of his act. The inhumanity of Bowman's expressionless determination throughout his ordeal is often remarked upon, and Kubrick coached both Keir Dullea (Bowman) and Gary Lockwood (Frank Poole) to remove any modulation from their performance.

Why? First, in avoiding any psychological depth Kubrick emphasises a vital physicality, both in the film's narrative (again, Dave operates the emergency hatch *manually*) and in the film's imagery (the shadow-boxing Poole). Second, this physicality, this body acts with a motivation that exists only as an instinctual necessity, an unreflective 'I will'.

This immanence of body and will, of the singular and the universal, makes of Bowman an automaton animated by the will to power, animated by an internal-other we know as the monolith.⁸² When Dave overcomes HAL he is acting in the monolith's name, as an automaton whose healthy, spontaneous, and vital body expresses a resurgence of will to power. Dave's physiology therefore embodies a political ontology, a political ontology of overcoming (its great 'health' as Nietzsche puts it) which posits the fully automated body as still to come. Indeed, the conflict with HAL has only succeeded in producing a new beginning, a victor who is capable of undergoing a further metamorphosis. In overcoming man's nihilism, as it was embodied in HAL, Dave has achieved the second of Zarathustra's three metamorphoses, and the camel – HAL, the great bearer of weights – has been superseded by Bowman – the lion (Nietzsche, 1961 55-6). What remains, and what this transformation has made possible, is the body's apprehension of its will to power in the thought of the eternal return, a thought of the body by which its heroic actions, and hence its final vestiges of subjectivity are overcome. In this Dave achieves the final metamorphosis, and is reborn as the Star Child.

JUPITER AND BEYOND THE INFINITE

Having overcome HAL, Bowman takes the last remaining pod and follows another monolith into the Star Gate. The Star Gate marks a sharp break in the filmic texture of 2001, as 'realism' gives way to an almost entirely abstract rushing of light. These spectacular special effects isolate and elevate traditional sci-fi pyrotechnics to a cosmic ring of fire, a rite of passage from which Bowman will emerge ready to be reborn.⁸³ The remarkable Star Gate effects were created by Donald Trumbull by adapting existing experimental film techniques, and are in this respect quite different from the cutting edge studio effects Kubrick employed in the rest of the movie. The Star Gate projects film as a dislocating physical experience, in the spirit of the experimental film makers Paul Sharrits and Stan Brakhage, against the narrative logic and realism of Hollywood.⁸⁴ In this sense, and as Jacques Goimard has already pointed out, '2001 is the first film since Griffith's *Intolerance* to be both a superproduction and an experimental film' (quoted in Chion 41). 2001 follows in a tradition of American avant-garde film interested in the mystical merge of the unleashed sensual body, found once the body floating on capital and techno-science has been overcome.⁸⁵ Somewhere between the epileptic colour fits of Sharrits' work, and the equally ecstatic twitches of Brakhage's painted lines, on a trajectory extending experiments already made by John Whitney and Jordan Belsen, the never ending zoom of the Star Gate reveals the unknown universe, our new body of stars. Brakhage's idea of 'closed-eye seeing' is appropriate,

because the Star Gate wants to teach us about a vision that does not compute, that moves us beyond consciousness and the human itself. And to do so thought in a rationalist sense must be attacked. And overcome.

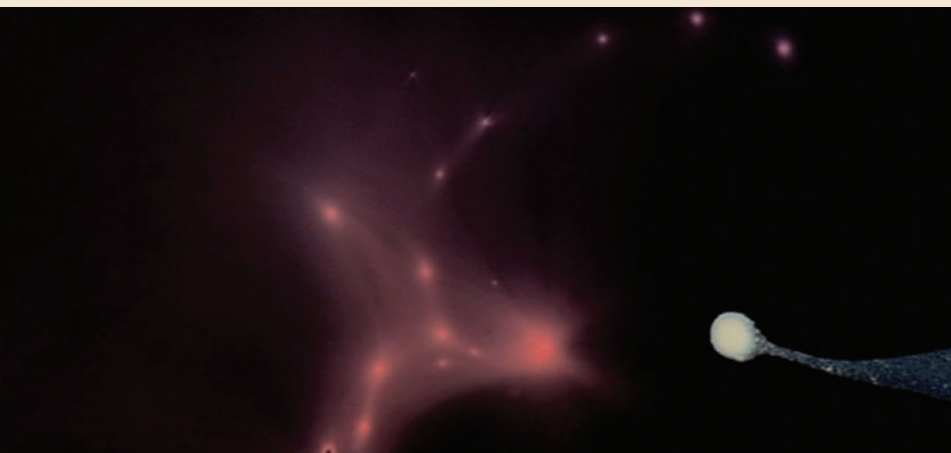
This thoroughly Nietzschean ambition also appears in the hallucinatory quality of the Star Gate, and its evocation of the effects of psychedelic drugs. Although Kubrick claimed never to have experimented with LSD himself, he didn't deny the connection to the Star Gate sequence (LaBrutto, 1997 313). Indeed, it is no surprise that in the second phase of the film's publicity it is referred to as 'the ultimate trip'.⁸⁶ These two elements (its psychedelic interests, and its debt to experimental film) constitute 2001's 'politics of ecstasy', with the Star Gate aiming the corpore-intelligence of cinema *against the human*. This makes the Star Gate episode a political statement that is both entirely of its time, and the most interesting element of Kubrick's interpretation of Nietzsche. Whether associated with the politics of transformation advocated by Sixties drug gurus such as Timothy Leary and Carlos Castaneda or not, the Star Gate episode (once more, in the tradition of American avant-garde film) clearly suggests that a pulverisation of the self in a sublime experience is the necessary condition for the emergence of the new, for the emergence of the future as such.⁸⁷ This emergence is possible only after our battle with a techno-scientific society of control, and only by defeating this suicide-machine can we begin exploring who we *aren't*, and go where no human has gone before.⁸⁸ In this sense, 2001 is the most sublime and radical hippy film ever made, advocating a process of absolute deterritorialisation

untroubled by any sentimental return to essentialist human values.⁸⁹ 2001 updates Nietzsche for the sixties, retaining his advocacy of political revolution through radical subjective transformation, while exploring contemporary psychedelic techniques of personal disintegration.

Bowman enters the Star Gate and begins accelerating into a corridor of light. As the intensity and velocity of these lights increases we cut to a reaction shot of Bowman's face as he holds his eyes wide in seeming shock and awe, before twisting his head in a tortured squint that attempts to evade the impossible. This sequence is still in 'real time' as it were, moving between a Bowman point of view shot of the Star Gate, and his reaction. Space and time remain intact as the camera connects them in a shot-counter-shot. But these shots also mark the limit of Bowman's endurance, and the next shot of his face is frozen and twisted in horror, desperately trying to escape a vision of what clearly exceeds his ability to comprehend it. These freeze-frame shots – there are four of them – not only show Bowman's trauma, but in being frozen register a disjunction between his point-of-view and our experience, and dislocate the camera's 'objective' view, which now films something whose 'reality' is entirely hallucinatory. As a result what is 'seen' in the Star Gate is unhinged from Bowman and from the camera, losing any spatial and temporal coherence. We are immersed in this abstract experience of light, one that fractures the brain the monolith originally created for man. With neither a subjective nor objective position from which to reflect on what we see, we are unable to act, and everything becomes a pure vision. The Star Gate takes us to







The Star Gate: A sublime hallucination – 2001

a place existing beyond human experience, a place existing, in fact, and as the film's subtitle tells us, *beyond the infinite*.

The Star Gate is therefore the culmination of the film's 'corporeal intelligence', but unlike the earlier free floating spatial fluidities of weightlessness, the Star Gate is not simply physical dis-orientation but subjective disintegration, for we no longer know from where we see, nor what we experience. The frozen head shots are now replaced by close-ups of Bowman's eye, which like the rushing landscape shots they intersperse, appear in strange psychedelic colours. It means that not only has our identification with Bowman's point of view been fractured, but that the status of the camera as an objective 'eye' is overcome in its hallucination. We cannot locate what we see subjectively or objectively; some shots seem to show the birth of galaxies, others microscopic biological events. We are somewhere and nowhere, our body and consciousness replaced by a sensation of chaos; we are a pure visionary experience cut loose from the I. The I has become an eye. This is, in Kantian terms, an experience of the sublime, an experience where, as Deleuze puts it: 'My whole structure of perception is in the process of exploding.' (1978 n.p.)

Kant argues that in the sublime human subjectivity is surpassed in an experience of a chaotic Nature: 'in what we usually call sublime in nature,' he writes, 'there is such an utter lack of anything leading to particular objective principles and to forms of nature conforming to them, that it is rather in its chaos that nature most arouses our ideas of the sublime, or in its wildest and most ruleless disarray and devastation, provided it displays magnitude and

might.' (1987 99-100) Of course for Kant this chaotic nature confirmed the existence of a higher faculty of Ideas, and the sublime scrambled sensation to reveal an ideal truth and divine *beyond*.⁹⁰ As such it falls directly within Nietzsche's sights, as the kind of nihilism typical of Romanticism, the all too serious attempt to overcome the body and find redemption in an ideal realm. Here, as Nietzsche writes in his critique of Romanticism (which is also a self-critique), the sublime provides the 'familiar romantic finale – break, breakdown, return and collapse before an old faith, before *the old god*.'⁹¹ Romanticism and its sublime aesthetic were for Nietzsche, nothing but the 'old faith' dressed up as 'a new art of metaphysical consolation' (1993 'Attempt At A Self-Criticism' 7).

Nothing in Dave's emergence into the Regency room implies his comprehension of an infinite and unchanging metaphysical realm. The Regency room is in fact the stage for the most startling transformations in the film, as we shall see. For Kubrick the sublime experience of the Star Gate does not take us beyond the body, but liberates the body from its last remaining grip on truth, its last remaining nihilism: a phenomenological self-consciousness organised around an invisible beyond.⁹² We can understand the necessity of this sublime transformation in terms of Nietzsche's three metamorphoses of man. In overcoming HAL Bowman has changed humanity from a camel into a lion. HAL was the ultimate camel carrying man towards a nihilistic future in the desert of space. 'But,' Nietzsche writes, 'in the loneliest desert the second metamorphosis occurs: the spirit here becomes a lion; it wants to capture

freedom and be lord in its own desert.' (1961 54) The lion becomes lord when he replaces the ascetic ideals of the camel and its hopes of redemption with his own 'I will!' (Nietzsche, 1961 54) But it is precisely this 'I' that remains a problem for Nietzsche, for it implies a subjective will that is partially blocked from the unending and unlimited becoming of life itself.⁹³ Similarly, Kubrick presents the sublime elements of the Star Gate sequence as the destruction of subjective integrity necessary for the emergence of the new.⁹⁴ Nevertheless the lion, like Bowman, is the necessary escape velocity required to overcome the human, and once this is achieved the real transformation can begin. Nietzsche puts it simply: 'To create new values – even the lion is incapable of that: but to create itself freedom for new creation – that the might of the lion cannot do.' (1961 55) Once the lion and its 'I will' have been overcome the will to power is expressed without nihilism, without recourse to an extra-dimension. Affirmation has undergone another metamorphosis: 'This indeed is the secret of the soul: only when the hero has deserted the soul does there approach it in dreams – the superhero.' (Nietzsche, 1961 141) This superhero is, for both Nietzsche and Kubrick, the child. Man reborn. Nietzsche writes:

The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes.

Yes, a sacred Yes is needed, my brothers, for the sport of creation: the spirit now wills *its own* will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins *its own* world. (1961 55)



The regency room: Dave jump cuts through his life – 2001

Bowman emerges from the Star Gate into his own world. A world sundered it seems, from any other world. After the pulverisation of his subjective consciousness in a vision encompassing the unknown rhythms of the chaotic universe, Bowman arrives in the Regency room shaking, shattered. The room is utterly incongruous, as absolutely disjunctive as the appearance of the monolith was at the beginning of the film. Nevertheless, Bowman seems to once more pick up the thread, and despite all he has gone through moves out of the pod to explore this new found strangeness. Bowman remains animated by a will, but one unencumbered by time and space and their perceptual conventions. The accelerated ageing that Bowman now undergoes is clearly not human, and nor is the fact that he observes this process in a series of cuts in which his visions of the future merely precede, seemingly by seconds, that future becoming present. These images don't show a reconstituting ego, they show Bowman's gaze dissolving time. Bowman is animated by something inhuman, and his non-responsiveness is remarkable. Bowman is simply willing the will to power, which means nothing more than that he wills overcoming, his own will in his own overcoming. And in doing so Dave conjures himself from himself, he jump cuts through his life. A life now shorn of anecdotal incident, interest or even event, other than its own destruction. And as we know, every destruction is the condition of creation.

Dave Bowman has arrived, having passed through his cosmic conflagration, in another womb. Like the brain that gave birth to consciousness in the apes, indeed because

of the process this entailed, this is a womb from which Dave will be reborn in a repetition of pure difference, a repetition in which the future will arrive. He goes into the bathroom, still wearing his spacesuit and we hear his breath resonating in our ears; a body is reassembling. He looks in a mirror as he goes and he gets his first shock. He has aged considerably and we can only conclude that time is most severely out of joint. At the moment we seem to have arrived back in diegetic space we immediately experience its temporal logic being disturbed. Not this time from without, by the sublime effects of the Star Gate, but from within, from a disjunction in time.

Bowman hears some noise coming from the other room, a soft metallic clinking. He peers around the corner, and once more in a point-of-view shot he sees himself, now elegantly clothed in a full-length black dressing gown, with his back to the door eating dinner. The eating Bowman slowly turns around, as if he too had heard a noise, and as we watch him turning a remarkable thing happens: the sound of breathing stops and we are in the impossible position of seeing with Bowman's eyes, but no longer being in his body. We are watching, in other words, our own disappearance. Here is the logical conclusion to our pulverisation in the Star Gate's cosmic vision. It is the condition for Bowman's accelerated transformations and the unhinging of our own identification, once more, both with Bowman and ourselves. For who is Bowman now, and who are we? A vision in which we return, overcome, continually new. The self-propelled wheel announcing a future of *eternal return*.

Bowman however, forever unflappable, seems to accept this with good grace. No doubt there are consolations as he eats the only decent meal of the entire movie. It is his last supper. Then he accidentally knocks his glass of wine on the floor, the glass of wine whose taste he had just so deliberately savoured. He looks down, we get a close-up of the smashed glass and then we see Bowman staring intently at the pieces. He seems, like the ape and Dr. Floyd before him, to have an idea. Immediately we hear breathing again, and Bowman looks up and over to its source, revealed to us not in a point of view shot this time, but from behind Bowman's head. We see Bowman become really old and lying in bed. Time once more skips a beat. From here things go fast, as the old man offers the final echo of the creative gesture and raises a feeble arm towards the monolith that now is at the end of his bed. This leads to the man's transformation into the child, whose point of view we once more take as it moves through the monolith and out into the cosmos.

Thus the film ends with this moment of return, as the child floats through the monolith and back to earth, completing man's enormous cycle of metamorphosis. But in fact this figure of return has already been offered by Kubrick in the shot of the smashing glass, which is the completion of the arc of the jaw bone cast high in exultation by the ape.⁹⁵ This joyful flight was interrupted, we remember, by the spaceship, by man's techno-scientific ambitions and the nihilistic hubris of his intelligence. But all this has been overcome, and Bowman has returned us once more to man's genesis, to the secret of the monolith,

its will to power. The initial impetus the monolith introduced was that of disjunction, and this disjunction taught that the emergence of the new will always involve the smashing of its containers. So the ape smashed the tapir's skull in becoming a man, so Bowman smashed HAL, and so man's (self) consciousness must finally be smashed if he is to be reborn a Star Child, and return innocence to earth. Each overcoming is ushered in by the monolith, by its eternally returning interruption, its difference creating something new. The monolith, in other words, is the immanent outside of the future, a future unconditioned by the past or the present because it repudiates them at the same time as they produce it. The relentless forward momentum of 2001 offers the same figure; every question posed by metamorphosis finds its answer in an absolute affirmation of what is new. Here Kubrick is close to Deleuze's contemporaneous (also 1968) reading of the eternal return:

[Eternal return] is properly called a belief of the future, a belief in the future. Eternal return affects only the new, what is produced under the condition of default and by the intermediary of metamorphosis. However, it causes neither the *condition* nor the *agent* to return: on the contrary it repudiates these and expels them with all its centrifugal force. [...] It is itself the new, complete novelty. (1994 90)

The monolith is our future, it is the eternal return of will to power as such, the will that wills itself. But the

monolith and what has become of man merge in the final sequence of the film as both are overcome and the Star Child is born. 'I tell you: one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.' (Nietzsche, 1961 46) This is the announcement of the broken glass: it was *no* accident that it was the only significant accident to occur in a film so incredibly deliberate. The smashed glass rings the return of the unaccountable, of chance, of the violent disjunction of overcoming that disturbs man's most deliberate, most brilliant, and most nihilistic thought. It ushers on stage the Star Child as the innocence and forgetfulness of becoming, as an embodiment of will to power, its bulging eyes emphasising the majesty of its vision. This is the vision the intelligence of man and the void of the monolith gave birth to, a vision they could never contain. The genealogy is complete, the human has been overcome and it is Noontide once more.

As the Star Child returns the future to the earth, so Kubrick returns the future to us, revalued. 2001 reopens cinema – and science-fiction in particular – onto the horizon of revolution. As such it is one of those beautiful fruits of 1968 whose inheritance we are yet to taste. It is revolution as the affirmation of our bodies over nihilism, of our instinctual actions over consciousness, and of the necessity of our overcoming.



The Star Child: Overcoming the human, all too human – 2001

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1998. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

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Chapter Five

Peace and Love (and Fuck) as the Foundation of the World, Spinoza's *Ethics* in Samuel Delany's *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*

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‘there is nothing more useful to man than a man’
(Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt.IV, P35, Cor.1)⁹⁶

I – OF GOD

Spinoza first appears in Samuel Delany’s *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*⁹⁷ on page 9, re-appearing occasionally, but with increasing significance through the remainder of the book. This first mention explains the words *emet yeshalom yasood ha’ollam* (peace and love are the foundation of the world), which, we read, ‘had something to do with seventeenth-century Amsterdam and a man named Spinoza’. Explaining how peace and love are the foundation of the world will be the purpose of *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, and as a result Spinoza and more particularly his *Ethics*, will provide the philosophical framework of the book. The *Ethics* will accompany the protagonist Eric throughout his life, a life in which the enjoyment of peace and love will be inseparable from the enjoyment of casual and committed gay relationships, and in particular of various unusual sexual activities including piss-drinking (both human and animal), incest, sex with animals, orgies, sexually motivated racist abuse, BDSM, sex with old guys, nose-picking, nail-biting, and all forms of uncleanness. Beyond Eric’s limits, the book will also affirm shit-eating, sex with children, sex between children, and cross-dressing, amongst other things.⁹⁸ And true to Spinoza, it’s all good (‘*nothing happens in Nature which can be attributed to any defect in it*’ (EIII, Pref.)). As Shit, Eric’s life partner, explains on his death-bed; ‘Bein’ a pervert

was the only way I ever learned anything worth knowin” (792) Indeed, this is the simple but profound gambit of the book; that the eternal truths of life, everything good on a personal, social and spiritual level, come from what is most basic – from the joy of sexual pleasure. This is not done in order to erase or excuse ‘nasty’ sexual practices, as the book calls them, because it is precisely their nasty character that makes them so enjoyable. Instead, Delany is, in strictly Spinozan fashion, suggesting an experimental exploration of pleasure as the basis for an ethical, and political life.

Eric’s will be an utterly fulfilled life, a life filled almost entirely with joy, with a life-long and enthusiastically reciprocated love for his partner Shit, supportive and loving parents, long and deep friendships, and satisfying sex and work. The reason is not a complicated one, being the simple fact that, as he explains to his mother at age 17; ‘I wanna be a good person.’ (203) He succeeds in doing this not only through his desire, but as well by learning from the desires of those around him. Spinoza says we desire what we judge to be good, (EIII, P9, Schol.) because what is good allows us to both persevere in our essential being, and to increase our power through the joy it causes (EIV, P18, Dem.). In fact, the method is straightforward, we discover what agrees with us, and then pursue it. As Spinoza says: ‘*Insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it is necessarily good.*’ (EIV, P31) This is good in Spinoza’s rather than Christianity’s sense, as Jay MacAmon – in many ways the book’s ethical model – explains; ‘God’s too much about payback’ he says, it leads to a ‘shitty life’.⁹⁹ Instead:

You do as many nice things as you can, boy, for as many people as you can. Feed 'em. Give 'em a place to sleep. Hug 'em and keep 'em warm – 'cause it's gonna keep you warm too and make you feel better, if your down. You do good things for people for the same reason you beat off – it makes *you* feel good. (169)¹⁰⁰

Joy, in other words, comes from your relationship to others, and to feel joy means you have given it, and done good.

For Spinoza; *'The human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the affection of its own body.'* (EII, P26) We feel joy when we imagine another body increases our power to act (it is an 'active passion'), and we experience sadness when that power is decreased (a 'sad passion'). In *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* someone's power to act (in Spinoza's terms their perfection) is increased through the power of fuck. As Spinoza puts it; 'the greater the joy with which we are affected, the greater the perfection to which we pass, that is, the more we must participate in the divine nature' (EIV, P45, Schol.). This is the 'pornotopia' of *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, where sexual pleasure – joy – provides the most important criteria defining what is good and right: 'Eric wondered if liking something sexually and liking something because it made you feel warm and wanted were the same thing.' (236) To feel warm and wanted increases Eric's power, as it does those he makes feel it. Thus, in experiencing sexual joy Eric acts true to his nature, and in doing so, is virtuous (EIV, D8). *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* seeks to dramatise

Spinoza's fundamental insight that the desire for joy, for relations that increase the body and mind's power to act is the organising force of Nature itself. What makes this updated Spinoza so 'queer' however, is that it starts at, and never leaves, the bottom – the transcendental bottom we might say – encompassing the 'Black Gay Utopian Community' of the Dump (676) where Eric lives, and the arseholes who inhabit it. 'It is especially useful to man to form associations,' Spinoza explains, 'to bind themselves by those bonds most apt to make one people of them, and absolutely, to do those things which serve to strengthen friendships.' (EIV, App. IIX) In *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* these bonds are pleasure, and most often the pleasure given and gained in the down and dirty sex enjoyed by black men.

We might say then, that Delany develops his own 'nigger faggot Spinoza', understanding both of these terms as the positive, sexualized adjectives they are in the book. This then, is a significantly updated 'Spinoza' inasmuch as it is the Spinoza who didn't write; 'he who imagines that a woman he loves prostitutes herself to another not only will be saddened, because his own appetite will be restrained, but also will be repelled by her, because he is forced to join the image of the thing he loves to the shameful parts and excretions of the other' (EIII, P35). Shit is the son of a whore (a proud 'nigger' and 'faggot' on his own account), and like him nigger faggot Spinoza knows there's plenty to go round, and that one should always share, especially those 'parts' and 'excretions' he loves. Sleeping with others only increases Shit's desire for Eric, and visa versa (678). Nigger

faggot Spinoza also didn't write, 'Pleasure can be excessive and evil', (EIV, P43) or 'Love and desire can be excessive.' (EIV, P44) As we shall see, for Delany Spinoza's wisdom is gained precisely on the way to excess, and thus ignores Spinoza's concept of human bondage. This is the name of the fourth book of the *Ethics*, and begins; 'Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call bondage.' (EIV, Pref.) No wonder then, that at the very end of the book Eric remarks; 'I can never remember what he called Part IV.' (801)

For Delany, relationships formed around the exchange of mutual pleasure (ie., casual gay sex) are neither romantic nor commercial, and require openness and communication to work.¹⁰¹ As such, and because such 'contact' often happens between different classes or races, Delany develops this type of relationship into a political model, arguing that; 'given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will' (1999a 111). Literature can also achieve this, Delany claims, and is also a realm where superstructural activities can impact on infrastructural forces. The 'contact' of genres – most obviously science-fiction with pornography – in *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* produces a 'discursive collision' capable of exploring 'unconscious' or 'imaginary' dimensions of reality that can change reality (Delany, 1999a 119). Existing institutions for interclass communication (what few there are) must be defended, and new ones permanently invented, Delany argues, to resist the deadening effects

of 'networking', a form of communication that operates through and so perpetuates class divisions (1999a 122). As Delany puts it, and this encapsulates the *Ethics* – both personal and social – of the book; 'what greater field than pleasure can human beings share?' (1999 56)¹⁰² *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* explores, in the most explicit terms possible, the utopian possibility that sexual pleasure is the most important constituent of a functioning social life.¹⁰³ As Delany puts it: 'If future society is vigorous, open, and varied, then so will future sex. If future society is repressive, authoritarian and monotonous, you won't be able to hope for too much better in bed.' (1989)

Unsurprisingly then, bottoms play an important role in the story, from Bill Bottom the somewhat pretentious white gay accountant who is Eric's neighbour as the novel opens, to the Bottom, which is the name for the dump in the Dump, the community where Eric will live for more than half the book. In many ways *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* could be called a portrait of the bottom, not just as an exhaustive account of gay sex, but as well of the gay working-class and *lumpenproletariat* (Eric, Shit, and Shit's father Dynamite are rubbish men, while other characters are homeless), uneducated (Shit is illiterate) and rural people living on the coast of Georgia unconcerned and largely unaffected by what others might consider important. This makes the horizon of Eric's life both immediate and cosmic, small but unlimited, concerning the everyday reality of his physical and emotional relations while encompassing the vast natural world that is their setting and which they express. This is a Spinozan world where a single joyful

affect (*Natura naturata*) takes on the force of Nature (*Natura naturans*),¹⁰⁴ and first of all through sex, as when Eric sucks Jay's cock for the first time and thinks; 'You can live inside your own mouth, and all the world's in there with you' (42); or when Eric fucks Shit's arse for the first time in the middle of a huge storm, and has the strongest orgasm of his life, 'rolling into and out of embraces with as much laughter and water in them as wind and flesh'; (354)¹⁰⁵ or when he's drinking piss; 'It's acidic force cleansed morning itself for Eric.' (209) The infinite cosmos (*Deus sive Natura*) is nothing but the relations that form its living infinity, and its beauty and joy gain existence through experience. 'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.' (EI, P15) This conception comes into the body through sex and love and the giving of joy, and it explodes outwards in the transformation of everything – every little thing – into beauty and light. From the first to the third kind of knowledge. After a night of sex with Jay and Mex during which Eric comes four times in an hour and fifteen minutes:

Through the screening, over blue sky and bluer water, sunrise's gold spilled in through oceanward screens, aslant the kitchen's wooden walls. Covered in yellow oilcloth printed with red and green flowers, the table was so bright he felt as if he'd never seen it before. Eric looked ... not breathing, lest that luminosity – which seemed something added to the sunlight rather than something that came from it – vanished. (315)¹⁰⁶

This added luminosity is the light of God/Nature, inasmuch as it provides Eric with an 'adequate knowledge', as Spinoza puts it, a 'clear and distinct' idea of the object itself. No longer an 'image' or 'imagination' of the object, this kind of knowledge involves what Spinoza calls a 'common notion', or understanding. Understanding means grasping what in my body and in an exterior one is the same, grasping the modal essence they share, their 'common notion' forming a part of God/Nature surrounding and including us all (see EII, P40). '*All ideas, insofar as they are related to God, are true.*' (EII, P32) And God, or Nature are explained through these true ideas in us (EV, P4, Schol.). The conclusion to this line of reasoning is that, as Eric puts it, 'everybody's related to everybody and everything – even trees and mosquitoes and minnows flickin' around in Runcible Creek. That's kinda reassurin' I think.' (392) As Spinoza puts it; 'the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change in the whole individual' (EII, L7, Schol.). The third kind of knowledge, or 'beatitude' as Spinoza calls it, is our understanding – which means our embodiment – of this. This point is made over and over in *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, as people and things, feelings and physical movements echo and entangle each other in the writhing breath of life. The banal and the universally significant are constantly rendered indistinguishable in the pantheistic Natural world that surrounds the characters, and frames their joy with its grandeur and its essence. After Jay explains to Eric that he loves his partner Mex 'so much, if I think about it, I can't hardly breath', and then tells Eric to have sex with Mex so he won't feel left out, then....

Eric looked up.

And thousands of stars, handful after handful,
prickled the black.

It's not that Eric *hadn't* seen the opening into the greater universe hanging over the sea – called night – when he wandered the mainland beaches, on the odd boat at night, or even on former trips to the island. But tonight it seemed vaster, clearer, bigger by an order of immensity. One after the other, two meteors etched white scratches across the part of the sky he starred at. “Jesus...” Eric whispered. (346)

It doesn't matter from where you look, infinity and eternity go in all directions. You don't need a higher viewpoint, a special machine, or an education to see it, you just need to pay attention to what is real. To find common notions in the things that affect you means ‘to perceive things under a certain species of eternity’ (EII, P44, Cor 2). This is to perceive the necessity of things within the infinity of essences interwoven to form God/Nature, to perceive ourselves in the same way, and finally, to love ourselves and the world as if our love was ‘a part of the infinite love by which God loves himself’ (EV, P36).

Eric's perceptions often approach such a beatific love. For example, he and Shit sit at the beach in the middle of a huge storm as ‘a serpent of light, zig-zag lightening broke apart the sky to crack free half the universe’ (440). In its light Eric sees the rocks on the shore of Gilead Island, the trees, and even their leaves; ‘He almost pushed himself erect, thinking, suddenly – *I've seen how large the world is!*’

(440) This is an intense infinity that cannot be measured – ‘the chasms between heartbeats’ (440) – but it often ruptures Eric’s vision and turns him ecstatic. It is what we might call *insight*, a clear and distinct, or adequate idea in Spinoza’s terms, an understanding of the small and simple things that reveals the face of God. Eric is not going to think in these terms of course, but his jaw-dropped awe at the infinity of Nature will be an oft-repeated figure of the book, as is the way he embodies the practical implications of this insight; that by loving others we enable Nature to love itself. It is nothing less (but also nothing more) than immanence.

Black Bull, a BDSM ‘master’, and Eric and Shit’s next door neighbour in the Dump clearly expresses this idea to his partner Whiteboy;¹⁰⁷

SHUT DA FUCK UP SCUMBAG! YOU DA MOST
IMPORTANT PERSON IN DA WHOLE WIDE
MUTHERFUCKIN’ WORLD AND AT THE SAME
TIME YOU AIN’T SHIT. YOU ARE DA WONDER
OF DA ABILITY TO PERCEIVE WONDER. AT
DA SAME TIME YOU ARE CAPABLE OF EVERY
ERROR HUMAN KIND EVER MADE IN ITS
BLIND STAGGER AFTER TRUTH. YOU ARE
UNIQUE AND IRREPLACEABLE – AND THERE
ARE NINE BILLION MORE OF US, EXACTLY THE
SAME. (502)

The bottom, then, not only teaches us how to live, but the Nature of life. The point being – as Bull so vividly puts

it – is not to go from the bottom to the top, from small to large, from the finite to the infinite. Instead, we must understand how the smallest is the largest, the bottom is the top (in all senses), the finite is infinity everywhere we look. These crude rednecks and dumb-ass niggers, these illiterate and illegitimate offspring of faggots and whores, these immigrants and trannies and slaves and abuse victims seeking refuge and love, these drinkers of dog and donkey piss, eaters of shit, pig-, cow- and horse-fucking collectors of trash, dirty unwashed losers all, instruct us in the simple wisdom of living in the world without restraint, without regret, with dignity, love and with joy. And the world, it gives them exactly what they deserve; happiness, pleasure, health, and knowledge leading to mystical insight – all a result of the lowest being the highest, and the bottom providing the rule for all. As Spinoza had it, and it will be the second sentence of the *Ethics* that Eric understands; ‘By reality and perfection I understand the same thing.’ (EI, Appendix III, quoted 525) Everything, in other words, is equally perfect, equal in its perfection, but – and this is the problem – we don’t understand it as such.

How then to act, given that one only receives the pleasure and love that one’s actions deserve? *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* gives us ethical advice straight out of Spinoza; if it feels right do it, and if it doesn’t don’t; ‘There ain’t no normal.’ Shit says, ‘There’s just comfortable and uncomfortable. And I like to be comfortable with pretty much everything.’ (305) As Spinoza has it, there are affects of joy and sadness, and these are the only ethical indications we need to do what’s right. Ethical evaluation therefore

depends on the nature of the experience, rather than a moral judgement whose law pre-exists experience. As Shit tells us; 'most of the pain most people suffer is because 'what should' is so far away from 'what is.' (668) In other words, there are no rules as to what is right and wrong, just as there are no limits, for 'no one has yet determined what the body can do' (EIII, P2, Schol.). There is only a program of experimentation, undertaken on the understanding that pleasure tells us something of its cause, of its true essence, and thus increases both our knowledge and our power. At this point ethics are inseparable from politics. *'Whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to man.'* (EIV, P38) This, Delany argues with an utterly Spinozian logic, is also the reason why pornography should be encouraged and censorship always rejected; 'necessary limitations on the aesthetic presentation of what the body may undergo, either in pleasure or in suffering, immediately and *a priori* restrict what the mind is allowed to contemplate: For nothing encourages the practice of political torture and sabotages the pursuit of happiness more than blanket restrictions on speaking, in precise, articulate, and graphic terms about either.' (2009 297)

II – OF THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF THE MIND

Eric's first encounter with Spinoza occurs in the book's introduction (chapters G–A, the story proper begins with chapter o and goes through to 114¹⁰⁸), where many of its

main themes are established; inter-racial sexual relations, father-son relations, and the necessity of following your desires. This last is the lesson Bill Bottom attempts to teach Eric at the beginning of the book, but being offered in the form of a rather camp metaphor, it flies over Eric's 16 year old – and rather butch – head. On the day of his departure from Atlanta Eric has returned home after an unsuccessful early morning attempt to fuck homeless men underneath the highway, and finds Bill awake in his neighbouring flat wearing a leather jacket, a gorilla mask, and drinking hot chocolate. Bill is a white accountant, an educated, ironic and effeminate gay man (the exact opposite of Bull) who has been watching the original *King Kong* – the 'uncut version' that includes the scenes removed or censored at various points after its release. As well, Bill explains, he has watched Peter Jackson's reconstruction of one of these scenes (put back into his restoration of the original) – the lost spider-pit sequence – '25 times'. Eric offers to have sex with Bill, who rejects him explaining 'I do *not* shit where I eat!' (15) Eric doesn't understand Bill's figure of speech, and after describing some of his more colourful sexual encounters rather petulantly claims; 'So I ... do eat shit or whatever the fuck you said. Right?' (21) Eric's affirmation not only rejects the norms of sexual activity, but of the normalised, responsible version of 'gay' Bill represents. 'I don't even *like* gay guys' (17) he explains to Bill, neither their camp effeminacy, nor their desire to live 'normal' monogamous married lives. Eric wants 'about a yard of dick every day' (19) and he isn't fussy about it, a fact already made abundantly clear during these first pages of the book.

In the reconstructed spider-pit sequence a number of men are chased through the jungle by a dinosaur and King Kong, ending up in a deep pit where they are attacked by a variety of monsters including a giant lizard, a giant crab, a tentacled beast and, of course, a giant spider. The spider-pit is therefore a dangerous, suppressed but nevertheless exciting place where one is 'devoured' by monstrous and fearful creatures who, like Kong, you love in spite of – or because of – it. For Bill, the spider-pit symbolises the repressed gay depths of *King Kong*, the flip side of the hetero-sexualised black beast, 'our big black homeboy', as Bill calls him, who off screen 'was giving Christene Daaé – or whatever her name was – some really good head' (20). Bill wittily mistakes the lead actress of *King Kong* for the female protagonist of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910), who falls in love with her singing teacher Eric. Our Eric is as unimpressed with Bill's allusion as he is with the idea of cunnilingus, and later claims it would be easier to fall in love with the dinosaurs and insects than with the gorilla (63). In fact the Blakean simile Bill will draw from *King Kong* – 'the Road of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom, even if it takes you through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders' (20) – is a lesson that only applies to himself, and not to Eric, for Eric – and this is the moral of *his* story – travels the Road of Excess *directly* to the Palace of Wisdom, and the Nest of Spiders where men are consumed by their own monsters doesn't come into it.

There is no metaphor in Eric's world, only the perfect reality of connected moments; 'Bill raised a reddish brow. Along the hedge, sedge and japonica bent and unbent.'

(17) There is no *like*. 'Above the bluff, clouds rose higher and darker, indicating, Eric was sure, only the changes in light and beauty the landscape placed about him.' (295) As with his illiterate life-partner Shit, Eric's life is radically unmediated, it knows no metaphor, no lack, no repression, nothing except what exists. His education involves the close study of Nature, whether cocks, clouds or cliffs, and it is this that leads to a knowledge and understanding encompassing the universe. As Jay tells Eric (and this is far better advice than anything Bill was able to offer); 'You got to sit and look out at the mornin' a fair amount, if you want to be civilized.' (320)

Bill's metaphorical story alludes to his own youthful encounter with a homeless black man in Central Park, whom he blows, drinks his piss, and who then wakes up. He then tells Bill that he will love being his 'bitch', because 'I'd be real good at sellin' yo' ass.' (23) Bill, terrified and enraptured at once – deep in the nest of spiders – runs off, and only later realises, 'that was the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life' (24). Going back to look for the man, it was sadly too late, and Bill's life becomes defined by this 'almost' (we meet Bill again, still chasing these memories, on page 403). Bill tells Eric not to miss such an opportunity for 'happiness', and when such a chance arises, to say 'yes' instead (25). Eric doesn't really get it, as he tries to explain, because he's already doing every nasty thing he can think of, and he's lovin' it! In fact, the only useful advice Bill gives Eric is about Turpens truck stop, a cruising spot close to Diamond Harbour where Eric is going to live, and where the book effectively starts.

Eric finds happiness where Bill saw it, tasted it, but couldn't let himself accept the perfection and truth of it, at the bottom, a place where sex and its pleasures are taken and offered without 'ifs' and 'buts', and more disturbingly, without any kind of moral (let alone legal) sense as to what is 'right' and 'wrong'. Bill saw it but ran, while Eric lives exactly in that Spinozian place: 'That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone.' (EI, D7) As a result, the book offers a beautiful transformation of the 'nest of spiders'; no longer a metaphor for repressed (because immoral) pleasure it returns as Eric, Shit and Dynamite's shared experience, an empirical reality blazing pure and brilliant in the sun, a vision of the beautiful geometric order of Nature itself:

Two tall fronds leaned widely apart. Between scalloped threads, a grand web rayed silvery lines from its center. Toward the middle, the dozen strands lost their precision. Hundreds of dewdrops caught along its lines, a third like diamonds in direct sun, another third in shadow became pearls, and still others, where reflected sunlight from the window behind them poured through its lattice, became prisms. [...] most of the matrix was symmetrical perfection – or, better, symmetrical perfection adapted to its asymmetrical firmament. Eric shifted his weight – and dozens of dewdrops all over the morning web flickered and flashed. Prisms shock myriad colors.

Yellow and black stripes on her less than dime-sized abdomen, the spider, having crawled halfway toward the center, paused to move a black leg, slowly, in a welcoming gesture, four, five, six times – for exercise, for relief, or some arachnoid dance – before crawling further on the bright lattice.

Eric glanced back at Shit. “You see that...!”

“Yeah...” Shit’s voice was lower than Eric’s.

Was that, Eric wondered, wonder? (185-6)

Wonder is being in the moment, the *now* of witnessing an utterly singular event (EIII, P52, Schol.), where thing and experience become one perfect blaze, where the nest of spiders becomes the geometric order of a spider’s web – in which they all live. Consequently; ‘*The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God.*’ (EV, P24)

A moment within a book of moments, a ramifying web of shared wonders making up a life, lives, a community, a world, the universe. Because the point is not this wonder – the spider’s web at sunrise – but wonder itself, an experience in which we understand the perfection of Nature, and so understand our own. This understanding cannot be metaphorised or taught, as Bill Bottom thinks, it can only be lived.

The question of the valley of the nest of spiders returns once more near the end of the book, when Eric meets Deena, a young artist who has produced her own version of *The Valley* – a perfectly spherical light sculpture that disintegrates and dissolves – and which Eric doesn’t understand. Deena explains the title to him; ‘Doesn’t it

look *less* like a valley ... than anything you can think of?' (747) The valley of the nest of spiders is therefore like the sculpture's title, a kind of negative, or inverted description of the perfectly real life of Eric and Shit:

I mean, valleys are depressions, but my sculpture is all outside. A sphere – and things coming off a sphere. So you have to think real hard to figure out any way at all that it's like a valley – and even think about all the ways it *isn't* like a valley. Which means you have to think about a valley and what makes something a valley even more. And what about this is different. (747)

This is certainly an accurate description of Eric's life in its relation to Bill's metaphorical valley of the nest of spiders (not that!), and a very dialectical explanation of how *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* examines that metaphor, or rather explores its very opposite – the joy, love and cosmic vision enjoyed by some nigger faggots, and *isn't* like that valley.

III – OF THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF THE AFFECTS

After arriving in Diamond Harbour to live with his mother, Eric's life begins to unfold and become filled with all sorts of enjoyment. Leaving his mother at work in the Lighthouse cafe, Eric sees a wave 'advancing shoreward with the inexorability of distilled time itself', and he thinks 'I'm going to remember *that* wave for the rest of my life!' (72) And while he remembers it for a few days, it soon 'melded'

with the thousands more he'd see, making Eric realise that what's important 'isn't the words I use to remind myself of it, but the *nowness* of it' (455). Eric moves from wonder to wonder as an alternative way of measuring time, not retaining and memorialising, but continually forgetting to give room to the new. 'Odd, Eric thought, how time's machinery moved moments out of initial wonder into the everyday to the blurred recall of the blurred – ' (436). Like the orgasm whose duration and detail can never be remembered, wonder is an experience both eternal and impossible to represent, a pure presence outside of time. No wonder, then, that when the narrator lists a series of achievements defining the 'wonder decade' of the 2030s, he also drily notes that 'all of these iconic moments bypassed the center of Shit and Eric's attention' (584). Wonder is not history, the eternal return of its *now* is an experience that escapes time.

Spinoza is one of the mechanisms by which the book explains this. He next appears on page 176 in the library of the old mansion on Gilead Island, which contains seven volumes (listed) from Spinoza in Latin and Dutch. But it is only 300 or so pages later, as Eric and Shit accompany Mama Grace – a black drag queen and ex-seminarian – to the now ruined *Slide* (a gay piss-sex bar near Diamond Harbour) that Spinoza's importance is clearly affirmed. Mama Grace gives her own version of Bill Bottom's tale but this time it will be a lot more relevant. As she was reading Spinoza's *Ethics*, she says: 'It struck me with the force that the insight behind the second definition in chapter one must have at one time struck Spinoza himself – that mind

could not effect matter directly, without the intervention of a living organic body –' (466).¹⁰⁹ As a result:

I realized that I did *not* have to take off my Maroon Passion nail polish every Sunday night with cotton balls and nail polish remover so that I could go to class on Monday morning and not scandalize my fellow seminary students and teachers. What's more, I was free to do anything that did not hurt others that strengthened me and helped me in the one thing that we are all put on this earth to do: *help one another* – because it is the only thing that, in the long run, gives us pleasure, as receiving love and friendship and affection is the only thing that gives us joy and ameliorates the dread of our inevitable extinction. (467-8)

That same summer she came down to live in the Dump in Diamond Harbour. Mama Grace has a higher kind of knowledge to Bill Bottom's not only because she learnt Hebrew, but because she read Spinoza and lived it for real, while Bill is lucky to break a little off for himself on the weekends.

Mama Grace promises her copy of the *Ethics* to Eric as a present, but, she warns him, 'it's *not* easy' (467). And indeed, so it turns out. Eric promises to read it three times, *properly*,¹¹⁰ and after numerous tries he finishes part I – 'Eric had made his eyes move over the all the words in the first thirty-one pages' (525) – but only understood one thing. Despite this seemingly inauspicious start, that one thing is in fact significant, being the last sentence:

But to those who ask “why God did not create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?” I answer only “because he did not lack material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest”; or, to speak more properly, “because the laws of his nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect”. (EI, Appendix III)

Together with Mama Grace’s moment of grace inspired by EI, D2 – and in particular the concept and practice of *help* – Eric’s reading of part I provides the basic logic of his life at Diamond Harbour; making others feel good makes you stronger, and this applies equally to everyone and everything, no matter what. Even the losers living in the Dump and so sorely lacking in ‘reason’ live this wisdom everyday without anyone needing to teach them about it. As Eric reads on, something else makes sense to him: ‘By reality and perfection I understand the same thing.’ (EII, D6) Perfection, in other words, is not a metaphysical concept dwelling in the great beyond, but simply what is real, right here, in front of us. This is perfect, it is ‘God or whatever’ (525) as Eric nicely puts it (*Deus sive whatever*) – every thing is perfect. ‘What was perfect?’ Eric wonders, ‘The pattern one picked up from a spider web between the ferns... What one could see of the stars webbing the night...’ (525) No metaphor, each expresses a fractal infinity joyously leaping from the Dump to the dark and encircling cosmic arc, each actualises the eternal diagram of Nature’s completeness.

Eric has clearly 'got' the *Ethics*, and by page 536 he has finished a reading in which he follows every single internal reference. After this Spinoza – or simply 'his book' – appears more frequently in *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, but now with a specificity that expresses Eric's growing understanding of its content. Whereas Mama Grace was able to understand the life she *should* have by reading the *Ethics*, Eric understands the life he *has* had, when, that is, he can remember it. The resonance of his book and his life are hard to miss, for Eric as much as us. Returning to Jay and Mex's place after a hard day's work, Eric reads a little, while Shit jerks off;

The light that came through the long curtains was sepia and gold. In the chair, he sat down and opened the book in front of him –

Desire is the very essence of man ... that is ... a striving by which man strives to persevere in his being. So a desire which arises from joy is aided or increased by the affect of joy itself ... whereas one which arises from sadness is diminished or restrained by the affect of sadness.

– a rhythmic squeaking came from some slight looseness in the high bed behind him. (582)

Eric takes the lesson of the book (one of course he knew already), and joins Shit in bed... .

A little later Eric has 'his first real encounter with Mama Grace's book' (636), going through it all and really thinking about it. This encounter effects Shit as well, who

tearfully declares 'how fuckin' amazin' it is that I got you', and goes on to explain;

when I'm messin' around with someone else, it's like you're always tellin' me, from that book of yours, that I'm fuckin' with another part of you or the world or the universe and – I guess – God. 'Cause everything's a part of everything else, and that's why I always get home extra horny. And I always got you there to hump and hang onto your dick and nuzzle on your nuts and stick my fingers up your asshole and smell your farts under the covers and take a leak in your mouth and hug onto you and breathe in how your breath smells in the mornin' before you wake up and lick inside your nose and rub my dick all over your butt and gettin' it in and hangin' onto you. Or just suck your damned dick. And its mine to hold onto pretty much whenever I want." Another breath, "Wow..." (678)

This list defining the affectual assemblage of Eric and Shit's relationship is an often repeated device that focusses our attention on physical actions and experiences, but encompasses in its implicitly open and infinite ramifications a world, perhaps a universe.¹³¹ The minutiae of empirical experience is inseparable from the feelings it evokes, so when it comes from the one I love, a fart gives me joy and increases my power to act, increases my knowledge. There is, of course, something humorous about this, but the joke also carries a profound philosophical point; from the most base can come the most joy, the

simplest thing can reveal infinity. In this sense the fart is a relatively innocuous example, for the book will make the same point about racist sex-play, sex with animals, incestuous and non-incestuous pedophilia, gerontophilia, coprophilia, etc. In all these things human behaviour simply takes its place with everything else as a part of Nature, a Nature ordered through its immanent ethics of joy and sadness, of active and passive passions, of the increase and decrease of power.

The order of Nature, as the *Preface* to Part III of the *Ethics* makes clear (and as Eric reads a little further on), is the cause of all things and determines what happens to us, rather than any 'vice of human nature' that we might 'bewail, or disdain, or (as usually happens) cure' (EIII Pref., quoted 708). Nature is always already perfect, and in behaving ethically – in giving and receiving joy – we come to know it more completely. This is a continual theme of *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, which repeatedly employs the Spinozian device of the common notion. According to Spinoza a joyful and active affect arises from my body's action on another, one that increases my power to act. This is the first kind of knowledge, and motivates almost all the actions of the book, from singular sexual exchanges to the founding and running of the Dump by the black gay millionaire Robert Kyle. When, however, I understand that my joyful affect arises because I share something essential with what it is I affect (and in particular an increase in power) – what Spinoza terms a 'common notion' – then I understand modal essence through the second type of knowledge, and so understand more of

the infinite essence of God/Nature.¹¹² Common notions are constantly occurring to Eric, even before he has read Spinoza. As he sucks Jay's cock in Turpens he has 'a flash of spring clarity, the afternoon sun a-slant beneath the Atlantic highway – as Jay rubbed his head, the way the hillbillies sometimes had. Eric thought: *Damn...!*' (41-2) Or when Eric tells Shit that holding his dick makes his own feel bigger, and Shit says the same, remembering that his Dad Dynamite used to tell him that too, when they held each other's (81). Or when Eric shoots his sperm into a 'medallion' on his toilet wall, and then finds a stiff 'irregular blotch' in Dynamite and Shit's bed that was '*Their medallion...?*' (126) Or as Jay tells us; 'Boys and dogs, boys and dogs – jerk 'em off, and they'll be your friends for life.' That was always Dynamite's philosophy.' (344) From a joyful affect comes an insight of commonality, of an essence of pleasure defining the community that shares it, of a common notion that includes Eric too, who thinks it.

Affective affinities lead to affirmative communities. While Spinoza says that we love something that a person we love loves (EIV, P22), in the language of *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, 'Shit claimed to love it [sex with men when he was a child]. And because Eric loved Shit, he loved whatever history had made Shit into Shit.' (244) And a little later the same logic applies to the love Dynamite feels for Eric 'Cause Shit loves you the way he do – and that kind of love spreads around' (293), or to Eric's love of Dynamite, which reminds Shit of his (437). It works the other way too, as Barb explains to Eric regarding her lover Ron (named after Ronald Reagan, also a conservative and

one of only two unsympathetic characters in the book), who doesn't dislike Eric, 'He just doesn't understand you. That's all.' (301)¹¹³ He shares no joyful affects with Eric, and in fact, Eric's joy makes him sad. In fact Ron is mostly sad, being perennially disappointed in others (Eric first of all, who 'wastes' his life) and finally himself (654), and as we know, sadness never made anyone intelligent.

IV – THE POWERS OF THE AFFECTS

Late in the book when Eric is 75 and Shit 77, they pick up Caleb, a young man in his late twenties, at Turpens. Caleb is into old men, not to mention the various other kinks he shares with the two 'old boys', and lives with them for the next three and a half years. Caleb has dropped out of grad school where he was studying philosophy, and at one point he and Eric discuss Spinoza, emphasising various points from the *Ethics*; the equivalence of God and the Universe, the parallelism of mind and matter, and 'the Spinozan 'in'' (714-15). The potentiality of a group being 'in' its individuals implies that God/Nature is not an idea that exists outside its constituent parts and their relations, and hence not something that could be understood except through those relations. This is to affirm the absolute immanence of God/Nature qua substance to the modes that construct and express it, which as we have seen is an affirmation that lies at the more 'atheist' end of Spinoza interpretation. But perhaps more interestingly, this feeds back into another major theme of *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, which is community, and how it

could operate along Spinozian principles. 'But that's what community is' Eric explains to a young student researching her group dissertation on the role of sexuality in gay community development, 'a lot of different kinds of people. Together. It ain't the difference between. It's the difference among – the difference within, see?' (776) This is a radically egalitarian form of difference that doesn't privilege any particular difference, but difference itself, as Eric explains; 'all of us at different times know different things. That's all. It ain't a matter of more or less. Just different.' (777) What is important is the difference amongst the modes, understanding those differences, and accumulating those that share a modal essence and so affirm and amplify each other into a community. What is not important is negative differences between modes, which can only make us sad, and the difference between modes (specific things) and God/Nature, which prevents us from understanding their immanence. Internal differences constitute the specificity of the members of a community, their autonomy and freedom, but what draws them together are the common-notions they share, which define how they are 'in' the community.

Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders is a utopian novel that offers a vision of a community more or less separate from the rest of the world – certainly for Eric and Shit, who rarely leave the environs of Diamond Harbour – where a new way of organising social life is developed.¹¹⁴ This community is, at its largest, the 'Black Gay Utopian Community' of the Dump (676), comprising of 75 houses and built with 10 million dollars of Robert Kyle's money (428). Started the same week as AIDs was announced, its

run by the Kyle foundation, 'an institution dedicated to the betterment of the lives of gay black men and of those of all races and creeds connected to them by elective and non-elective affinities' (232). The foundation controls the local council, runs a credit union, a pension plan, a farming co-op and subsidises local public services such as rubbish collection and disposal, public transport, a health clinic, a gay cruising establishment (Turpens), a gay cinema (the Opera) and a gay piss-bar (the Slide). The Dump was established and continues only because of the philanthropy of Robert Kyle, but what makes it successful is its focus on the free exchange of pleasure as the basis of life. This focus was there from its beginning, and indeed *as* its beginning. As Robert Kyle himself explains to Eric, he set up the Dump because of his love for Dynamite, who only 'ever wanted a decent job, and to have a fair number of black men around who liked to fuck, and be left alone to live his own life' (501). In this sense there is a coming together of charity, political community and sexual love under the term 'generosity', which is the foundational common notion of the Dump, of the sex that takes place there, and in different ways of nearly all the characters in the book. On all of these levels the same generosity applies; the giving of joy means receiving it, and happiness is good, even if sometimes desire must be balanced with the value of honest hard work (a theme Dynamite on the rubbish run often returns to). Goodness in this sense is a necessarily shared value arising only through relations, first of all sexual (between people and with animals – Dynamite is not called 'pig-fucker' for nothing, but he is the first to explain that the animal has

to want it too), but also relations with things, and perhaps more importantly the relations that constitute the natural world, and our experience of it. As a result; 'if [man] lives among such individuals as agree with his nature, his power of acting will thereby be aided and encouraged' (EIV, App. VII, see also XII). *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* is therefore utopian in both a practical and cosmic sense, precisely because these two terms define the immanent extremes of a single, living plane of ethical existence; now here but also nowhere, a future whose method is known but whose reality remains to be constructed... This is what makes the utopian aspect of the novel so interesting, it insists that utopia is not achieved or even defined by the social forms or institutions that constitute it, but rather it is a method, a means, a type of relation that seeks to enhance rather than determine. Utopia is a way of living, a mode of life, and a utopian society can only be constituted on this basis.

As the novel progresses, and Eric slowly understands 'his' book, the *Ethics*, he seeks to 'do good' outside the immediacy of his sexual circle. This means applying the ethics of sex to the wider relations constituting his community, and thereby elaborating the experience of 'joy' into the offering of 'help'. The most obvious example of this is the large mobile cooker, 'The Dynamite Memorial Free Feed-All' he builds at the Opera, which supplies free food four times a year for any who wish to eat it. Eric got this idea, he explains to Shit, through the experience of feeding people in their cabin during the severe storm of 2009 and through reading Spinoza (608). By the end of the book this link is made explicit, as Eric realises;

Yes, help was what it was all about. But so much of it was needed, whether signalled by atrocities or just unthinking cruelties or simple annoyances, that when the vast hunger for help from *Deus sivi Natura* struck straight against the bridge of your nose, all you could do – whether you were Robert Kyle with his foundering Foundation or Eric Jeffers with his sandwiches and cookies because he no longer had energy for chilli, or Deena Havers holding a wounded soldier on another world or sculpting a light on this one – was to rise and walk through the valley in tears ... and think about the valley ... (749-50)

Help becomes the name for an ethical life, a life lived according to eternal ethical principles that when understood leads to cosmic, mystical insight. Such a life nevertheless enjoys the anonymity of its present, a present that passes but never into history, one that never rises above its inevitable erasure as inconsequence. This is the melancholic paradox of the ethical utopia *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* presents, generosity leads, in its most intense form, to a vision of the harmonious universe. But this experience travels through the pleasurable relations of everyday life, and in doing so has no interest in what we might call the ‘historico-political’.

V – ON HUMAN FREEDOM

The respiration of the narrative from particular to universal, from pointed pleasure to cosmic perception

animates the entire novel, and provides a utopian but nevertheless practical formula for living that is universal and timeless. This gives the status of future developments described in the book quite a different sense, according to whether they are social or technological. On the one hand, various wider social changes are directly related to the utopian forces at work in the Dump (a gay black woman Governor of Georgia (533), a liberal woman President (583), and the 'multiple partner referendum' over legalising group marriage (741)), while on the other Shit and Eric are unapologetic Luddites ignorant or antagonistic towards technological innovations. The novel thereby figures the future in terms of continuity with, rather than difference from the present, which is quite different from the usual sci-fi employment of the 'novum' of futurity.¹¹⁵ In this sense, José Esteban Muñoz has argued that heterosexual culture sacrifices its present for a fantasmatic future that will be enjoyed by its children, whereas a queer future is a future lived in the present. He goes on to discuss aspects of Delany's autobiographical *The Motion of Light in Water* in these terms, but they could equally be applied here: 'To call for this notion of the future in the present is to summon a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics.' (2009 49) Perhaps we could call this the utopian future of the 'faggot-nigger avant-garde', the repressed and denied but nevertheless ever-present communities based on the generous and free exchange of pleasure. These communities always form according to their specific conditions of emergence, but what they distribute is the timeless experiences of joy and happiness. In this sense,

Fred Moten has argued that Delany's 'speculative' fiction and his queer politics share a utopian logic of the (black) 'ensemble': 'The future metaphysics of out, of the "to come", of the speculative is, instead, what's already given in the descriptive and prescriptive totality present in Delany's work as anarchic institution: the experience of critical enrapture marks the space-time, the externalizing gap and caesura, of an old-new institution: (the jazz) ensemble.' (2003 157)

The improvisational but co-operative community of the ensemble is formed out of active passions, out of affirmative rather than negative differences (counterpoint rather than contradiction). As a result, and despite its universal and eternal ethics, the ensemble remains fundamentally undetermined inasmuch as it is not oriented towards a specifically described end, but rather proceeds in whichever direction guarantees the greatest amount of pleasure. As Spinoza argued, Nature does not exist according to an end – because this would imply Nature lacks something it wants (EI, App.I) – it exists because of its necessity, its immanent power to express eternal truths. In this sense, then, any practical (ie., Spinozian) utopian state cannot be projected into a future better than our present, whether achieved by socio-historical revolution or magical technological developments, but only found in a present that contains its own future in those parts that are affirming their relations to others in a process of mutual transformation.

Consistent with this, when Eric and Shit encounter the technological marvels of the future (plasma induction

screens (450), hydrogen-ion engines (515), holographic communication (532), a cubical smelter (533), nanobolts (566), permaclean shirts (607), a Folz Recycling Bundler (622), eye-readers at ATMs (632), 'jack-work' (672), scooter fields (729), fully actualised virtual reality (750)) these are often rejected, or simply observed without comment. Far more important is to be 'in' Nature (something the Nature-poetry of the book continually emphasises), to understand and so animate it through our ethical relations. Eric and Shit are not, Eric thinks as he takes a crap, people 'who'd lived a life you could tell stories about – but Eric – Shit and Eric – the best we'll ever be is elements in someone else's.' (749) But we are nearly through the 800 pages so poignantly written to describe these very lives, these beautiful, loving, considerate, good lives that so brilliantly illustrate a utopia that lies in every one of us. After Shit dies, and Eric spends some time thinking about the *Ethics* he notes that he never liked fiction books because; 'They were never his story. It was never about him. Or Shit. Or even niggers like that Caleb kid, who got off watching them do what they did.' (801) Now there is a story-book about his life, and that of 'niggers like him', *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, but more to the point there was another book about his life, one he did read over and over, and that was Spinoza's *Ethics*.

So while the utopian ambitions of *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* are certainly not unusual in the science-fiction genre, its detachment from any investment – or even interest – in the 'future' certainly is. The utopian practices of joy the novel so intricately describes are

formed from tradition and learning, and emerge as the eternal conditions of social coherence ('exploding through today toward tomorrow' (761)). This is quite unlike most political understandings of utopia, which usually require a completely new start, often achieved through a radical revolution. Eric's life, from the moment he steps into the toilet to have sex in Turpens, unfolds with a necessity that confronts no resistance, embodying the idea that; '*In nature there is nothing contingent.*' (EI, P29) In Spinoza the universe is famously deterministic, and Eric never really encounters any moments of choice or even conflict in his life, each moment unfolding from the next with an unflustered necessity. '*God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence.*' (EI, P25)

While Eric understands this through his reading of the *Ethics*, and his experience of common notions, he nevertheless struggles to take solace in the eternity of ideas in the face of the inevitable, and steadily accelerating, decay of bodies;

(It was wonderfully pleasurable to find a man who wrote four hundred years ago writing of "building and painting" in a landscape in which, only a few hundred yards away, Eric had built and painted...)

Things strived to remain themselves – that striving was their *conatus* – and yet so many of them, it would seem if you looked at the histories people kept building around themselves, did nothing but fail in that endeavor. (709)

The growing awareness of the decay of bodies – human and objects – is part of Eric and Shit getting older, a process the novel lovingly depicts in all its sadness and humour. Eric finds it increasingly harder to remember things, and to keep his thoughts clear and coherent. *‘The mind can neither imagine anything, nor recollect past things, except while the body endures.’* (EV, P21) The third kind of knowledge – beatitude – seems increasingly elusive. In this sense, *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* is an inherently conservative book because it tragically describes the way that time inexorably swallows the truths of today, submerging our eternal ideas and their mystical experience in the entropic tick-tock of time slowly dissolving our body. Finally Eric succumbs to the same anxiety and melancholy, noting just after Shit’s death that people ‘did not seem to understand what a great part of the world the dead actually were...’ (797). Nevertheless there is an important lesson here, even if Eric cannot quite grasp it. At the end of the book Ann’s research into the Dump marks Eric and Shit’s lives as historical, but rewrites them in the image of her own prejudice (she is against ‘science’, BDSM, child sex), and with the partial insights of its distanced perspective. This obviously irritates Eric, but it is precisely the nature of the utopian life he has led – one embodied in its living relations – that means it cannot be retained or contained within any historical knowledge.

Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders is a book as modest (but at the same time as ambitious) as its characters, describing both the pleasure and the cosmic moments their relations have generated. It has simply followed

Eric's desire, a desire that led to a life almost completely contained in a small beachside town in the deep south of America. But this town, this life, it contained everything, because all of its moments were lived the right way, and so revealed the face of God/Nature, and the eternal ethical truths that bless our existence. Eric's wisdom is based on a utopian desire for a better life, but one enacted through the most everyday actions. To do good, to understand the universe, these difficult but always possible things bring Eric happiness and insight.

The cycles of Eric's life took in stony beaches and pine forests where you could walk in a daylight all but night black and fields where there was no grass, only stones and moss, alongside tar and macadam measured at its edge with poles and wires and solar panels, and water, broken, flickering, so much water, as much water – salt and silver – as there was sky, enough to make you scream or laugh at such absurd vastness, swelling within until Eric became his self exploding through today toward tomorrow, water green as glass falling between rocks and wet grass, the smell of dust and docks and distances, and sometimes Shit stepped up and took Eric's rough hand in his rough hand. (761)

The simplicity of a touch, the vastness of the universe. These two things together forms the framework of *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* and the scope of its wisdom. It is a simple message, but at once an utterly cosmic one, and necessarily at once – which is the complicated part,

the part inscribed in Book V of the *Ethics* and constituting the third kind of knowledge. This is the final lesson of immanence, a lesson Eric grasps – and therefore lives – from the beginning to the end of the book. This is the eternal nature of its truth, Eric lives through a long life full of everyday incident, but the ethical impetus for this life remains the same from his teen-age exclamation that ‘I wanna be a good person’ (203) to his summary, at the very end of the book, of Spinoza’s *Ethics*; ‘Hurt others and you hurt a part of yourself because you hurt a part of Nature or God. Help others and you help a part of Nature or ...’ (801). It is an understanding of Spinoza whose self-evidence is both inspiring and an indictment, available to everyone and scorned by most, its effect illuminating the universe in the perfection of its moment, its perfection scorned in the pettiness of selfish acts that negate the generous relations constituting a utopian community. For utopia is not an impossible future, but one that can only be lived in the presence of its emergence.

the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are under 15 years of age has increased from 1.1 billion to 1.5 billion, and the number of people aged 65 and over has increased from 0.2 billion to 0.4 billion (United Nations 1999).

There is a growing awareness that the needs of children and young people are different from those of adults, and that the needs of children and young people are different from those of older people. This has led to a growing emphasis on the need for services to be tailored to the needs of children and young people, and to the need for services to be tailored to the needs of older people.

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Filmography

2001, *A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968)
Abres los ojos (Alejandro Amenaber, 1997)
Akira (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988)
Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979)
Alphaville (Jean-Luc Goddard, 1965)
Altered States (Ken Russell, 1980)
Anti-Trust (Peter Howitt, 2001)
Automata (Gabe Ibáñez, 2014)
Avatar (James Cameron, 2009)
Avengers: Age of Ultron (Joss Whedon, 2015)
Avengers: Infinity War (the Russo brothers, 2018)
Bladerunner (Ridley Scott, 1982)
Blade Runner 2049 (Denis Villeneuve, 2017)
Bloodshot (David Wilson, 2020)
The Blob (Irvine Yeaworth, 1958)
The Book of Eli (the Hughes brothers, 2010)
Brainstorm (Donald Trumbull, 1983)
Close Encounter's of the Third Kind (Steven Spielberg, 1977)
The Congress (Ari Folman 2013)
Contact (Robert Zemeckis, 1997)
The Creature from the Black Lagoon (Jack Arnold, 1954)
The Day After Tomorrow (Roland Emmerich, 2004)
The Day the Earth Stood Still (Robert Wise, 1951)
Demonlover (Olivier Assayas, 2002)
Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, 1969)
The Element of Crime (Lars van Trier, 1984)

Elysium (Neill Blomkamp, 2013)
Equilibrium (Kurt Wimmer, 2002)
E.T. (Steven Spielberg, 1982)
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Michel Gondry, 2004)
Ex Machina (Alex Garland, 2014)
eXistenZ (David Cronenberg, 1999)
The Falls (Peter Greenaway, 1980)
The Final Cut (Omar Naim, 2004)
Forbidden Planet (Fred McLeod Wilcox, 1956)
Gamer (Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2009)
Glen and Randa (Jim McBride, 1971)
Hackers (Iain Softly, 1995)
The Handmaid's Tale (Volker Schlöndorff, 1990)
Her (Spike Jonze, 2013)
High Rise (Ben Wheatley 2015)
The Hunger Games trilogy (Gary Ross and Francis Lawrence, 2012-15)
I am Legend (Francis Lawrence, 2007)
Idaho Transfer (Peter Fonda, 1973)
In Time (Andrew Niccol, 2011)
Invaders from Mars (William Menzies, 1953)
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956)
The Island (Michael Bay, 2005)
It Came from Outer Space (Jack Arnold, 1953)
Johnny Mnemonic (Robert Longo, 1995)
Jubilee (Derek Jarman, 1978)
King Kong (Merien Cooper and Ernest Schödsack, 1933)
The Last Starfighter (Nick Castle, 1984)
The Lawnmower Man (Brett Leonard, 1992)
Mad Max trilogy (George Miller, 1979, 1981, 1985)
Matrix (the Wachowski sisters, 1999)
Matrix: Reloaded (the Wachowski sisters, 2002)
Matrix: Revolutions (the Wachowski sisters, 2003)
No Blade of Grass (Cornel Wilde, 1970)
North by Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)
The Omega Man (Boris Sagal, 1971)
On the Beach (Stanley Kramer, 1959)
Panic in Year Zero (Ray Milland, 1962)
The Phantom of the Opera (Gaston Leroux, 1910)

Porcile (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1969)
Punishment Park (Peter Watkins, 1971)
The Purge (James DeMonaco, 2013)
Ready Player One (Steven Spielberg, 2018)
Rebel without a Cause (Nicholas Ray, 1955)
Red Desert (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964)
The Road (John Hillcoat, 2009)
Sense8 (TV series, the Wachowski sisters, 2015-18)
Signs (M. Night Shyamalan, 2002)
Solaris (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972)
Snowpiercer (Bong Joon-ho, 2013)
Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995)
Terminator (James Cameron, 1984)
Theorema (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1968)
The Thing (John Carpenter, 1982)
THX 1138 (George Lucas, 1971)
Total Recall (Paul Verhoeven, 1990)
Transcendence (Wally Pfister, 2014)
Transformers (Michael Bay, 2007)
Tron (Steven Lisberger, 1982)
Tron: Legacy (Joseph Kosinski, 2010)
The Truman Show (Peter Wier, 1998)
Simone (Andrew Niccol, 2002)
Starman (John Carpenter, 1984)
Surrogates (Jonathan Mostow, 2009)
Until the End of the World (Wim Wenders, 1991)
Upgrade (Leigh Whannell, 2018)
V for Vendetta (James McTeigue, 2005)
Vanilla Sky (Cameron Crowe, 2001)
Virtuosity (Brett Leonard, 1995)
War Games (John Badham, 1983)
Waterworld (Kevin Reynolds, 1995)
Weekend (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)
Welt am Draht (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1973)
The Wild One (Laslo Benedek, 1953)
The Word, The Flesh and the Devil (Ranald MacDougall, 1959)
Zabriskie Point (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1970)
Zero Population Growth (Michael Campus, 1972)

Notes

- 1 Reddell's genealogy of the 'sonic novum' in his recent *The Sound of Things to Come* is a remarkable example of what can be achieved by taking this approach.
- 2 I am referring to Owen Hatherley's excellent book of the same name. Csicsery-Ronay makes a similar point, writing, 'the novum reveals history's contingency: that, at any point, history can change direction. [...] *Modern* historical consciousness is shaped by belief in novums.' (2008 57)
- 3 'My day', Nietzsche complained (but also boasted), 'won't come until the day after tomorrow.' (1968 125)
- 4 There are, of course, other philosophies of the 'new', perhaps most notably the recent work of Alain Badiou and his concept of the 'event' that is discussed in chapter three. Phillip Wenger has also drawn upon Badiou in his discussion of science fiction films (see Wenger 2009).
- 5 In recent years the number of dystopian films has declined somewhat, less as a reflection of current politics, and more because of the seeming hegemony of superhero films, which currently dominate the science fiction market.
- 6 Science fiction is based, Jameson argues, on 'the properly utopian dialectic of Identity and Difference' (2005, xiv). This dialectic conse-

quently provides the philosophical framework or condition of possibility for any political transformation, and indeed is the condition of possibility for the future itself. What is new (difference) always appears in relation to what exists (identity), making the existent the condition of possibility for its difference.

- 7 Science fiction has developed a whole sub-genre to deal with this problem; alien-contact. The great film that explores this unknowable other-alien is Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) (and perhaps even more profoundly the 1961 book by Stanislaw Lem it is based upon). For an account of Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* and its 'Other' in Lacanian terms see Freedman 2000, 107-10.
- 8 Tom Moylan gives an interesting account of the development of Suvin's views on dystopia (Moylan 2000).
- 9 Mythic narrative has also, although more rarely, been used in a progressive way. One example is the excellent *The Word, The Flesh and the Devil* (MacDougall, 1959), starring an effervescent Harry Belafonte, where the interracial romance of two survivors of a nuclear holocaust is interrupted by a white man suddenly appearing in the midst of their domestic bliss. This reveals Belafonte's internalised racism, and he abandons the couple because he cannot imagine that the white woman loves him rather than a man of her own race. Here the 'essential truth' of racism is shown to be a social construct.
- 10 *I Am Legend* remakes *The Omega Man* (Sagal, 1971), which highlights the anti-family values of the collectivised forces that oppose the hero by swathing them in the trappings of black-magic, and having them refer to themselves as 'the Family'.
- 11 Nevertheless, not all 'critical dystopias' take aim at capitalism, *Punishment Park* (Watkins, 1971) is a leftist film inspired by current events that gives a quasi-documentary portrayal of state brutality and the murder of political prisoners.
- 12 The ascetic ideal emerges in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* as the evaluation of things according to an immaterial 'be-

yond'. As such it is perpetuated by scientists, who 'still have faith in truth' (Nietzsche 2006, 112).

- 13 The passage is very beautiful, and worth quoting in full: 'Genealogies are therefore not positivistic returns to a form of science that is more attentive or more accurate. Genealogies are, quite specifically, antisciences. It is not that they demand the lyrical right to be ignorant, and not that they reject knowledge, or invoke or celebrate some immediate experience that has yet to be captured by knowledge. That is not what they are about. They are about the insurrection of knowledges.' (Foucault, 2003 9)
- 14 On a formal level science fiction has seldom explored the potentials of aesthetic abstraction, preferring visual and diegetic 'realism'. One notable exception is *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982), which developed a beautiful and highly abstract monotone look that drew heavily on early cinema. This film offered the nascent sub-genre of interface films and its CGI technology an exploration of abstraction – and its related hallucinations – an offer that has unfortunately been mostly declined. By the time of the sequel *Tron: Legacy* (Kosinski, 2010) the aesthetics of a smooth and fluid digital space was firmly entrenched, along with its most common avatar – a techno-club.
- 15 Hallucination is a recurring themes of Deleuze's *Cinema 2*. See 1989 12, 46, 55, 167, 263.
- 16 It is worth mentioning two other interesting science fiction films that take a different, but related, approach to abstraction. Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (1978) and Peter Greenaway's *The Falls* (1980) both employ a technique of proliferating fragmentation. *Jubilee* intercuts a dystopian future London that has descended into punk chaos, with dialogues between the historical Queen Elisabeth and the poet/philosopher John Flood, in a way that makes it impossible to resolve the various narrative threads. Even more radical in this regard, *The Falls* is a quasi-documentary that reports on the eruption of new languages and their special relationship to bird's following an unexplained but cosmic event. The film documents a dizzying mutation in human being, and its use of the objective documentary form deliber-

ately foregrounds how this cannot handle, let alone comprehend, the event that exceeds it.

- 17 Thanks to Arturo Silva for pointing this out.
- 18 This is one of the strongest aspects of the film, which although clearly positioning the sado-masochistic and murderous images of the videodrome as a kind of 'black hole' that sucks Max into it, the hallucination it produces is also strangely liberating and empowering. This is quite different from *Demonlover* (Assayas, 2002), another film in which both characters and plot revolve around the back hole of sado-masochism and murderous images produced by the eponymous website. *Demonlover*, however, figures this 'attraction for the void' as a kind of entropic drift into which both the narrative and the already soulless characters fall, doomed from the start.
- 19 *Videodrome* is close to *Akira* (Otomo, 1988), another great dystopian film, in the horror of its fluid cybernetic mutations and in the refusal of moral expectations in the unfolding of the narrative. Tetsuo is both pathetic and heroic, like Max, and his transformation to a stage beyond the human is both painful and beatific.
- 20 The computers can range from the world controlling computer named 'Simulacrum' in Fassbinder's *Welt am Draht* (1973) to the considerably more modest computer games of *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982) or *The Last Starfighter* (Castle, 1984). Similarly, in early films virtual reality was represented by clunky computer graphics (*Tron* or *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995)), while in later films it became an ambiguously fake 'reality' associated with games or reality TV (*The Truman Show* (Wier, 1998), *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004), *Gamer* (Neveland and Taylor, 2009)), or was sinisterly indiscernible from the 'real' while nevertheless remaining ontologically distinct (the *Matrix* trilogy (the Wachowski sisters, 1999-2003), *Abres los ojos* (Amenaber, 1997), *Total Recall* (Verhoeven, 1990)). Some films focus on the confusing (or not so confusing) co-implication of 'real' and 'virtual' reality – *Simone* (Nicol, 2002), *The Final Cut* (Naim, 2004), *Surrogates* (Mostow, 2009), *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), *Her* (Jonze, 2013), or the more recent

films *Bloodshot* (Wilson, 2020) or *Upgrade* (Whannell, 2018). Despite this list, this chapter is more concerned with the themes these films share than with a typology that would identify their differences.

- 21 Steven Shaviro suggests that sci-fi is the equivalent of social realism because the most intense part of our lives today is our sense of the future (2009 n.p.), a sense most immediately given by the use of computers. Ian Watson calls this the films 'neurorealism' (quoted in Wilson 132), referring to the postmodern subject's emersion in the hyper-reality of interfaced life.
- 22 Class is a consistent aspect of interface films. *Johnny Mnemonic* is notable in this respect, its protagonist monologuing on his 'right' to be upwardly mobile, and as in many films that came after, the resistance fighting corporate cyber-capitalism is clearly coded as a working class movement. In a completely different spirit, the opening scene of *Upgrade* figures the protagonist as a working class hero, listening to Howlin' Wolf while working on his muscle car, a 1971 Dodge charger. This prefaces, however, his final failure to defeat the corporate machine.
- 23 This is not strictly true in the *Matrix* films I know, but I'm prepared to make Laurence Fishburne an honorary rapper. Cornel West, another honorary rapper, appears in *Matrix: Reloaded* (the Wachowski sisters, 2002) and *Matrix: Revolutions* (the Wachowski brothers, 2003). For the others, *Johnny Mnemonic* stars Ice-T, and *Gamer* stars Ludacris. *Surrogates* has an armed resistance movement led by 'the Prophet' who is black and almost raps (played by Ving Rhames), and *Strange Days* involves a popular uprising sparked by the killing of 'Jeriko One', a black rapper played by Glen Plummer. In *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) the leader of the armed resistance is a white boy in the body of an indigenous warrior. What is significant in these films is not only that blackness is associated with rebellion, but that the leader of an armed resistance is so often a music celebrity. This is the paradoxical logic of interface films; the condition of possibility and impossibility of revolution is entertainment.

- 24 D. Harlan Wilson goes as far as to claim that *Matrix* shows 'our primal desire is to be controlled by our technocapitalist extensions' (2009 135).
- 25 This is already to go further than most films. In *Bloodshot* (Wilson, 2020) the protagonist is a soldier resurrected from the dead by nano-technology, which also turns him into a super-assassin controlled by a manipulative corporation. Freeing himself means escaping (ie., destroying) the corporation, a process his cybernetic upgrades enable him to do. Capital and technology are therefore kept strictly separate, allowing him to declare at the end of the film: "Who we were doesn't have to define who we will be. We can choose, we all can." This is the solution to Pasquinelli's problem offered by most films, freedom of choice allows the human to control the machine, even while the machine increases our possible choices. So its all good.
- 26 For a brilliant genealogy of such strategies see Kolonias 2015. I owe the phrase 'gaming the game' (while using it in a slightly different way), and much more, to him. D. Harlan Wilson succinctly summarises the *Matrix* films as 'caricaturizing how late capitalist technologies produce postmodern identity. [...] The trilogy portrays the fantasy that the human, while dependent upon the technological, diverges from the technological – morally, ideologically, ontologically and metaphysically. This fantasy reveals the coordinates of a collective panic desire for a "natural" selfhood, one that is not constructed by the machinery of advanced capitalism.' (2009 131 and 132).
- 27 Even more specifically, "General Intellect" is not the result of the generic development of communication, science and technology, but of the vast military investments that shaped it as the brain of Integrated/Integrating Global Capital.' (Alliez and Lazzarato, 2016 224-5)
- 28 For an entertaining Lacanian account of this aspect of the *Matrix* see Žizek, 2002.
- 29 Brooks Landon was the first to identify this 'aesthetics of ambivalence', as he called it, in science fiction film (see, Landon, 1992). Interestingly, this is an 'ambivalence' that can perhaps also be attributed

to the Italian political movement of post-Operaism that Pasquinelli draws heavily upon, and their fascination by capitalist processes of instrumentalisation and exploitation. As Sergio Bologna puts it; 'It's not clear which was greater [for post-Operaism]: the paean to the working class, or that to the capitalist capacity of subsuming this working class from the point of view of its components' (quoted in Wright, 114).

- 30 An image the Wachowski sisters perpetuate in the television series *Sense8* (2015-18), where one of the main characters is a dj, and a direct link is made between the psychic 'interface' of the eight 'sensitive' characters and the merge on the dance floor (and in one notable scene, in an orgy). Following *Avatar*, this series explores the idea of a biological interface that can counter that of capitalist and military violence and exploitation.
- 31 Most interface films present the 'real' and the 'virtual' worlds as parallel and ontologically distinct (eg., *Matrix*, *Tron*, *Welt am Draht*) so movement between them generally remains smooth and unhindered, sustaining the fantasy that 'freedom' in the virtual can produce 'freedom' in the real. While the troubling question of what, exactly, is 'real' is never far away, the inevitable answer of the 'human' cuts across the virtual/real distinction, re-ordering it along moral lines. In *The Final Cut* for example, the digital recording of the protagonist's life finally absolves him of his deadly 'sin' by proving that it was entirely imagined, so reversing our usual understanding of what is 'real' and what 'virtual'. But although this reversal is interesting, the film resolutely confirms the idea of an 'impartial' technology that is 'good' when it supplements the vagaries of human memory. In a similar way *Until the End of the World* (Wenders, 1991) and *Brainstorm* (Trumbull, 1983) posit digital technology as a positive prosthetic extension of human perception (allowing us to see death in the case of *Brainstorm* or returning sight to the blind in *Until the End of the World*).
- 32 Perhaps this phase is finally coming to an end. *Upgrade*, *Automata* (Ibáñez, 2014) and *Ex Machina* (Garland, 2014) all show the victory of the machines, with the latter two affirming their will to power, and restraining from humanist panic.

- 33 Christine Cornell gives an interesting account of *Virtuosity* that pays attention to the racial politics of its black cop Vs white serial killer narrative: 'Sid [the serial killer] represents the falsity and corruption of the dominant and pervasive white culture that surrounds Parker [the cop], while Parker comes to stand for a kind of human truth and authenticity.' (2007 191) This is the usual interface story, only nicely wrapped around issues of social justice.
- 34 *Ready Player One* (Spielberg, 2018) ends rather unconvincingly with the heroes triumphing over corporate capital and then turning the computer game that consumes the world off for two days a week, so people can concentrate on their 'real' lives (which are consistently shown in the film to be unbearable).
- 35 Pasquinelli puts it rather more drily; 'The basic assumption behind Berardi's position is that libidinal energy is limited and we simply cannot party all the time.' (2008 203)
- 36 I have already mentioned the end of *Bloodshot*, where a spectacular sunset stands in for the open waves, and a motor home takes the place of the yacht, etc. The adoring woman remains a constant.
- 37 Brian Holmes has produced a useful analysis of this phenomenon in 'The Flexible Personality, For a New Cultural Critique', available at <http://ut.yt.to.or.at/site/index.html>. Perhaps the definitive account, however, remains Boltanski and Chiapello's, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 2007.
- 38 This is an echo – but in reverse – of Nietzsche's famous phrase, 'No creation without destruction'. For Nietzsche however, the destruction is a result of the creation, rather than the other way around.
- 39 Pasquinelli references Antonio Negri's claim that 'Proletarian self-valorization is sabotage', and as such is the 'negative power of the positive' (quoted in 2008 154).
- 40 For the former reading see Biskind, 2004 318-324. For the latter see Jancovich, 2004 325-336. For a bit of both see Hoberman, 2004 140-144.

- 41 This understanding of the alien is consistent with the generally accepted framework for science fiction criticism, in which the genre is defined as a process of estrangement from 'empirical' reality that allows a critical interrogation of that reality. This position was closely examined in chapter 1. See Suvin 1979 and Freedman 2000.
- 42 Most alien films assume we know nothing about them, but some go in the opposite direction, emphasising how the alien shares, and even exemplifies 'human' values. Examples include *E.T.* (Spielberg, 1982), *Starman* (Carpenter, 1984), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, 1951), *Contact* (Zemeckis, 1997).
- 43 'The most crucial requirement for a subtractive ontology,' Badiou writes, 'is that its explicit presentation takes the form of the axiom, which prescribes without naming, rather than that of the dialectical definition.' (2004 p.43-4)
- 44 The literature making this point is extensive. See for example, Freedman, 1998, Badmington, 2004, Mair, 2002.
- 45 This decision is one that cannot be taken for granted. There is a lovely scene early on in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounter's of the Third Kind* where the crews of two aircraft observe a UFO, and when both are asked by those in an airport's control tower if they would like to report it, they reply that they would not. They clearly see the task of verification as being too difficult.
- 46 The relation of Steve's vocal ellipsis to the event is, according to Badiou, 'one of the phenomena by which one recognizes an event, it is like a point of the real [*point de réel*] that puts language into deadlock.' (2003 46)
- 47 These problems of fidelity to an alien truth are hilariously illustrated in John Carpenter's 1982 remake of *The Thing*, where the alien has no form of its own, and exists only by occupying those living beings it comes in contact with. The fact that it occupies various beings *simultaneously*, merging them into a single mass, provides ample opportunity for graphic and grisly special effects displaying

its monstrous physical fluidity. But it is as if this horrific visibility is a response to the fact that *in itself* the alien has no form, and is a necessarily invisible addition that denies (subtracts from) the ontological consistency of the beings it occupies. Furthermore, the film famously registers the way the problem of truth tends to evaporate in the empirical verification of the alien: upon seeing a human-head-become-thing sprout spider's legs and scuttle out the door, one of the characters explodes: "You've got to be fucking kidding!" Here empirical evidence provokes the rejection of truth rather than its verification, announcing the typical slippage from an ethics of the alien to a human, all too human morality of the monster. For an interesting discussion of *The Thing*, and this line in particular, which connects the problem of verification to that of spectator belief see Neale, 2004 11-16.

- 48 The wonderful exception to this, and indeed the most Badiouean alien film in this regard, is 2001, *A Space Odyssey*.
- 49 The violence of this will lies in its refusal of a new truth, and appears when Steve accepts the name 'monster', a nomination defining the alien by the very law he had previously been in conflict with. Indeed the film initially goes out of its way to place Steve and his girlfriend, as well as his young friends, on a limit shared with the Blob. The film opens with a passionate, even rather *wet* kiss, one stolen we soon learn, without the girls full permission, outside the city limits, and in the back of an automobile that will later confirm Steve's virility by winning a drag race with the local delinquents. All this places the teenagers under the sign of a sexuality not entirely controlled by social rules, and sharing with the Blob a certain throbbing energy threatening to get out of control. Of course it is all very gentle, but there are clear echoes of the more serious concerns of *The Wild One* (Benedek, 1953) or *Rebel without a Cause* (Ray, 1955). Unlike the protagonists of those films however, Steve will become the defender of the community and its values (the film ends in classic horror fashion, with the re-constitution of the nuclear family, even if this is Steve, his girlfriend and her young brother), defeating the very thing he initially valued, a freedom yearning for the outside, and something new. In uttering this word: 'monster', Steve articulates nothing less

(but also nothing more) than the destruction of any outside to the conservative "heartland" of small-town Amerika.

This dangerous sexual element also appears in the scene in a garage with two mechanics. The one under the car explains to the other that he's going on a "hunting trip" and intends to get so "roaring, stinking, no good drunk that I won't be able to see." He invites Marty, who declines because "Martha wouldn't like it", to which the other tells him to make up a story, "Tell her your going away so that you'll love her more when you get back." His friend leaves while the other continues, explaining that if he didn't "cut loose" once and a while he'd "blow a gasket". This repressed sexual energy is then directly connected to class warfare. The two mechanics are the only working class characters we see in the film, and the one under the car ends his tirade by exclaiming: "When I get in on Monday, if Mr Johnson looks at me funny just once, JUST ONCE, I swear I'll...." The response to this open rebellion? The Blob delivers a death sentence. The Blob may be a monster, but obviously it hates class insubordination as much as the cops.

- 50 As Badiou elaborates: "The truth is that, in the context of a system of thought that is both a-religious and genuinely contemporary with the truths of our time, the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned." (2001 25).
- 51 This centrifugal motion is already established in the film's beautiful opening shot, where the camera flies over a rocky outcrop to reveal a town as the voice-over tells us: "This is Sand Rock Arizona, of a late evening in early spring. It's a nice town, knowing its past and sure of its future, as it makes ready for the night and the predictable morning." As the shot fades into one of the empty desert, we already know that this *security* of the 'predictable' is about to dramatically change.
- 52 Jack Arnold's intelligent use of this effect has often been commented on. Rather than throw things out of the screen at the audience as most 3D films tend to, Arnold prefers, as in this scene, to use it to explore an interior depth. Arnold also used this approach in his other well-known 3D film, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). See Lucas, 2004.

- 53 At least according to the documentary accompanying the DVD release of the film. The alien point-of-view shot enjoys a rich and varied history, and following *It Came from Outer Space* is consistently indicated by a distortion of the camera's lens to indicate the alien's look. Such distortions had, of course, already been used as early as silent cinema to indicate extreme subjective states such as drunkenness (eg., in French Impressionist films), but the extension of the subjective shot to aliens marks an important philosophical extension of this device.
- 54 The music featured the theremin, which was to become 'a staple of the science fiction films of the 1950s' (Reddell, 4), and was often employed to signify the creepy presence of an alien, most notably in *Forbidden Planet* (Wilcox, 1956).
- 55 Badiou's argument about the Jews and National Socialism runs as follows: 'the name 'Jew' was the name of names, serving to designate those people whose disappearance created, around the presumed German substance promoted by the 'National Socialist revolution' simulacrum, a void that would suffice to identify the substance. The choice of this name relates, without any doubt, to its obvious link with universalism – to what was in effect already void [*vide*] about this name – that is, what was *connected to the universality and eternity of truths*. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it served to organize the extermination, the name 'Jew' was a political creation of the Nazis, without any pre-existing referent. It is a name whose meaning no one can share with the Nazis, a meaning that presumes the simulacrum and fidelity to the simulacrum – and hence the absolute singularity of Nazism as a political sequence.' (2001 75)
- 56 Badiou also discusses Stalinist communism in these terms, as well as other 'flaccid and insidious forms' such as '[t]he civilized man of imperial parliamentary democracies', for whom Matt is undoubtedly the strong arm. See, 1999 132.
- 57 'Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. [...] But what we must recognize is that these differences hold no interest for thought,

that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind, as obvious in the difference between me and my cousin from Lyon as it is between the Shi'ite community of Iraq and the fat cowboys of Texas.' (Badiou, 2001 26).

- 58 Badiou is at his most provocative on this point, arguing that 'post-modern' ethics rests on the untenable position of a 'radical Other' as it is understood by Emmanuel Lévinas. The 'ethics of difference', 'multiculturalism' and any other political practice based on the recognition of otherness appeals to Lévinas' theory of the Other as '*a principle of alterity* which transcends mere finite experience.' Lévinas calls this the 'Altogether-Other', and, Badiou claims, 'it is quite obviously the ethical name for God' (2001 22). Badiou makes atheism an absolute condition of truth, which cannot rest on any transcendental outside. Nevertheless, alien films have sometimes explored the theological dimension of Otherness, most notably the cloven hoofed aliens that finally help to re-install Mel Gibson's faith in *Signs* (Shyamalan, 2002), and the debate between science and faith that receives its resolution in the divine aliens of *Contact* (Zemeckis, 1997). Despite the opposing roles for aliens in the two films (baddies and goodies respectively), both argue for the necessity of faith in a transcendental Other as the (religious) consequence of the phenomenal appearance of aliens.
- 59 In this sense *It Came from Outer Space* poses the same political question as Badiou: 'Can there be a just politics? Or a politics which *does justice* to thought?' (2004 69) See also, 'Politics as a Truth Procedure', in 2004a.
- 60 For Badiou this makes the production of truth an 'infinite production' irreducible to established knowledge and 'determined only by the *activity* of those faithful to this event, it can be said that generic thinking is, in the widest sense of the term, militant thinking' (1999 81).
- 61 I'd like to thank Arturo Silva for his inspiration and collaboration on this essay. Without him it wouldn't have started, and without his insights it wouldn't have been half as good.

- 62 For an excellent account of Deleuze's relation to Nietzsche in terms of science fiction and a philosophy of the future see Flaxman 2008.
- 63 There are many variants on this theme in *Zarathustra*: 'For the creator himself to be the child new-born he must also be willing to be the mother and endure the mother's pain.' (1961 111) Or 'only where there are graves are there resurrections' (1961 136).
- 64 Nietzsche clearly associates will to power, overcoming and life: 'Where I found a living creature, there I found will to power; [...] And life itself told me this secret: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that *which must overcome itself again and again*.'" (1961 137 and 138, italics added)
- 65 Michel Chion suggests that the monolith and the discontinuous narrative structure of 2001 are 'intimately related' (2001 72). Each part of 2001, he argues, 'is subtended by the idea of an after and ends with a beginning: the beginning of man, the awakening of the monolith on the moon, the revelation to Dave of the monolith and another species beside man, the possible beginning of a new species of superman' (2001 69). This relentless surge into the future each time the monolith appears is, Chion perceptively argues, the narrative correlate of the monolith's disjunctive energy. Chion will, however, go on to argue that these structural disjunctions 'produce an effect of arbitrariness' that 'institutes the acquisition of language', a language that is the films as much as ours, and that establishes the monolith's function as primary castration (2001 177). Chion's subtle analysis of 2001 along psychoanalytic lines has, however, two major drawbacks; it places an emphasis on language that the film itself seems to deny (there is only around 40 minutes of dialogue in the 148 minute long film), and it fails to really account for the 'psychotic' final episode of the film. Chion claims the Stargate passage indicates and inculcates a power of 'wonder' at the 'mystery' of life (2001 150), a mystery that remains linguistic inasmuch as it is defined by its 'unlimited meaning' (2001 151). Although this fits well with Chion's psychoanalytical commitments, and his belief that 'the film is directly about interpretation itself' (2001 138), it means that he abandons any Nietzschean explanation, claiming that 2001 'is far from any mythology of the superman' (2001 151). Not only does the film draw on Nietzsche far

too often and precisely for this to be true, but by embracing the Nietzschean 'meaning' of the film it is possible to affirm it in the highest possible terms, as an *ontological revaluation* of science fiction that contributes a new concept of the future. Or at least this is what the rest of this essay shall attempt to argue.

- 66 This line seems to have escaped Jerold Abrams, who claims that 'we know who our creators and designers really are – namely, the aliens' (2007 251) to support his argument that 2001 draws on Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. Neither claim is sustainable because at no point of the film is anyone aware of the monolith's function.
- 67 The first four spacecraft we are shown in the sequence are all atomic weapons circling the globe, a point not immediately obvious in the film, but made clear in the book.
- 68 As Chion accurately points out, the warfare of the apes has been superseded by mutual surveillance (2001 146).
- 69 This process, once more, is that of the techno-scientific economy, which Kubrick presents, in a vision as prescient as Nietzsche's, as a logical extension of our own state of globalised capital. Nietzsche's words could be Kubrick's: 'It is clear, what I combat is *economic optimism*: as if increasing expenditure of everybody must necessarily involve the increasing welfare of everybody. The opposite seems to me the case: *expenditure of everybody amounts to a collective loss*: man is *diminished* – so one no longer knows what *aim* this tremendous process has served. An aim? A new aim? – that is what humanity needs.' (1967 866) Kubrick will show us its aim – HAL – and the new aim it serves – HAL's overcoming.
- 70 Dave Bowman is in fact asked this question in the course of the interview. To which he answers: "Well, he acts like he has genuine emotions. [...] But as to whether or not he has real feelings, I don't think anyone can truthfully answer."

- 71 By 1968 the technophobia sub-genre of science fiction films was already well developed. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, 1951) explored the moral dangers of science to man, and had shown these trumped, or even cured by a superior alien technology beyond human understanding. In a way 2001 replays this story-line, although with an anti-technoscience twist. Similarly, *The Forbidden Planet* (Wilcox, 1956) contrasts the emotionally driven human with a super-intelligent alien race, the Krel, that has mysteriously died out, but whose death provides a moral lesson that remains to be learnt. 2001 also echoes this story-line, whose moral is that the hubris of technological perfection unleashes uncontrollable 'monsters of the id.' This is also Nietzsche's argument about scientific knowledge, as we shall see: 'Our whole attitude toward nature, the way we violate her with the aid of machines and the heedless inventiveness of our technicians and engineers, is *hubris*.' (1967a 113)
- 72 This confirms our first impression of the *Discovery*, which passed before our eyes like nothing so much as a brain and spinal column floating in space.
- 73 I take the term *homo machinus* from Leonard Wheat's allegorical interpretation, which exhaustively argues that 2001 is a systematic dramatisation of both Homer's *Odysseus*, and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. The problem with his account is that it is far too literal, attempting to read almost every scene of the film as a dramatisation of its two source texts, usually at the expense of any deeper understanding. As a result, Wheat quips, '2001 is like a boys game of code-making and breaking.' (2000 21) This produces an at times ridiculous interpretation of the film: "The character symbolized by Floyd is symbolically absorbing whatever the monolith symbolically represents." (2000 22) Unfortunately this style of interpretation is rife in 2001-studies. Some follow Wheat's analysis, such as Abrams discussion of whether it is Bowman or Poole who symbolise Nietzsche's tightrope walker (2007 254). Others attempt to find their own 'source' texts for the film: Joseph Gelnius in a 1969 review suggests Marshall McLuhan and a book by British Jungian psychiatrist Alan McGlashan *The Savage and Beautiful Country*. Morris Beja, in a review from 1968 suggests Yeats' poem 'Sailing to Byzantium' which

emphasises 2000 year historical cycles. Robert Plank puts forward Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's poem 'Citadelle', which contains the lines 'but the block of granite, dripping with a luminous rain, remained, for me, impenetrable.' Recently, and less literally although seemingly just as arbitrarily, Adam Roberts has suggested the Wallace Stevens poem 'Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction' for, in part, its shared 'celestial ennui' (2016 390). The point is not so much whether these texts were or were not 'sources', Kubrick's researching was voracious and wide-ranging and could well have included almost anything, rather the problem with such interpretations is their stubborn ignorance as to the explicitly philosophical themes of the film, which do not fall under the compass of their attempts at 'code-breaking'.

- 74 Ironically Nietzsche employs a science fiction idiom in describing it: 'Read from a distant star, the majuscule script of our earthly existence would lead to the conclusion that the earth was the distinctively *ascetic planet*, a nook of disgruntled, arrogant, and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at themselves, at the earth, at all life, who inflict as much pain on themselves as they possibly can out of pleasure in inflicting pain – which is their only pleasure. [...] For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: here rules a *ressentiment* without equal, that of an insatiable instinct and power – will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful, and basic conditions; here an attempt is made to block up the wells of force; here physiological well-being itself is viewed askance, and especially the outward expression of this well-being, beauty and joy; while pleasure is felt and *sought* in ill-constitutedness, decay, pain, mischance, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, self-mortification, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice. All this is in the highest degree paradoxical: we stand before a discord that *wants* to be discordant, that *enjoys* itself in this suffering and even grows more self-confident and triumphant the more its own presuppositions, its physiological capacity for life, *decreases*.' (1967a 117-118) For a cinematic affirmation of the necessary convergence of science and religion in a faith in the big beyond, see *Contact* (Zemeckis, 1997).
- 75 Nietzsche had already posed himself as the answer to this question, a question and answer he refers to in *The Gay Science*: 'The will to

truth requires a critique – let us thus define our own task – the value of truth must for once be experimentally *called into question*.’ (1974 #344)

- 76 Once more Klossowski elaborates the meaning of this necessity for Nietzsche’s prescient vision of the future: ‘for everything that may want to preserve itself at a certain degree, whether a society or an individual, *the will to power appears essentially as a principle of disequilibrium*. And insofar as knowledge accompanies power and increases in proportion to acquired power, knowledge (and thus culture as well) must in turn disrupt the equilibrium of a determined state, however, says Nietzsche, knowledge will never be anything more than an instrument of conservation – for there will always be a *discordance* between the excess of (the will to) power and the feeling of security that knowledge procures.” (1997 103)
- 77 Michelson argues: ‘A weightless world is one in which the basic co-ordinates of horizontality and verticality are suspended. Through that suspension the framework of our sensed and operational reality is dissolved. The consequent challenge presented to the spectator in the instantaneously perceived suspension and frustration of expectations, forces readjustment. The challenge is met almost instantaneously, and consciousness of our own physical necessity is regenerated. We snap to attention, in a new, immediate sense of our earth-bound state, in repossession of those coordinates, only to be suspended, again, toward other occasions and forms of recognition. These constitute the “subplot” of the Odyssey, plotting its action in us.’ (1969 60)
- 78 Kubrick, we know, was worried that the imminent launch of the Apollo mission to the moon would occur before his film’s release, making its dramatic presentation of weightlessness redundant, eclipsed by the real as it were.
- 79 This ‘physicality as the ground of consciousness’ is precisely the Nietzschean assumption of the will to power. Although Michelson’s comments approach Nietzsche’s at this point, she never really moves beyond the phenomenological assumptions she is working with.

Unsurprisingly she hardly deals with the Star Gate in relation to her astronaut's 'lived body'.

- 80 Deleuze argues that Kubrick offers us a cinema of the brain, inas-
much as Kubrick's *mise en scène* is always a brain. This may be true
in *2001* to the extent that the spaceship and the final room are both
kinds of brains, but this does not contradict the importance of the
body for Kubrick, nor their immanence in a body/brain of the fu-
ture. In this sense *2001* also follows Deleuze's analysis of a cinema of
the body. 'Life will no longer be made to appear before the categories
of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life. The
categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures.'
(1989 189) Kubrick, at least, explores the new posture of weightless-
ness.
- 81 Klossowski claims that 'a corporealising thought' emerges in a body
that is not the property of a self, but the expression of impulses and
their chance and chaotic confrontation (1997 29-30).
- 82 This is Deleuze's reading of *2001*: 'The identity of world and brain,
the automaton, does not form a whole, but rather a limit, a mem-
brane which puts an outside and an inside in contact, makes them
present to each other, confronts them or makes them clash.' Bowman
enacts this limit at which the corporeal intelligence of the body/
brain is able to produce a new folding of the universe and thought,
a 'reconciliation' as Deleuze has it, 'a regeneration of the membrane
which would pacify the outside and the inside, and re-create a world-
brain as a whole in the harmony of the spheres. At the end of *Space
Odyssey*, it is in consequence of a fourth dimension [ie., the mono-
lith] that the sphere of the foetus and the sphere of the earth have a
chance of entering into a new, incommensurable, unknown relation,
which would convert death into a new life.' (1989 206)
- 83 In an interesting essay Carl Freedman suggests that science fiction
cinema's special effects are the epitome of capital's control of our
corporeality, and work against our critical intellect. *2001*, he argues,
foregrounds 'the spiritual nullity' of this control and, 'in classic
dialectical fashion' (1998 314) opposes it to 'literary science fiction [...]

as the critical genre *par excellence*' (1998 312). As a result 2001 attains the remarkable achievement of revealing the 'hopeless contradiction between science fiction and cinema' and shows that science fiction film 'may well be intrinsically impossible' (1998 315). Freeman's determination to locate all critical intelligence in a dialectical process of thought, and all political possibility in science fiction literature means that he misses how Kubrick locates the body *against* the critical intelligence of HAL. But this revolt nevertheless requires the Star Gate in order to turn special effects against itself, a liberation achieved by Kubrick's turn from studio technology to the work of American experimental film-makers. Kubrick's 'critical' use of special effects explores a non-dialectical corpo-intelligence in a way perhaps only cinema can. 2001 – and cinema – thereby explores a different political body to that imagined by Freeman's dialectical Marxism.

- 84 Paul Sharrits and Stan Brakhage (amongst others) explored the possibilities of the non-narrative and unconscious physicality of the filmic experience, the way film is capable of turning the body on and the brain off. This exploration of 'corpo-intelligence' was a line of research that came out of and extended the counter-cultural ambitions for psychedelic drug use. Some people also claim the Star Gate sequence was timed to coincide with the acid you dropped at the interval. In this sense the Star Gate episode in 2001 was consistent with the aims and strategies of the experimental film tradition upon which it drew. For a discussion of 2001's relation to contemporary experimental film practices, and to psychedelic drug use, see Youngblood 141-154.
- 85 Michelson also examines 2001's place in the avant-garde tradition, comparing it to, amongst others, Leger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1969 60).
- 86 It would be interesting to pursue the relations between the growing availability of Nietzsche in English and the American counter-culture of the sixties. R. J. Hollingdale's translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was published by Penguin in 1961, and Walter Kaufman's translation of *Will to Power* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (with R. J. Hollingdale) came out in 1967.

- 87 In this sense 2001 seems to accord with Nietzsche's own rejection in *Zarathustra* of his claim in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the means of radical cultural change are immanent in received historical circumstances. Both Nietzsche and Kubrick argue that transformation is an immanent force, but one that is nevertheless *necessarily external* to historical circumstances.
- 88 Istvan Csicsery-Ronay (following Cornel Robu, 1990) argues that 2001 is the supreme example of the 'mathematical/contemplative technosublime' (2008 163). His interesting reading emphasises the cold, machinic aspects of the film, and rejects any sense of transcendence. While part of this reading intersects with my own accounts of HAL's embodied nihilism, it necessarily ignores the obvious transcendence of the final section. 'Progress is not,' Csicsery-Ronay writes, 'a matter of moral or cultural advancement, but of the ability to extend technological power. [...] Human history is reduced to the steps of a technological progress: from the natural, to the artificial, and ultimately, to the mysterious stage after cosmic insemination.' (166) As we've seen, like many interpretations of the film, this is only coherent if we pretend the Star Gate and what comes after doesn't exist.
- 89 Such sentiments were found in other 'trip' films of the time, such as *Easy Rider* (1969, Hopper), or the later *Altered States* (1980, Russell). In fact, in its attack on bourgeois humanism – and hence as a true '68 film – 2001 finds its closest allies in European films of the time such as Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1967), Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il Deserto Rosso* (1964), and *Zabriskie Point* (1970), and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968), and *Porcile* (1969). All of these explored the possibilities of a hallucinatory deterritorialisation of traditional subjectivities under the forces of capital (Godard), of madness (Antonioni), and of sexual love (Pasolini).
- 90 'Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense.' (Kant, 106) Similarly: 'The sublime can be described thus: it is an object (of nature) *the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature's inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas.*' (Kant, 127) See Zepke 2017 for an account of Deleuze's understanding and use of Kant's sublime.

- 91 Nietzsche is criticising his own *The Birth of Tragedy* here, in the second preface he wrote for that work in 1886, 'Attempt At A Self-Criticism'. His comments can also be taken as a statement against Romanticism in general.
- 92 Kubrick would here be close to Deleuze's highly original use of the sublime in *Cinema 2, The Time-Image* where he suggests the destruction of the sensory-motor apparatus in cinema after the war, and the emergence of the time-image was a sublime achievement. 'Romanticism had already set out this aim for itself: he writes, 'grasping the intolerable or the unbearable, the empire of poverty, and thereby becoming visionary, to produce a means of knowledge and action out of pure vision.' (1989 18) Deleuze develops this sublime element in his own way of course, carefully removed from any Romantic redemption.
- 93 'His deed itself is still the shadow upon him: the hand darkens the doer. He has still not overcome his deed.
To be sure, I love in him the neck of the ox: but now I want to see the eye of the angel, too.
He must unlearn his heroic will, too: he should be an exalted man and not only a sublime one – the ether itself should raise him up, the will-less one!
He has tamed monsters and solved riddles: but he should also redeem his monsters and riddles, he should transform them into heavenly children.' (Nietzsche, 1961 140)
- 94 In an interesting essay Scott Bukatman suggests something similar: 'The passage through the Star Gate is a voyage 'beyond the infinite': a movement beyond anthropocentric experience and understanding. [...] In 2001, light's transformative power illustrates, embodies and enacts precisely the supersession of the human (and the human's rebirth as a super-human, a Star Child).' (1999 263-4)
- 95 A point made by Chion (2001 119).
- 96 All page references now given in the text following the usual form, eg., EI, P34, Dem. (*Ethics* chapter 1, Proposition 34, Demonstration).

- 97 All page references now given in the text.
- 98 Delany has said of his pornographic novel *Hogg*, but it also applies to *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*: 'Among the tasks the novel attempts is to mark out a discursive field in which, by the end, the reader can no longer even say the words "normal" and "abnormal" without putting them in quotation marks, ironising them, or somehow or other placing them *sous rature*.' (1999 308). This articulation of the 'outside' therefore dissolves limits, with directly political consequences. The sexual revolution, Delany argues, will be achieved through 'the infiltration of clear and articulate language into the marginal areas of human sexual exploration' (1988 175).
- 99 For Spinoza, '*God is the immanent cause of all things*' (EI, P18) rather than a transcendent cause and/or moral rule. Eric clearly articulates this position towards the end of the book: "Concerning God" – that's the name of the first Part. Which is funny, because about the fifth or sixth time I went through it, I realized that man didn't believe in no God at all. He believed in the stars and the sea and the hills, and what grows on them and lives in them and your body and what you could figure out with your mind – and if you wanted to call that God it was alright with him. *Deus sivi Natura*.' (800)
- 100 Or as Spinoza puts it; 'This doctrine contributes to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one, to dis-esteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry at no one, to envy no one; and also insofar as it teaches that each of us should be helpful to his neighbor, not from unmanly compassion, partiality or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand.' (EII, P49, Schol. IV, C) This describes Eric pretty precisely.
- 101 'Because feelings, emotional and physical, are so foregrounded in sexual encounters, the orgy is the most social of human interchanges, where awareness and communication, whether verbal or no, hold all together or sunder it.' (Delany, 1988 153)
- 102 The Dump is founded on such relationships, being the result of the philanthropy of Robert Kyle, a rich black man, inspired by his sexual relations with men from the area.

- 103 As opposed to assuming they must be repressed in order for the social to function correctly, as hetero-normative society would have it. See Delany, 1999a 188.
- 104 'by *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, [...] and] by *Natura naturata* I understand what ever follows from the necessity of God's nature' (EI, P29, Schol.).
- 105 Shit describes it somewhat differently, but no less dramatically on his death bed: 'when that boy turned around and stuck his dick up my goddamn ass I thought the sky had opened up and the Congress and the President of the United States had just declared Shit Haskell was king of everything' (792).
- 106 What better evidence for Spinoza's parallelism? '*The human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways.*' (EII, P14) For every affection experienced by the body there exists an idea in the mind, an 'idea' rather than a 'perception' because perception implies something caused by an object (EII, D3 + Exp.). As Eric thinks it; 'something added to the sunlight rather than something that came from it'. This takes us to; '*The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.*' (EII, P7) They are the same substance only under the different attributes of thought and action (EII, P7, Schol.).
- 107 Bull has a special function in the Dump, he delivers messages to its occupants that actualise their till-then hidden desires. He is the messenger of liberatory truth.
- 108 The published book only goes to section 113, as section 90 was accidentally left out. The missing section can be found at <http://sensitiveskinmagazine.com/chapter-90-through-the-valley-of-the-nest-of-spiders/>
- 109 'That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature. For example, a body is called finite because we always conceive another that is greater. Thus a thought is

limited by another thought. But a body is not limited by a thought nor a thought by a body.' (EI, D2)

- 110 Although in the end he 'read it a lot more times than that by a long shot' (800).
- 111 In this sense, all the joyful connections listed by Spinoza in the third book of the *Ethics* are fully explored in *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*. ie., we love someone who affects with joy someone we love (EIII, P22), we affirm what affects us with joy (EIII, P25), we strive to further what affects us with joy (EIII, P28), etc..
- 112 As Spinoza puts it; 'if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and more easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance, which happens seldom and with great difficulty, then it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible.' (EI, P15, Schol.V)
- 113 As Spinoza explains; 'Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, *or* the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.' (EI, A5)
- 114 The island of Gilead clearly echoes the island Paha in Aldous Huxley's *Island*, and even further back, Thomas More's island *Utopia*.
- 115 This term has famously been employed by Darko Suvin to describe how sci-fi narratives are usually organised around a 'new' element (usually technological) that confirms the 'futurity' of the events depicted. There is a longer discussion of this term in chapter 1.

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