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**SPACE DOUBT: THE PROGRESSION OF SPACES FROM
*METROPOLIS TO THE MATRIX***

Por

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ABSTRACT

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The recent surge in cyberspace science fiction follows previous trends within the genre, i.e. those connected with future city-space and outer space, and is an inevitable result of economic forces. There has always been a close relationship between capitalism and spatial expansion, compelled by technological innovations that have opened spaces to exploration and exploitation. The most obvious examples are the locomotive and the automobile, both of which involved spatial domination and were impelled by capitalism. The diachronic progression of those technological advances has its counterpart in the development of capitalism itself, as pointed out by Frederic Jameson who, following Ernst Mandel, identifies three stages of capitalism with their corresponding cultural logics. Multinational capitalism, the current stage, has as its technological innovation the electronics and computer industries, which are markedly different from previous stages

principally because the space involved, cyberspace, is intrinsic to the products themselves. Jameson asserts further that the cultural logic of this current stage is postmodernism and that any cultural output today takes place within the context of multinational capitalism. Previous technological innovations and their respective spatial dominants have also led to ontological uncertainties, a fact borne out by examining the corpus films that make up the bulk of this study. In the nearly 75 years that separate *Metropolis* from *The Matrix*, we have seen a succession of ontological shifts between humans and their technological offspring which indicate both persistent doubts about the role of technology and its possible encroachments on our own autonomy. This last is a further differentiation between the modernist perspective of technology as exemplified by *Metropolis* and postmodern attitudes revealed by *The Matrix*. If a shift within the science fiction genre is occurring, with cyberspace based fiction supplanting previous spaces, then the same capitalist forces that were at work in previous spatial dominants must be functioning as well. A fact brought out by the current research is the inevitable connection between capitalist forces and spatial exploration, augmented by the role of multinational corporations in the cultural output of today. While there have been numerous critical inquiries into the differences between modernism and postmodernism there has been little said about the progression of spaces between them. The current research is focused principally on space but an inevitable conclusion is that space cannot be separated from either technological advances or ontological uncertainties, whether in society in general or in the cultural output of a particular historical period.

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RESUMO

O recente surgimento de ficção científica no espaço cibernético acompanha uma tendência anterior do gênero, que seja, a relacionada com espaços urbanos e espaços siderais futuros, e é um resultado inevitável das forças econômicas. Sempre existiu uma relação íntima entre o capitalismo e a expansão espacial, compelida por inovações tecnológicas as quais abriram espaço para a expansão e para a exploração. Os exemplos mais óbvios são a locomotiva e o automóvel, ambos envolvidos na dominação do espaço e impelidos pelo capitalismo. A progressão diacrônica desses avanços tecnológicos veio acompanhada pelo desenvolvimento do capitalismo em si, tal como dito por Frederic Jameson o qual, ampliando as idéias de Ernst Mandel, identificou três estágios do capitalismo e três lógicas culturais correspondentes. O capitalismo multinacional, estágio corrente, tem como inovação tecnológica a indústria eletrônica e de computadores, a qual difere de forma marcante dos estágios anteriores principalmente porque o tipo de espaço envolvido, o espaço cibernético, é intrínseco aos próprios produtos industrializados. Jameson afirma mais adiante que a lógica cultural desse presente estágio é o pósmodernismo e que qualquer produção cultural nos dias de hoje acontece dentro do contexto do capitalismo multinacional. As inovações tecnológicas anteriores e seus espaços dominantes respectivos, igualmente conduziram a incertezas ontológicas, um fato que se tornou aparente a partir do exame dos principais filmes utilizados nesse estudo. Nos quase 75 anos que separam *Metrópolis* de *Matrix*, houve uma alternância sucessiva entre humanos e suas criações tecnológicas, a qual revela uma dúvida persistente sobre o papel da tecnologia e sua possível intromissão em nossa autonomia. Essa última, constitui mais uma diferença entre a perspectiva modernista da tecnologia, tal como exemplificada em *Metrópolis*, e as atitudes pósmodernas reveladas em *Matrix*. Se está ocorrendo uma

alteração dentro do gênero de ficção científica, com o espaço cibernético suplantando os espaços físicos anteriores, então as mesmas forças capitalistas que funcionaram nas dominações espaciais prévias devem estar atuando agora. Um fato evidenciado pela presente pesquisa é a inevitável relação entre forças capitalistas e exploração espacial, aumentada pelo papel das corporações multinacionais na produção cultural de hoje em dia. Enquanto tem havido numerosas críticas inquisitivas sobre as diferenças entre o modernismo e o pósmodernismo, pouco tem sido dito a cerca da transição, ou progressão, do espaço entre eles. A presente pesquisa enfoca primariamente o espaço, mas uma conclusão inevitável é que o espaço não pode ser separado das inovações tecnológicas, ou incertezas ontológicas, seja na sociedade em geral, ou no produto cultural de um período histórico particular.

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INTRODUCTION

Space has always figured prominently in science fiction, whether that of future cities, outer space or most recently, cyberspace. This dissertation examines how those spaces have been represented in science fiction cinema, as exemplified by four films: *Metropolis* (1926), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Matrix* (1998). Besides their paradigmatic stature within the genre, these films were selected because of their diachronic occurrence within the modernist and postmodernist movements. *Metropolis* for example, was produced at the zenith of modernism while *The Matrix* occurs within the advent of postmodernism. They also share the themes of struggle, whether that of the overt class struggle depicted in *Metropolis* or the human versus machine struggles that inform the rest of the corpus. The use and treatment of space in science fiction cinema in many ways expresses the aesthetic and philosophical differences that define the transition from modernism to postmodernism

Space of course cannot be looked at in a vacuum. The presence of humans in any particular space has almost always depended on technological innovations, innovations that inform each of the films discussed. The interdependence of space and technology is such that as the space of fictional encounters changes, the *relative* status of humans and machines changes with it. This change in ontological status inevitably leads to the struggle for control of space between humans and machines that also helps form these films, along with a multitude of other fictional efforts.

Analysis of this sort however, leads to difficulties in deciding on the entry point and parameters for discussion. For example, is it the presence of technology that determines spatial expansion, or is it the desire for expansion that compels the technological innovations? Similarly, does the fact that *Metropolis* was produced at the moment of high

modernism justify connecting its treatment of space and technology to modernist preoccupations regarding those themes? Does *The Matrix* reflect how we feel about the increasing role that computer technology plays in our lives or is it merely an extended commercial for the possibilities of cyberspace? The only way to answer these questions, and others, is to place these films firmly within the historical context that produced them, which includes the dominant cultural movement of their times.

In this dissertation I will try to analyze the tripartite themes of space, technology and ontology as they appear in the corpus films and trace the evolution of those themes across time and cultural dominants. I will try to show that the spaces represented in cinematic science fiction are inseparable from the technological advances that enabled them and that the attitudes and beliefs of society regarding space and technology are embedded in both cultural movements and their outputs. Further, there are inevitable connections between capitalism, technology and the exploitation of space that surface repeatedly in science fiction literature and film, to such an extent that the transition between fictional spaces eerily resembles the evolution of capitalism itself. Frederic Jameson and David Harvey have both written extensively on this point and it is their critical work on postmodernism that comprises the theoretical foundations for this dissertation.

While numerous other theorists have grappled with defining postmodernism none have gone as far as Jameson in establishing such a direct link between it and late capitalism; to Jameson postmodernism *is* late capitalism (*Logic* 4-6). This remarkable assertion, if readily accepted, makes categorization of cultural output easy enough. Since late capitalism is the period of multinational capitalism then anything produced within this time frame is postmodern and anything produced before it is modern. The problem with this eminently logical form of ordering is that the *content* of cultural output is made irrelevant by the simple expedient of temporal classification. Placing capitalism at the heart of cultural

movements, insisting that capitalism is the 'ghost in the machine' as it were, precludes analysis of any other sort and reduces discussion to a mere recapitulation of the base-superstructure analysis that informs the Marxist literary project of which Jameson is a part.

There are certainly enough reasons to warrant a Marxist critical analysis of the corpus films, each, for example, is deeply informed by class struggle between humans or, metaphorically, between humans and machines. Further, each reflects the dominant mode of production of the day, whether that of the machine processes of *Metropolis* or the computer reproduction of *The Matrix*. But this sort of mirroring is inevitable; primitive cave paintings reflect hunter societies as much as Soviet propaganda posters from the 1920's reflect industrial and technocratic processes. But in terms of space, the principal preoccupation of this dissertation, such linking breaks down. While one may make at times torturous connections between the rise of late capitalism, for instance, and spatial expansion there is still an enormous amount of expansion that took place long before capitalism even existed. Thus while capitalism is most certainly involved with the exploration and conquest of new spaces it was never the unique motivation for doing so; the Mongol hordes were hardly entrepreneurs.

The exploration of new spaces has been facilitated by technological innovations that have often been induced by capitalism, certainly in the 20th Century. It is the occupation of such spaces that results in the ontological struggles familiar to us, whether they are those that arose between white European settlers and native Americans or the fictional battles between humans and extra-terrestrials that make up a lot of science fiction. Put consecutively, the opening of a new space leads to ontological struggles between the competing inhabitants of that space. That struggle is at the heart of the films that will be discussed here. What have often been overlooked however, are the shifting spaces that determine and define the nature of that struggle.

Each of the corpus films is set in a represented space that is typical of the science fiction genre. *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner* in future city space, *2001: A Space Odyssey* in outer space and *The Matrix* in cyberspace. The shift in these spaces reflects both the technological processes and realities that make their exploration possible and the emergent conflict between humans and machines that results from spatial expansion. Further, each film was produced at a particular cultural and historical moment, which suggests the prevalent attitudes of both in their treatment of space, technology and ontology. Each of these works is well known for their shared themes of technology and ontology; each foregrounds the struggle between humans and robots/computers while the space of this struggle is subordinated. Yet the principal argument of this dissertation is that space determines the conflict.

An early example of the correlation between space and conflict can be found in a much earlier work that informs the entire corpus. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's 1817 novel *Frankenstein* introduced one of the themes taken for granted in science fiction - the struggle between humans and their creations and the latter's aspiration to equal ontological status. Victor Frankenstein's torturous search for knowledge through the dark regions of arcane science, which lead him to create the Monster, is paralleled in the narrative by the geographical expansion of humans to the then unknown reaches of the planet, the North Pole, where Victor finally succumbs. Victor is killed, in effect, by the space, as are much of the crew of the exploration vessel. The monster however, seems to thrive in such spaces. Throughout the novel the monster shows his skill in adapting to spaces that threaten the survival of humans. He dominates Victor on glaciers, in forests and on the barren ice deserts of the Arctic circle. At one point he says, "What were rain and storm to me?" (89). Thus a thematic connection is established between the nature of a particular space and the relative

ability of humans and their creations to survive in that space, a connection that occurs repeatedly in science fiction literature and film.

All of the 'monsters' encountered in the corpus show a similar resilience to the forces of nature and the vicissitudes of space. Robot Maria of *Metropolis* seems to pass through city spaces like a phantom, HAL of *2001* is unaffected by the cold vacuum of outer space, the android Roy Blatty of *Blade Runner* returns from wars fought in other star systems, and the digital agents of *The Matrix* take any form they wish in cyberspace. Their human counterparts however, are hindered by their very humanness in attaining mastery of the spaces their species constructed.

We too, experience similar difficulties with the spaces we have created around ourselves, whether in the decaying urban spaces that envelop us, the disappearing natural world we seem unable to preserve, or the multimedia and sometimes hallucinatory world of cyberspace. Our movements among these spaces are reflected in our cultural output, some of which is discussed in this dissertation.

Chapter I

THE PROGRESSION OF SPACES

Cyberspace is the latest technological innovation to become the subject matter of science fiction literature and films. But unlike the sentient computers and androids that make up the usual suspects in such works, cyberspace is neither a technological fantasy nor an imaginary conscious being out to usurp human hegemony. It is not aware, but a *ware*: a digital commodity serving as a fictional locus for imaginings of the future and a battleground for the same ontological struggles that have persisted in science fiction since *Frankenstein*. In cinematic science fiction, these struggles have traditionally taken place in spaces most commonly associated with the genre: outer space and futuristic city space, and invariably involve either aliens or some form of sentient technology. It is the principal hypothesis of this dissertation that a shift is taking place within the science fiction genre from the traditional milieus mentioned above to cyberspace, a shift that carries with it similar themes of ontological struggle between humans and machines and struggles over the mastery of space.

Often enough, the struggle for ontological parity involves control of a space or, at the very least, a definite positioning in space based on ontological status. In Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, for example, workers labor below ground to support a splendid city and its inhabitants, similar relationships occur in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and The Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix*. Economics based interpretation of this above and below positioning is quite obvious: vertical ascendance is always associated with superior status, and whether that status is economic or not, it is certainly related to technological hegemony. In Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, vertical ascension is associated with evolution from the beginning of the film, as our primitive ape-like ancestors struggle to gain and maintain

upright posture. Similar positioning is employed in *Blade Runner* where the streets of future Los Angeles are filled with all manner of undesirables while the high towers are reserved for men like Mr. Tyrrel, whose own Tyrrel Corporation dominates the landscape.

Such spatial concerns are not limited to science fiction. Consider the classic Western scenarios of a town not being big enough for both the hero and the villain or the equally common dehumanization of Indians invariably used as the justification for expropriating their territory. Historically, one's right to be in a particular place has always depended on the nature of one's *being*, to the extent that, in science fiction at least, the struggles for ontological status and mastery of space are so interdependent as to mean the same thing. The means of attaining mastery of space, both historically and fictionally, usually involve some form of technological innovation, possession of which is in itself a determiner of evolutionary precedence. The significance of technological advancement in human evolution is such that the two are inseparable, a fact referred to in *2001* when one of our primate ancestors seizes on a bone and employs it as the first rudimentary tool and weapon. In a stunning image, that same bone transforms into a spinning spacecraft high above the earth, visually describing the equivalence of human evolution with the vertical trajectory of technological progress.

Outer space based science fiction films first took off in the 1950's, when space travel first became a plausible thematic device. The V2 rockets that had fallen on London during WWII were being refined into what would eventually turn into the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union, with the moon as the first prize. The great promise of space was, and continues to be, perceived as the logical progression of human expansion on the face of the earth; galactic living space for the centuries to come. Similar promises occurred when the space in question was the Pacific Ocean, the Frontier or the jungles of Panama, all of which were concerned with horizontal expansion. That expansion entailed

exploration of the surface of the earth and was made possible by a series of technological innovations described by Ernest Mandel as the three stages of capitalism. Each of these stages is characterized by a particular technological innovation that has come to symbolize both the age, in diachronic time, and the Age, in terms of the defining achievement of a particular period. The first is the steam engine, the second is the internal combustion engine and the third are the nuclear and electronics industries (Mandel, qtd. in *Logic* 35). It is this last, the period of late capitalism, which Frederic Jameson has taken to be synonymous with the postmodern age (*Logic* 3); the principal critical theory used in this dissertation. The paradigmatic machine exemplars of Mandel's three stages are the locomotive, the automobile and the computer, each of which is intimately connected with the mastery of space and dimensional expansion; horizontal in the case of the locomotive and automobile and multi-dimensional in the case of the computer. All have been involved as well with the inevitable conflicts that arise with the introduction of new technologies.

Interactions between humans and locomotives and cars were the prototypes for the cinematic human versus machine struggle that informs so much of science fiction. In the early days of American cinema, these machines were used in much the same way that androids and computers are deployed today: necessary but problematic adjuncts to human aspirations. One can point to *The Great Train Robbery*, the first American feature film, and the innumerable Mack Sennet silent comedies that employ car chases and human/automobile 'interfaces' with comic intent; this, by the way, when driving a car was considered to be a real technological achievement in itself. When trains were not being used as threatening objects, think of the multitudes of virginal heroines tied to railroad tracks with cross cuts to oncoming locomotives, they were depicted as the vehicle for cultural clashes between colonists and indigenous populations. After all, it was the railroad that eliminated and demystified the vast, interior space of the United States by joining the

coasts, thus opening the interior to colonization. While native Americans were invariably depicted as the bad guys in literary and film efforts that dealt with this internal expansion, it is worth considering such a characterization from the capitalist viewpoint, which was based less on the Indians' skin color than on their obstruction of spatial expansion and 'progress'. Referring to one meeting with Plains Indians chiefs and United States government representatives, essentially railroad agents, John Hoyt Williams points out:

[The] Indian chiefs were asking the impossible. The half of a continent could not be kept as a buffalo pasture and hunting ground. Yet that was essentially what they were demanding. Nor, with the advent of white civilization, could that half of a continent support the traditional Indian way of life. (105)

Even when the Indians (who, in dubbing the locomotive the 'iron horse', fell into understandable ontological confusion themselves) were expelled the problem of who would control space continued. In George Steven's 1953 *Shane*, for instance, the issue of who will dominate space becomes a struggle between free-range cattlemen determined to maintain the wide open spaces that they usurped from the Indians and farmers equally determined to close off that space and re-distribute it for cultivation; a battle that persists until today in both the United States and Brazil.

Early cinematic efforts that involved locomotives and cars are similar to Jameson's description of the weaker efforts in contemporary science fiction, i.e. works that describe technological innovations more as thematic representations than the processes of reproduction that result in them (*Logic* 79). These films feature the comic possibilities inherent in technology without acknowledging the effect their production was having on the lives of consumers. This is especially true of early silent shorts that involve endless car chases and mechanical difficulties arising from the early automobile. These films refer neither to the assembly line innovations that made mass (re) production of cars possible, which never occurred with locomotives, nor to the massive infusion of capital that enabled these processes to occur, which most certainly happened with railroads (Hoyt Williams 29-

48). Such processes are depicted however in works as diverse as Theodore Dreiser's 1926 novel *An American Tragedy* and Chaplin's 1936 *Modern Times*. By the time these were made, the expansionist challenges of the locomotive age had already been achieved, only to be replaced by the rural incursions characterized by the automobile, Mandel's second age, and roadways that reduced and ultimately removed the distances between urban and rural areas.

In the expansionist phases of the locomotive and automobile the conquered space under question is of course *horizontal*, which along with *vertical* and *subterranean* spaces forms the dimensional reference for the representation of what Henri Lefebvre calls absolute space (236). Lefebvre refers to the significance of dimensionality as follows:

Absolute space does have dimensions, though they do not correspond to dimensions of abstract (or Euclidean) space. Directions here have symbolic force: left and right, of course – but above all high and low. I spoke earlier of three levels: surface, heights depths...Altitude and verticality are often invested with a special significance, and sometimes even with an absolute one (knowledge, authority, duty)...By and large, however, horizontal space symbolizes submission, vertical space power, and subterranean space death. (236)

Representations of vertical, horizontal and subterranean spaces all figure prominently in the films discussed in this dissertation but the absolute significance associated with vertical space is particularly relevant. No discussion of city space, for example, is complete without analyzing the positioning of a city's inhabitants and the suggestive power of that positioning. Besides physical position, the English language itself is filled with high/low binary oppositions, all of which clearly indicate the absolute superiority of vertical ascension.¹

The locomotive and automobile, limited as they are to horizontal spaces, certainly played a major role in compelling the submission of both space and its inhabitants, as described above. Even though they were technological means of achieving this submission, they were not exempted however from some questioning over the desirability of such

machines, even if they were neither sentient nor independent from human control, as later fictional representations of androids and computers often are. The basic themes that inform this dissertation were thus established early on: the mastery of space made possible by technological innovations and the resulting conflicts between humans and machines, the latter realized earlier, in science fiction, as conflicts between humans and aliens. As will be shown, there is little difference between the two. Both involve the right to a particular space based on ontological status, that status being defined as humanness. Historical and fictive conflicts that arise from definitions of this ‘human’ quality have inevitably taken place over the question of who will control what space.

Space has long been used as a literary and cinematic trope for exploring ontological uncertainties, at least as far back as *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz* (references to both abound in nearly all of the films discussed in this dissertation). Almost inevitably, it is the mastery of space, and thus all it contains, that resolves the power struggle implicit in ontological struggle. Once Native Americans were robbed of their land, for example, there was no further need to dehumanize them. Instead, they were relegated to reservations where they now enjoy the same rights as any other citizens, even more in some cases, and have become mythological, even heroic figures, minus their land, of course.

Numerous cinematic examples of this phenomenon will be described but here two may serve to illustrate the point. The first is Byron Haskin’s 1953 film version of H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*, in which earthly bacteria kill off the technologically superior alien invading force after all human efforts have failed. The contest is over space, in this case the Earth, where the overwhelmed humans enjoy “home-field advantage”. The film weirdly inverts the Spanish conquest of Mexico by a few conquistadors aided by small pox and the Aztec confusion of Cortes’ blond hair with that of the gods mentioned in their prophecies; an historical spatial/ontological event. *The Matrix* has a similar cinematic

reference to space and ontological status. In many ways the film recalls Stanley Kubrick's 1960 *Spartacus*, both films being preoccupied with slave revolts against exploitative and arrogant masters. *The Matrix* openly acknowledges the connection: the costumes worn by Neo and the rest of the crew while on the ship are nearly identical to those worn by Kirk Douglas in *Spartacus*. In both films, the slaves wish to liberate themselves and find some new land/space where they can be free, although this is much more apparent in *Spartacus*. In *The Matrix*, such a space, Zion (the Promised Land), already exists but is never depicted. Unfortunately, Spartacus and his comrades lose the last battle because of the Roman mastery of the terrain; the rebel army is caught between the Romans and the sea and has literally no place to go. In *The Matrix*, it is Neo's mastery of cyberspace that promises eventual human control. Similar control is exhibited in the relatively low-budget *The Thirteenth Floor* where the same cyberspace, Los Angeles, exists in two different historical periods, the 1930's and our present.

Of course, slave/master is the archetypal binary opposition at work in struggles for ontological status and power; one of the ways in which slavery was both justified and continued in the United States was by legally concluding that slaves be counted in the census as $\frac{3}{4}$ of a white man. The census was then used for the distribution of space/ land, with slaves counted as property in the same way that land was (cf. Gogol's *Dead Souls*). Here it must be stressed that the historical struggle for equal status is inevitably an ontological issue, whether that of women, different races, sexual preferences or any other *Other*, and invariably refers to *status within a particular space*: country, workplace, spaceship or remote part of the galaxy. People want to be treated equally, and the mere fact that they are not indicates diminished status. Ironically, the same pattern is presented in *The Matrix* where "humans" are routinely killed, even though, according to the film's narrative, cyberspace death results in real death. They are only slaves, after all, as are the more human

than human androids of *Blade Runner* or the sentient Mechas of Steven Spielberg's recent *AI*, whose space is easily invaded and conquered by humans. Significantly, the films that form the corpus of this paper refer to ontological relationships and status between humans and machines in three spatial milieus: futuristic Earth space in *Metropolis* (and *Blade Runner*), outer space in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and cyberspace in *The Matrix*. The shifting attitudes towards technology present in these films and their spaces also reflect the shifting position between modernist and postmodern conceptions of the role of technology in our lives.

The main thesis being presented in this chapter is that there has been a movement within the genre of cinematic science fiction from outer space to cyberspace. This movement or trend corresponds both chronologically and aesthetically to the transition from modernity/modernism to postmodernity/postmodernism. Part of that transition concerns the attitudes about technology that characterize each period.

While cyberspace is itself a technological innovation it differs markedly from previous innovations characterized in science fiction in that it has no status as *being*, unlike the other creations, robots and androids and the like, discussed in this dissertation. In other words, the ongoing struggle for equal or superior ontological status between humans and their creations, which began with *Frankenstein* and which continues through all the films discussed in this dissertation, has ended in a new space in which the very status of humans as humans is in doubt. The de-centering of the human self/subject that marks one of the defining breaks between modernism and postmodernism has found its perfect expression in the latest space to be exploited by science fiction. The relationship between cyberspace, and its electronic parentage, and the postmodern moment corresponds to earlier transitional moments, or cultural logics, as described by Frederic Jameson and elaborated upon by Vivian Sobchack.

Following Mandel (Logic 35), Frederic Jameson refers to the postmodern as the cultural logic of late capitalism, and points to two other cultural logics that belong to their relative periods of capitalism. Following Jameson, Vivian Sobchack has also elaborated the corresponding visual representations located within this conceptual framework (Sobchack, Presence 3). The relationships between each are laid out below in Table 1.

Mandel's Stage of Capitalism	Technological Component	Jameson's Cultural Logic	Sobchack's Representational Paradigm	Space
<i>Market (1840's)</i>	<i>Steam Engine</i>	<i>Realism</i>	<i>Photography</i>	<i>The Frontier</i>
<i>Monopoly (1890's)</i>	<i>Internal Combustion Engine</i>	<i>Modernism</i>	<i>Motion Pictures</i>	<i>The City</i>
<i>Multinational (1940's)</i>	<i>Nuclear/Electronic Industries</i>	<i>Postmodernism</i>	<i>Electronic (television, computers, Internet etc.)</i>	<i>Cyber Space</i>

Table 1

Sobchack's organization extends to her representational paradigms. I have included my own category of space as a means of connecting the capitalist impulse of spatial expansion with cultural output as determined by a particular space.

Arranging matters like this is not meant to suggest distinct, causal relationships between categories. For example, the advent of photography was not necessarily the impetus for the 'photographic' realism encountered in novels published at the same time. Nor was the temporal dislocation offered by motion pictures either the cause or the result of a similar characteristic perceived in modernism. Certainly, such aesthetic categories as realism and modernism persist until today, in the same way that, arguably, one can find works with postmodern characteristics produced in a period when the term postmodernism did not even exist. Rather, the table is meant to graphically illustrate the historical co-

incidence of some technological and aesthetic phenomena and their corresponding spatial dominant.²

Such co-incidence is crucial to Frederic Jameson's hypothesis that these days, all cultural production takes place in the 'force field' of the postmodern, the postmodern being the same as the late stage of capitalism (*Logic 6*). But this type of linking, or historicizing, demands some sort of causal relationship if only because of the *pervasiveness* of the electronic technology associated with this stage in our everyday lives. Previous technological innovations like the locomotive and car certainly played a part in the reduction and commodification of space but little can be said of their effects on cultural production apart from their thematic uses in such production. Electronic technologies such as television and computers are quite another story because much of their cultural content is designed specifically for them as mediums, whether as 30 to 60 minute television shows or interactive CD-ROMS which can only be shown or used on a computer, clear cases of content following form.

Vivian Sobchack points to Heidegger's comment that "The essence of technology is nothing technological" and continues:

That is, technology never comes to its particular material specificity and function in a neutral context for neutral effect. Rather, it is always historically informed not only by its materiality but also by its political, economic, and social context and thus always both co-constitutes and expresses cultural values. Correlatively, technology is never merely 'used' never merely instrumental. It is always also 'incorporated' and 'lived' by the human beings who engage it within a structure of meanings and metaphors in which subject-object relations are cooperative, co-constitutive, dynamic and reversible. (Sobchack, *Presence 1*)

Starting with television, in the late 1940's, the use of electronic technologies has been adapted into both social mechanisms and forms of perception to the extent that such technologies are embedded in aesthetic production as both forms and thematic representations. Jody Berland points out there are spatial consequences associated with this as well:

...[So] television started with live variety and film but consolidated the dramatic series once the industry had been thoroughly capitalized by the purchase of sets. American television production now relies mainly on the dramatic series, whose centrality in television's highly integrated structure of financing facilitates international export and the dominance of American productive relations as well as programs abroad...The series also forms a direct link with television's rhetorical and physical centrality in the home. (Berland 44)

A similar shift is occurring today with the pervasive presence and use of computers and the Internet. Apart from the centrality of the computer itself, it is rapidly assuming the tasks previously performed by other electronic media, including television and radio. Thus films and albums are routinely downloaded from the Internet and replayed on the computer.

It is important to note here that the current preoccupation with computer technology and cyberspace has not arisen suddenly or independently but is in fact a continuation of the electronic intrusion that began with television. The thematic representation of *reciprocal* intrusion, ourselves into the technology, has been with us since at least the early 1960's when such pioneering science fiction efforts as *The Twilight Zone* began to appear on television. In one episode, a weirdly gifted kid who spends hours watching television disposes of his family by transferring them into the cartoons he's watching on television. His pesky older sister gets eaten up by some gelatinous cartoon monster, as if the peculiar ontology of television could not tolerate invasion of *its* space.

Remembering that television has been with us nearly 60 years, it's worth noting that its content has passed through the same aesthetic periodization noted in the Table 1. The intense realism of early 1950's 'serious' dramas, shot live and eerily preserved on kinescopes, helped to lend television a touch of class, after its initial demeaning through comedy hours, sporting events and quiz shows. The modernist impulse dominated throughout the 1960's and 70's, preserved in anti-hero dramas like *Then Came Bronson* and the sometimes dreary moralizing of *Star Trek*, with its unashamed trust in the future and technology. Later decades brought with them the decidedly postmodern *Max Headroom*

(Bukataman 256-259) and a host of *Generation X* situation comedies characterized by disaffected youth facing an uncertain and unpromising future.

Reciprocal invasion of technological space has also been represented cinematically. The genre defying *The Last Action Hero* features a boy transported from a dark, cavernous movie theater, itself an icon, into the brilliant light of the screen and the real/fictional world of the fictional star of the film he is watching. In that world, which now becomes the film the audience is watching, cartoon characters share the same space with live action figures, removing any ontological difference between Roger Rabbit and Arnold Schwarzenegger (as if there really were any); all inhabiting the larger movie world of which they are a part. Since these characters are not aware that they *are* fictional, the movie can poke fun at the characters the actors have played in other films, along with the action genre itself.

The audience's awareness of these inside jokes works because of the incorporation of previous thematic representation and the representational image of movies themselves, both of which rely on dynamic involvement of the audience. Similar effect is produced by the recent *Pleasantville*, which features a teenage brother and sister transported into the black and white fictional world of a 1950's family comedy that survived as re-runs on television. The boy's intense nostalgia for the place and time depicted in the show (he is not even old enough to remember the 70's) is not enough to save the fictional Pleasantville from the invasion of color that gradually transforms it into a more visually attractive place. In both of these films it is the technological process of filmmaking that is the real star, engaged in a dynamic transformation of the real into the fictional and vice-versa. The centrality of such technical virtuosity raises the question of whether there has been a change in the form and content of cultural production caused by computer generated cyberspace. Berland points out:

Like many features of commercial media, the capacities of new media for "occupying a space, producing a space" have been more readily recognized by their

marketers; already in the 1920's, American advertisers understood radio as an ideal extension of their trade...Both radio's triumphant domestic diffusion, integration, and economic concentration, *and* its subsequent demographic, technical, spatial and economic fragmentation as its listeners abandoned the domestic scene after television, are consistent with this prognosis. (43)

The marketers of cyberspace, including the multinational media giants involved in the film industry (SONY, Vivendi and AOL-Time/Warner) most certainly recognize the centrality of computers. A similar process to the one Berland describes is taking place today, but now it is television that is being superceded by the ubiquitous computer screen and cyberspace. What is more remarkable than previous supercessions is the computer's ability to incorporate *all* of its visual and auditory predecessors, from radio and books to films and video games while at the same time producing its own space. Berland is informative here as well:

McLuhan (1964) contends that each new medium adopts the "content" of its predecessor and thereby disguises its real historical efficacy. Another way of putting this is that cultural hardware precedes the software that will constitute its content...The hardware is initially promoted through software appealing to a targeted market on the basis of already established tastes...As the hardware becomes more widely available, new software (radio programs, video games CDs) emerges for a larger more fragmented market. (Berland 43-44)

The analogy of hardware and software is an interestingly oblique reference to something not even mentioned in the passage: computers. All the entertainment technology mentioned falls squarely in the category of electronics, the period of late capitalism that Jameson describes as the postmodern.

The processes described in the above passages may easily be extrapolated to the earlier stages of capitalism defined by the locomotive and automobile. In each case a market was most certainly found: vast, previously un-colonized space with the hardware being those same technological innovations. The conquest of those interior and rural spaces enabled the introduction of infrastructure, which in turn brought the colonizers, or spatial consumers. The point here is that each technical innovation associated with a new stage in

capitalism has also signified the conquest and exploitation of space. This is easier to perceive when the space is physical or geographical but the practice of granting space to capitalist development persists even when that space is electronically engendered.

The builders of the first transcontinental railroad in the United States were routinely given enormous tracts of land as right of way, in some cases up to 250 kilometers, land which immediately became capitalized once the railroad was built (Hoyt Williams 102). Similarly, in the 1930's the American government, in an attempt to offset Depression unemployment, engaged thousands of people to build six lane superhighways in Western states such as Wyoming and Idaho at a time when there were neither enough cars nor people to warrant such projects. Later, when there were enough cars, those same roads undertook the same transportation duties once filled by the railroads. David Harvey (1978) writes:

Capitalist development has therefore to negotiate a knife-edge path between preserving the exchange values of past capital investment in the built environment and destroying these investments in order to open up fresh room for accumulation. Under capitalism, there is then a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of crises, at a subsequent point in time. The temporal and geographical flow of investment in the built environment can only be understood in terms of such a process. (qtd. in Berland 45)

The airwaves through which radio, telephone and television signals pass, the space they inhabit, are as rigorously contested and controlled by the entities which stand to gain the most from them as was the physical space exploited by the railroad and automobile industries. Similarly, those electronics industries whose physical landscape has been with us since approximately the 1940's, principally television, are the ones being threatened with extinction by the latest space to be created – cyberspace. It is not surprising then that the fight for control and domination of this new space has already become as contentious a political and economic issue as that associated with geographical space. Nor is it surprising that in the age of multinational capitalism a company like AOL Time-Warner is involved in

every aspect of electronic transmission from fiber-optic cable to the Internet, and from cable television to the production of films, including *The Matrix*.

An attempt has been made to show how each stage of capitalism has been characterized by a technological innovation concerned with the conquest and mastery of space and how Jameson has associated each stage with a particular cultural logic. According to him, the cultural logic of the current stage, that of multinational capitalism, is postmodernism.

Postmodernism

Jameson points to a break with high modernism that occurred sometime in the 1960's (*Logic 1*). While he does not point to a specific factor that caused this break, he highlights several defining differences between the modern and postmodern. Interestingly, Jameson describes these differences as “effacements of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinctions between high culture and so-called mass culture or popular culture” (*Cultural Turn 2*). Jameson's project in defining postmodernism, or at least identifying it, is implicitly historical, or periodicized. Since he places postmodernism in the historical context of late capitalism, or multinational corporations, it is perhaps not surprising that he uses so much terminology usually connected with geographical limits when describing “effacement” of boundaries or frontiers. Hence the established categories that defined modernism are, to him, blurred or incorporated (*Cultural Turn 3*). In an attempt to outflank the usual definitional problems that occur with discussions of postmodernism, Jameson clearly places it within a historical context:

Now I must say a word about the proper use of this concept [i.e. postmodernism]: it is not just another word for the description of a particular style. It is also, at least in my use, a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order – what is euphemistically called modernization, post-industrial or

consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism. (*Cultural Turn 3*)

Therefore postmodernism can be historically placed directly within the context of electronic technologies in everyday life, which began in the late 1940's with the advent of television and continues up to the present moment. This technology has a greater impact on cultural production than either the locomotive or automobile had, although all are connected with space, a point I will argue extensively in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

Jameson's argument focuses on the aesthetic characteristics that define high modernism, one of which is the distinct style and voice of writers like Faulkner, Wallace Stevens and Joyce, which not only make them immediately identifiable but also subject them to parody because of that very individualism (*Cultural Turn 5-6*). He explains both the individualism of high modernists and their subsequent death in economic terms:

... in the classic age of competitive capitalism ...and the emergence of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic social class, there was such a thing as individualism, as individual subjects. But today, in the age of corporate capitalism, of the so-called organizational man, of bureaucracies in business as well as the state, of demographic explosion – today, that older bourgeois individual subject no longer exists. (*Cultural Turn 6*)

Since this discussion is limited to aesthetics in the United States and Western Europe the fact that some outside of those places might object to this presumed loss of individualism does not count. Jameson goes on to the more 'radical' viewpoint that such constructs as individualism or unique personal identity never existed in the first place. In either case, the loss of individualism is reflected in a loss of the personal style that helped to define modernism. Since all styles have already been done, there is nothing left to produce except copies and imitations of dead styles (*Cultural Turn 7*). Jameson adds:

But this means that contemporary or postmodern art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past. (*Cultural Turn 7*)

Imprisonment in the past does not necessarily refer only to content, i.e. the rewritten or re-imagined history that one associates with postmodernism, but to form as well. As an example, Jameson points to E.L. Doctorow's use in *Ragtime* of simple, declarative sentences, asserting that such a formalistic device separates the events being told from any connected present (*Logic* 23-24). The stilted, sometimes childlike phrasing of the novel is, for Jameson, Doctorow's way of transforming time and action into so many discreet 'event objects', approximating a preterite conjugation that exists in French (*Logic* 24). However, what seems to be a new style of writing is itself recognition of the lack of current, *political* content that called the style into existence in the first place. Thus Doctorow is employing a formalistic device to convey his own longing for a radical past that has either been forgotten or relegated to a kind of so-remote history that it might as well be in the Pleistocene era. Jameson writes that, "[Doctorow] has had to convey this great theme formally (since the waning of the content is very precisely his subject)..." (*Logic* 25).

To someone who sees history as a continuum, any formal device that separates the past from the present is, by definition, anti-historical. This is particularly troublesome if the historical perspective is Marxist, with its emphasis on continuous class struggle. Compartmentalizing the past into isolated 'event objects' at once removes the past from any relevance to our present and imprisons those events in such a way that we can only approach them through representation. In a novel like *Ragtime*, preoccupied as it is with class consciousness and struggle, the danger is in thinking that these great events of the past were somehow all resolved and no longer exist today; a position that is anathema to a Marxist and, frankly, any thinking person. It is the lack of attention to these radical moments today, a by-product of late capitalism and the waning of content referred to above, that leads Doctorow to represent the struggle in the past (*Logic* 25). The postmodern reinvention of the historical novel, with its free association of fact and fiction, represents

our ideas and stereotypes about the past, instead of the past itself, and ends up as 'pop history' (*Logic* 25).

One way of rephrasing this argument is to say that history is being put into context, an overused word which, in this context, means looking at the past with the eyes of the present, hence representation. This is unavoidable. Unless one lived in the early 20th Century America of *Ragtime* for example, the only context one can apply is that of one's own present; equally true of any event in the historical past. But the risk here is the loss of a genuine, political position that such contextualizing brings with it. This is particularly relevant when one considers the class struggle represented in the corpus films.

In *Metropolis*, class struggle is represented as precisely what it is - an exploited proletariat working to support an effete and unproductive upper class. The dialectic of class struggle is neither allegorized nor, apart from its spatial orientation, contextualized. Yet while one may perceive the same class-consciousness at work in the humans versus machines struggles in both *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* it is reasonable to question the need to allegorize such class struggle between humans when it continues to exist as a political matter. Transferring a political question to one of ontological status between humans and machines is similar to what Jameson describes as the formalistic device of *Ragtime*: a lament for a radicalized past when class struggle was depicted as what it was.

The loss of definite personal style described by Jameson refers strictly to aesthetic sensibility and does not take into account the presumed loss of individuality amongst subjects who are neither in the arts nor in academia. Yet one of the characteristic traits of the postmodern is reflected there as well. Jameson refers to postmodern pastiche, compounding styles from different periods, replacing parody, imitation or burlesque of a particular work or style, insinuating that since there is no personal or individual style left to parody, all that remains is mere imitation. Pastiche would seem to refer more to content than

to form, particularly when referred to stylistic influences in the visual arts. It is thus becoming more common to see films that take place in one historical period using costumes or language from another, especially as iconic references to period style. One example is *Gattaca*, a science fiction film that takes place in the near future whose detectives are immediately identifiable by their use of overcoats and fedora hats, reminiscent of 1940's film noir detective stories. The recent *Moulin Rouge* also freely mixes styles and music, as did the earlier *Romeo and Juliet*, made by the same director, Baz Luhrman. However, in these cases and others the reason for this pastiche of style may be nothing more than simply an exhaustion of material, in the same way that Renaissance religious art finally gave way to subsequent subject matter. In cinema and literature, there might not be any more stories to tell. If that is the case, we may look to different *forms* for telling stories.

In fact, there have been efforts at non-narrative filmmaking, but such efforts serve more to satisfy the high art/low art dichotomy that exists in every art form, with non-narrative films clearly occupying the aesthetically superior position. But even those films may be subjected referentially to earlier modernist works that played with the structure of space and time. The only way out of this seemingly circular argument is to introduce another element into the discussion, which can only be called technological.

I would suggest that the most historically contextualized art being produced today are science fiction films because they not only address the cultural preoccupation with technological presence but are themselves a *product* of that same presence. While these films offer little difference in narrative terms they differ radically in *how* they are created, depending largely on computer generated simulations of reality instead of purely human efforts. Thus an animated film like the recent *Stallion* which, while not a science fiction film, was rendered completely by computer animation, making for a weird aesthetic style that is certainly different from anything done before. Similar graphics were used in

Gladiator to shoot scenes of the actor Oliver Reed after he had died during production.

Whatever its artistic merit, is this not a new style, one based on the blurring of the ontological boundary between the creator and the created? Is the skill, the human ability, involved in making *Stallion* the same that was involved in creating *Fantasia*? I would answer yes to the first question and no to the second, with equal force. Both questions arise from the new form of cultural production brought about by computer-generated cyberspace.

Jameson asserts that computers are machines of reproduction rather than production and thus “make different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment” (*Logic* 19). But, as pointed out above, computers *are* being actively used in cultural production, granting that most of Jameson’s work on this subject took place before the advent of cyberspace generated production. In taking on the exemplar of the third machine age, the computer, Jameson takes a long leap from merely thematic representation into something much larger. Since the following passage is critical to Jameson’s argument it is quoted at length:

I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not so much in its own right but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself. This is a figural process presently best observed in a whole mode of contemporary entertainment literature—one is tempted to characterize it as “high-tech paranoia”—in which the circuits and networks of some putative global computer hookup are narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the normal reading mind. Yet conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt—through the figuration of advanced technology—to think the totality of the contemporary world system. It is in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that, in my opinion, the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized. (*Logic* 19-20)

Here Jameson is applying a similar reasoning to what he used on *Ragtime*. The ‘high-tech paranoia’ is the new form for allegorizing an economic situation, although there is no

longing for a more radical past. All of this paranoia, essentially the plot of *The Matrix* is thus a representation of some other reality: global, multinational capitalism. One problem with Jameson's reading of this type of fiction is that "immense communicational and computer networks" are *not* merely fictional devices that hint at the spread of global capitalism. They are in fact real, and their growing use has already created some situations that have more to do with altered perceptions and ontological uncertainty than "dimly perceivable economic reality". Computer based technological processes have already begun to *produce* things unlike any mere thematic representation should be expected to do and have begun to alter perception in ways that previous technological innovations never did.

The Self and Cyberspace

In a 1994 newspaper article "A Rape in Cyberspace", Julian Dibble described the activities of an Internet group, a MUD – multi-user dimension, of which he briefly became part. The setting for this group was LambdaMOO, a 'chateau' located within cyberspace. The article concerns the reactions of residents of this chateau to a series of virtual rapes committed by a resident called Mr. Bungle. Dibble writes:

Nightly, I typed the commands that [dropped me] with what seemed a warm electric thud inside the mansion's darkened coat closet, where I checked my quotidian identity, stepped into the persona and appearance of a minor character from a long-gone television sitcom, and stepped out into the glaring chatter of the crowded living room. Sometimes, when the mood struck me, I emerged as a dolphin instead. (Dibble 1)

It is important to note the science fiction like wording of this prose. Like science fiction, cyberspace demands the suspension of what ordinary ontological sense tells us is possible.

He continues:

For the Bungle Affair raises questions that-here on the brink of a future in which human life may find itself as tightly enveloped in digital environments as it is today in the architectural kind...It asks us to...look without illusion upon the present possibilities for building, in the on-line spaces of this world, societies more decent and free than those mapped onto dirt and concrete and capital. It asks us to behold

the new bodies awaiting us in virtual space undazzled by their phantom powers, and to get to the crucial work of sorting out the socially meaningful differences between those bodies and our physical ones. And most forthrightly it asks us to wrap our late modern ontologies, epistemologies, sexual ethics, and common sense around the curious notion of rape by voodoo doll-and to try not to warp them beyond recognition in the process. (Dibble 1-2)

This particular MUD, there are thousands, had a population of almost 1,000 members (Dibble 12). While rape is the issue in question, Dibble prefaces it with a discussion about virtual sex that concludes with:

...you've read Foucault and your mind is not quite blown by the notion that sex is never so much an exchange of fluids as it is an exchange of signs [but] the shock can easily reverberate throughout an entire young worldview. Small wonder, then, that a newbie's first taste of MUD sex is often the first time she or he surrenders wholly to the slippery terms of MUDish ontology, recognizing in a full-bodied way that what happens inside a MUD made world is neither exactly real nor exactly make-believe, but profoundly, compellingly, and emotionally meaningful. (Dibble 4)

As Scott Bukatman points out, "Whether a real space or a 'consensual hallucination', cyberspace produces a unified experience of spatiality, and thus social being, in a culture that has become impossibly fragmented" (156).

The muddy ontology compelled by real-world cyberspace 'experience' has its counterpart in postmodern fiction as a whole, where it was preceded by a literary trope – the Zone. Pointing to one of the significant differences between modernism and postmodernism as that between epistemological and ontological considerations, Bukatman, following Brian McHale, writes:

...McHale defines the dominant [in modernist fiction] as *epistemological*, as exemplified by the questions of narrator, narration, and knowledge that structure literary works as diverse as Faulkner, Nabokov, Henry James, and even early Pynchon. Modernism is organized around perception through shifting consciousnesses and unreliable narrators. Interpretation becomes a foregrounded and dominant activity for the reader of, and characters within, the modernist text. (162)

Knowledge, and its validity, is thus called into question as a result of subjective differences amongst, well, subjects. This fundamental characteristic of modernist fiction depends on having a subject, however alienated and dispossessed, but for

Bukataman:

The postmodern text replaces such an epistemological impulse with an *ontological* imperative. Knowledge is no longer emplaced as the structuring problematic; instead Being is centered, as the status of the world and existence become defining issues. Postmodern fiction stages a dissolution of ontological boundaries, presenting a collision and shifting of worlds. (162)

The spaces of these events vary but they exist merely as fictional tropes to introduce ontological uncertainty. The recent surge in cyberpunk fiction makes use of the real phenomenological shift created by cyberspace in much the same way that earlier, and current, science fiction used other fictional spaces such as outer space and futuristic city space to probe the ontological uncertainties brought about by those spaces. But whatever the literary or cinematic representation of cyberspace it still remains the one science fiction 'paraspace' that informs our everyday lives and, perhaps, has altered our perceptions.

Vivian Sobchack observes that, in the United States, no one can escape daily encounters with the objective phenomena of the various electronic technologies (*Presence* 1). One can add that these encounters, while today limited predominantly to the industrialized world, are much more likely to increase in the rest of the world, as well. She writes:

Nor is it an extravagance to suggest that, in the most profound, socially pervasive, and yet personal way, these objective encounters transform us as *subjects*. That is, although relatively novel as "materialities" of human communication, cinematic and electronic media have not only historically *symbolized* but also historically *constituted* a radical alteration of the forms of our culture's previous temporal and spatial consciousness and of our bodily sense of existential "presence" to the world, to ourselves, and to others. (1)

The transformation as subjects that Sobchack refers to is closely connected with the arguments put forth by Jameson and described above. But the advent of sophisticated electronic technologies has also *included* the subject in ways that previous innovations have not. Whatever the effects that cinema, for example, has had on temporal and spatial consciousness it has only been recently that viewers could actively involve themselves in

the process of watching a film. In fact, the recent innovation of DVD allows the viewer to participate in a form of editing which, given the notion that editing is the grammar of film, substantially alters the relationship between subject and object, reader and text. Similarly, video and computer games, along with the MUD activities described in the Dibble article, serve to engage the participant at the same time they distance him or her from the actual experience. The new experiences provided in cyberspace are thus, as Dibble says, neither real nor not real. Sobchack writes:

The two-dimensional, binary superficiality of electronic space at once disorients and liberates the activity of consciousness from the gravitational pull and orientation of its hitherto embodied and grounded existence. All surface, electronic space cannot be inhabited. It denies or prosthetically transforms the spectator's physical human body so that subjectivity and affect free-float or free-fall or & free-flow across a horizontal/vertical grid. Subjectivity is at once de-centered and completely extroverted – again erasing the modernist (and cinematic) dialectic between inside and outside and its synthesis of discontinuous time and discontinuous space as conscious and embodied experience. (*Presence* 10)

But this transformation has certainly not sprung upon us all of a sudden. Rather, it has been an accumulated process, one that began with the introduction of such technologies as cinema and television and has been characterized by the gradual reversal of the intrusion that began with television entering our living rooms and has culminated with us entering our computer screens.

Following Jameson, an attempt has been made to show the close relationship between technological innovation, spatial questions and ontological uncertainty. In the following chapter, these factors will be brought to bear in an examination of how space has been traditionally represented in several paradigmatic science fiction films, specifically in terms of the modernist and postmodern movements.

Chapter II

METROPOLIS TO 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY TO BLADE RUNNER

“*In order to save the village, we had to destroy it*”, anonymous U.S. Army officer referring to the burning of a South Vietnamese village in 1968.

This chapter presents a discussion of three films: *Metropolis*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Blade Runner*, paradigmatic science fiction examples of future city space and outer space. Each of these films is informed by the tripartite themes of this dissertation, i.e. space, technology and ontology, and is discussed chronologically as a means of elaborating their positions within the modernist and postmodernist movements, specifically in terms of their spatial representations.

Metropolis was produced in 1926, at the height of the modernist movement, and reflects the modernist preoccupation with spatial organization as a means of social emancipation and technology as a means of achieving that goal. The vision of an ordered, functional and, above all, rational city was at the heart of the modernist social formation, a utopian vision that had its roots in the Enlightenment (Harvey, *Modernity* 1-26,). *Metropolis* is the forerunner of both futuristic city space science fiction and the technology gone out of control theme that informs much of the genre. It depicts a world organized around the binary *spatial* oppositions of high and low, up and down and above and below. In it, the workers toil underground, supporting the vast machinery that sustains Metropolis and its privileged way of life.

An early scene reveals the inevitable concurrence of this physical positioning with technology. Freder, the protagonist, is driven to see his father. As the car moves on it passes

on a road above a mass of workers trudging below; Freder has access to the fruits of technology while the workers do not. Freder is forbidden to enter the machine rooms, the strict reserve of the workers who actually live below the machines. Even the costuming supports the distinction. Freder is dressed in white shirt, jodhpurs and riding boots, attire usually associated with equestrians (or German film directors) while the nameless foreman is in the uniform of the workers, denim work fatigues. The housing of the workers is reminiscent of the housing projects of later periods (appearing in *The Matrix* as the domain of the lower classes). The office of Freder's father is spacious, with high ceilings and ample space for people, contrasted with the crammed elevators and dense tenements of the workers. As befits a silent film, this social division is presented visually; there's no need to explain this relationship because we understand the situation at once: the higher spaces are reserved for the higher classes. Once Maria starts to educate the workers and Freder about the unfairness of the existent social order, Freder's father enlists the help of Dr. Rotwang, whose robot creation is transformed into a replica of the real Maria. Robot Maria is sent below to stir up problems amongst the workers and ends up radicalizing them to such an extent that they destroy the machines and threaten Metropolis itself. Robot Maria is an early example of technology gone crazy despite the intentions of its creator, a common science fiction theme that is present throughout the corpus works discussed in this dissertation (cf. *Frankenstein*). Yet it is robot Maria's destructive energy that serves as the catalyst for resolving the central conflict of the story, i.e. the imbalance between mind and labor.

The final scene positions Freder, the heart, mediating the conflict between the mind, his father, and labor, the foreman. One reading of such a juxtaposition could be that the workers are mindless and easily swayed by rhetoric, whether that of human Maria or her robot counterpart. They are certainly depicted as such, including their furious resolve to

'burn the witch', i.e. robot Maria, after realizing they have been deceived, a low-tech solution usually associated with medieval peasants. The inhabitants of Metropolis do not fare much better, gaily dancing away as their city crumbles beneath them. However, the film is sympathetic towards the workers, particularly in its depiction of the misery and drudgery of both their work and their living quarters. Their radicalization ultimately comes through the intervention of robot Maria, with whom they participate in what is finally an act of creative destruction of *space*.

The space depicted in *Metropolis* is that of a rationally conceived city in which aesthetic satisfaction plays a major role, a cinematic realization of an essential feature of modernist architecture in general, i.e. the city as an extended 'machine for living'. Technology is the means by which this is achieved, enabled by the workers, who are denied the fruits of progress. The hopeful ending of the film suggests that the workers may someday share in the benefits of their own labor, which is consistent with the hope that technology could be used as a means of social emancipation, instead of the social exploitation that was beginning to emerge from mass production techniques, the automation of man later depicted by Chaplin in the 1936 *Modern Times*, for example. The spirit of *Metropolis* is still hopeful for the future, even if the film recognizes the radical changes necessary for bringing that future about. It is for this reason that technology has such a diverse role in the film. On the one hand it is depicted as the means of exploitation and the other as the means of emancipation. Both of these factors exist in the form of robot Maria, who embodies both the creative and destructive elements of technology; she is, in fact, the engine of change. The passion of robot Maria contrasts with the tedious moralizing of human Maria or worse, the hand wringing (literally) impotence of Freder. The inertia of Maria and Freder, read here their inability to act, is depicted spatially. Both end up as trapped in the confines of Dr. Rotwang's house while robot Maria seems to appear in

various places without having to travel to them. One minute she is radicalizing the workers and in the next, she is the star of a flash party in the city, but in the end it is she who imparts the will to act.

What robot Maria does is to effectively *collectivize* the workers to act, as opposed to Freder's individual and self-indulgent abasement, which is futile. By imparting this 'essence of humanity' to a machine, recall that robot Maria is not instructed to make the workers destroy Metropolis, the filmmakers recognize a dilemma of modernity and its aesthetic manifestation modernism: how to build something new without completely destroying the old. It is one thing, for example to destroy the decaying areas of cities to improve the lives of their citizens but quite another to destroy the lives of the citizens in order for them to have a better society. This would seem to lead to paralysis, an inability to act, as it were, that the film clearly recognizes in the character of Freder. Imparting the will to act to robot Maria is the same as inscribing the burden of change upon technology *itself*, an early fictional surrender of human autonomy to machines that is recapitulated in each of the corpus films discussed in this dissertation. In *Metropolis* it has all to do with space, a modernist reformation of city space into something that can serve the needs of all its inhabitants. In other words, in order to save Metropolis, it had to be destroyed.

2001: A Space Odyssey

2001 was released in 1968, at the height of the American space program and one year before the first moon landing by Apollo 11. The film presages the soon-to-be banality of lunar voyaging and instead focuses its attention, in a technological sense, on the exigencies of deep space travel, in this case to one of the moons of Jupiter. By doing so, it implicitly acknowledges the improbability of achieving deep space travel without the aid of technology, both in its spacecraft and its on-board sentient computer HAL, which represents

a further encroachment of machines over human autonomy. In this sense, *2001* is much closer to science fact than its filmic predecessors of the 1950's, films like *Conquest of Space* and *Forbidden Planet*, which usually ignored the technological and physiological barriers to space travel. Not only do the crew's human limitations place them at the mercy of HAL, but HAL displays more human like characteristics than the crew, at least in that most human of functions, speech.

Most of the dialogue in *2001*, there is very little for such a long film, is delivered in a sparse, machine-like way by the principle players, whose inarticulateness and lack of emotion is made even more apparent by HAL's facility with language and deepening 'emotional' crisis. If robot Maria is an example of the unbridled passion that leads to disorder, anarchy and chaos, then Dave, Frank and Dr. Floyd are examples of the bureaucratic restraint that leads to affable disinterest and vapidness, as witnessed by their routine participation in such an important mission. Penelope Gilliat writes:

The citizens of 2001 have forgotten how to joke and resist, just as they have forgotten how to chat, speculate, grow intimate, or interest one another. But otherwise everything is splendid. They lack the mind for acknowledging that they have managed to diminish outer space into the ultimate in humdrum, or by dealing with the fact that they are spent and insufficient, like the apes. (quoted in Sobchack, *Space* 178)

By giving human qualities to HAL, not the least of which is a kind of neurotic frailty, the filmmakers follow the tradition established in *Metropolis*, yet in both cases it is the space that determines the nature of the machine and the machine that compels action. In *Metropolis*, robot Maria's Emma Goldman impersonation ignites the creative destruction of the city while in *2001*, HAL's breakdown leads to the failure of the mission and crewman Dave's internal odyssey. It is as if by imparting these human qualities, the quality of action is conferred as well. HAL is imbued with the qualities (or defects) its makers no longer seem to possess, among which is the will to dominate, the will to power, which will appear again in the androids of *Blade Runner* and the sentient computer programs of *The Matrix*.

HAL's demise involves a return to its own origins, while its gradual descent into programmed nursery rhymes hints at crewman Dave's own imminent temporal transformations. In fact, for all its foregrounding of space, *2001* is much more concerned with time, a modernist characteristic. As sparse as the dialogue is, it contains numerous references to the passage of time. For example, when Dr. Floyd arrives at the orbiting space station he is greeted with comments on how long he has been away, "Eight months, isn't it?" This is followed by his encounter with the Russian scientists, who inquire about the duration of the quarantine at Clavius, now running to two weeks. On board the ship, Dave and Frank's interview is broadcast on the BBC with the reminder that that had been a seven minute delay in the transmission, due to the vast distances involved, which had been edited out. Later, Frank will celebrate a birthday on board, receiving a video birthday greeting from his parents back on Earth; Dr. Floyd had sent a similar birthday greeting to his daughter upon arriving at the space station. The film itself begins in the remote past and the famous sequence of the spinning bone transformed into spinning spacecraft is less a comment on space than it is the diachronic transformation of primitive tool into space based technology. Similarly, HAL's mutiny begins with its withdrawing support from the life functions of crew members who had been put in a state of suspended animation for the long voyage; signifying the suspension of time in its most meaningful aspect for humans, aging. If that were not enough, one must contend with the glacial pacing of this film, which includes an intermission. Current day audiences accustomed to brief scenes and rapid cutting would have a difficult time adjusting to the languorous, lingering scenes that comprise *2001*.

The space of the film is almost entirely in interiors, the only outside spaces presented are the opening sequence, significantly devoid of humans, the lunar discovery of the monolith and the deep space ejection of Frank and Dave. This is consistent with the film's

project of repudiating technological advances, specifically those that have resulted in the supreme technological triumph, man's conquest of space, in favor of the murky self-discovery implied in the film's open-to-interpretation ending. Dave's Odyssey is finally an *inward* journey, back and forth through *time*, a filmic assertion of Hamlet's, "the truth, Horatio, lies not in the stars, but in ourselves".

But whatever the direction of this Odyssey and whether it is geographical or metaphysical, Dave's journeys are both examples of *upward* striving, one towards the stars the other towards personal self-discovery and consciousness, decidedly '60's values. Such values, for those of us old enough to remember, nearly always involved a repudiation of 'consumer culture', which was usually defined by such technological innovations as cars and televisions. Computers, even ones as all seeing as HAL, are forever denied this sort of consciousness, but HAL's elevation to crew member entrusted with independent responsibility is in fact an ontological shift from machine to co-equal status with humans. The difference again is that what is possible for humans, is not for machines. That shift, both realistically and fictionally, is one determined by the real physiological exigencies of space travel, such as the enormous amounts of time involved, which were usually ignored by the vast amount of space fiction generated after the Second World War.

While victory in WWII brought the United States the political, military and economic hegemony it enjoys to this day it did not bring any new colonies; no *lebensraum* for the American victors. Economic hegemony, however, did bring about both the creation of new space and dislocation of existing spaces within the country itself. Suburbia, for instance, enabled blue-collar workers to escape the cities and relocate in middle-class housing developments, many of which, in California and New York sprang up around the post-war defense industry, cities like Levittown, New York and El Segundo, California, for example, homes to Grumman Aerospace Corporation and TRW, respectively. What is most striking

about suburbia however, is that it springs into being at the moment of the radical coupure referred to by Jameson and is indeed the first example of postmodern spatiality.³

Jameson points out the phenomenon of the ‘synchronicity of the non-synchronous’, the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history. In referring to the actual *spaces* of modernism, he writes: “...handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance” (*Logic* 307). This was also true of city spaces, and still is in Europe, where it is not uncommon to find glittering skyscrapers near to ancient monuments, as in Rome for example. This is neither nostalgia nor pastiche as this process of modernity or modernization is a genuinely historical one. The United States has little of this, although in some cities one can still find older buildings buried amongst modern ones (as in Florianopolis). What is recovered in suburbia is the memory of open, rural space which, combined with the ‘closed in’ living of cities, creates tenements with grass. By the early 1950’s, the time when many of these developments arose, people were already mourning the loss of both the frontier and live-able cities. Their solution was to incorporate the city into the frontier, the country into the city, constructing identical houses right next to each other, just like the inner cities they had escaped from, with all surrounded by still empty fields. Seen from above they look like medieval towns, minus the walls (they are there, but invisible) and with a bank, post office and supermarket at the center instead of a castle. Locking the inhabitants inside is the equivalent of keeping the city out.

Those same inner cities were surrendered to the next wave of immigrants, who were subjected to the same ontological relegation that the previous inhabitants had endured (a process alluded to in *Blade Runner*, see below). The war also created a great deal of capital, which fueled the post war boom in technological consumer products that we associate with the Fifties: dishwashers, toasters and television sets. Yet capitalism has always been

intertwined with space, as was shown earlier with Mandel's three stages of capitalism and the technological advances associated with them. Each of those, locomotives, cars, electronic technologies involves either the reduction or elimination of space. As Harvey notes:

The incentive to create the world market, to reduce spatial barriers, and to annihilate space through time is omni-present (i.e. throughout capitalism) as is the incentive to rationalize spatial organization into efficient configurations of production (serial organization of the detail division of labor, factory systems, and assembly line, territorial division of labor, and agglomeration in large towns), circulation networks (transport and communication systems), and consumption (household and domestic layout, community organization and residential differentiation, collective consumption in cities). Innovations dedicated to the removal of spatial barriers in all of these respects have been of immense significance in the history of capitalism, turning that history into a very geographical affair – the railroad and the telegraph, the automobile, radio and telephone, the jet aircraft and television, and the recent telecommunications revolution are cases in point. (232)

The Saturn V rocket, the ultimate expression of the internal combustion engine, seemed to bring with it the hope of new worlds to conquer: the Conquest of Space. The promise of limitless vertical expansion, made possible by the technological breakthrough of rocketry (similar to the very real horizontal expansion enabled by previous technological advances like the locomotive and car), spawned the great boom in 50's science fiction now that space travel seemed a real option. The multitude of science fiction created in this period deals with space travel and exploration, and encounters with aliens, often revealing the same ontological concerns we would expect if humans came into contact with other civilizations. It was only when space travel began to appear physiologically unrealistic for humans, that we might not be destined for the stars after all, that technology entered the scene as a substitute for humans. But in 1950's outer space science fiction this technology is generally viewed benevolently, patronizingly even, in much the same way that blacks and ethnic immigrants were depicted in earlier cinematic efforts, i.e., as hapless but lovable adjuncts to white supremacy. In other words, technology was not a threat.

Increasing dependence on that technology, and the even greater need to develop technologies sophisticated enough to make space travel possible, inevitably leads to the ontological differentiation, and doubts, that inform *2001* and *Blade Runner*, and numerous other films that depict problematic relationships between humans and our machine offspring. But even before then, as audiences themselves became more aware of what real space travel entails, the realities of time imposed themselves: we simply don't live long enough to get anywhere. It is all well and good to have such creative imaginings as warp drive and suspended animation to overcome the limitations of our life-spans but since such things in no way exist, the promise of space travel implied by such devices sinks into fantasy, instead of the great hope for limitless vertical expansion ushered in by 1950's rocket technology.

The remoteness of space travel, pun intended, its submergence into fantasy instead of possible reality, is brought home by the *Star Wars* series, whose very depictions of its events as having taken place 'long, long ago and far, far away' remove them from whatever human connection possible, in space or in time. This may seem obvious enough, but it is my contention that the supercession of outer space in science fiction and its devolution into fantasy is directly connected to the fact that we have already exhausted the vertical space implicit in space travel. Whatever vicarious thrills we enjoy in reading of the travels of Columbus or cowboys, we are not likely to feel similarly when we read of the spacecraft Voyager's encounters with one of the moons of Pluto, merely because of its machine status. This is quite different from the humanlike representations of robot Maria, HAL and the androids of *Blade Runner*, all of which demand some level of human interaction.

Both of the films discussed above are examples of modernist preoccupations with space and time. *Metropolis*, produced much earlier, retains the modernist hope in the saving power of rationality and its expression in technology, although it mediates that rationality

with an even greater hope on feeling, as witnessed by the emphasis placed on the 'heart'. Made when space travel was pure fantasy, *Metropolis* sets its sights on the city spaces so dear to modernism, placing its hopes on a meaningful enhancement of human life within an urban setting. It was in architecture after all that the principal gurus of modernism held sway. Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus movement all focused on cogent and rational urban planning as a means of creating a city that functioned as a machine for living (Harvey 31).

The machine metaphor appears in much modernist writing as well. William Carlos Williams, for example, called a poem 'a machine made of words', and fiction writers such as Hemingway certainly created prose that is characteristic of machine like efficiency in its spare use of words (Harvey 31). What is significant here is that in this period, the 1920's and 30's, technology had *already* been appropriated by high culture, both in its actual physical possession and its aesthetic form and content. It is no accident then that in *Metropolis* the machines that support the vast city are positioned *between* the upper and lower classes, a barrier that exists in real life as well. Today, more than anything else, it is access to and mastery of technology that separates the First World from the Third World and relegates the latter to an ever worsening ontological status.

Yet however much technology came to be a focal point of the modernists' aspirations it was not the original one. The modernist movement underwent many changes of perspective during its evolution, frequently reacting to tumultuous changes in world-views and social movements. Yet the modernist movement has never lost its connection to its origins, the Enlightenment project dedicated to the uplifting of human beings towards some as yet unknown destination.

While *2001: A Space Odyssey* rejects the centering role of technology as a means of attaining the modernist and Enlightenment hope it does maintain the hope in some

monumental struggle to achieve the desired end. In *2001*, the central feature is now self-discovery, freed from the chains of technology, which, in 1968, was already beginning to be seen as oppressive and controlling. This had always been the danger in the modernist project, the ” ‘iron cage’ of bureaucratic rationality from which there is no escape” (Harvey 15).

This bureaucratic rationality is precisely what is on display in *2001*, in the form of the techno-evolutionary approach to human development; witness the spinning bone visually transformed into a spacecraft. Ultimately, the spaceship itself becomes the ‘iron cage’, escape from which can only result in a kind of death, physical in Frank’s case and metaphysical in Dave’s. The generally upbeat ending of the film seems to promise that escape from the technological trap will enable the search for human realization to continue as it once had, before the confining limitations of rational thought imposed themselves. I would argue that, in this sense, *2001* can be read as a modernist critique of the Enlightenment meta-narrative, summarized by the editors of PRECIS 6 as “...positivistic, technocentric and rationalistic...with a belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production” (qtd in Harvey 8-9). Jameson points out an anti-modernist trend within modernism itself, which arises from:

...a violent or muffled protest against modernization, now grasped as technological progress in the largest sense. These anti-modern modernisms sometimes involve pastoral visions or Luddite gestures and ...involve what is sometimes referred to as a new wave of anti-positivist, *spiritualistic* (my italics), irrational reactions against triumphant enlightenment progress or reason. (*Logic* 304)

Crewman Dave’s egress from all of this is both repudiation of technology and rationality and return, return to what existed before, i.e. a sort of metaphysical *cum* mystical search for one’s true self, the Judeo-Christian meta-narrative that was supplanted by the reason and rationality of the Enlightenment. It is worth noting that Arthur C. Clarke, the

author of the novel on which the film is based, was a disciple of the Russian mystic G.I. Gurdjieff, much of whose teaching informs the film's ending. Mysticism and rationality would seem to be incompatible, especially if one reads the function of meta-narrative to be the final arbiter of contradiction.

For all its spectacular special effects, *2001* is more of a parody of its outer space predecessors than a sophisticated re-make, (Corseuil). Part of this lays in its depiction of the sheer banality of space travel, a strong de-glamorization of what had previously been portrayed as epic and heroic adventuring. While earlier space voyage films had simply transferred the expansionist dream from the frontier and the city to outer space, *2001* implicitly recognizes the resultant de-humanization of its astronauts and subsequent humanization of their technological adjuncts. But the legacy of this film, from an historical position, is that it repudiates space travel not only when such travel seemed possible but also at the same moment that cities were starting to collapse. The late sixties were when the modernist hopes in cities as machines for living began to give way to the pressing urgencies of urban blight and decay. This is of particular relevance to spatial understandings of the break between modernism and postmodernism.

Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*

“There must be some way out of here” *Bob Dylan, All Along the Watchtower*

There is no clear definition of what separates postmodernism from modernism. Terry Eagleton, no fan of postmodernism, writes:

There is, perhaps, a degree of consensus that the typical post-modernist artefact is playful, self-ironizing and even schizoid; and that it reacts to the austere autonomy of high modernism by impudently embracing the language of commerce and the commodity. Its stance towards cultural tradition is one of irreverent pastiche, and its contrived depthlessness undermines all metaphysical solemnities, sometimes by a brutal aesthetic of squalor and shock. (Eagleton, *Awakening 2*)

Carl Freedman's assesses the difference as follows:

The basic contrast generally adduced is that modernism tends towards the monumental and the mythic, while postmodernism works to undermine such totalizing structural principles, favoring instead a protodeconstructive stress on the marginal, the fragmentary, and the heterogeneous. According to this view, the characteristic modernist tone is lofty and not infrequently tragic, while postmodernism inclines more readily toward the ribald and comic, and sometimes toward a certain flattening of affect altogether. Modernism upholds the traditional authority of high art, while postmodernism revels in a scandalous mixing of high and low, of traditional humanistic culture with the culture of mass society. Modernism, enim, remains, for all its sense of irony, committed to the classic aesthetic project, whereas postmodernism strives to break decisively with the category of the aesthetic. (182)

It is not uncommon to find features from both movements within the same work, which makes any attempt at definitive categorization problematic at best. Flattening of affect, for example, is one of the most obvious features of *2001* yet that film is hardly self-ironizing or concerned with the marginal. However difficult it is to define differences, *Blade Runner*, the next film to be discussed in this chapter, is by consensus a postmodern artifact. Since it is so heavily informed by its modernist predecessor *Metropolis*, it is useful to analyze it in terms of its differences with that film, vis-à-vis the tripartite themes of this dissertation: space, technology and ontology.

In *Blade Runner* ontological status is put into question because of technological advances, although the underlying class issues that inform *Metropolis* still remain. The raising of the androids to human simulations, and the ambiguous relationships that ensue, take place in a future Los Angeles that seems exactly like what people in 1982 thought it would look like: a globalized Pacific Rim city. Janet Staiger points out that “One of the most immediate signifiers of the genre of science fiction is the representation of a known city in which readily distinguishable features are present while other parts are rewritten.” (*Alien Zone II* 97). Thus downtown Los Angeles is rewritten to have a definite Asian feel while at the time the film was made it was exclusively the domain of the city’s Mexican and Central American community. The film substitutes one ethnic group for another but

maintains the real-life sense of activity and urgency one encounters in any downtown, leaving the uptown, real and figurative, to the towering skyscraper of the Tyrrel Corporation, whose inhabitants are examples of an increasing sterilization of affect and will; at least in *Metropolis* the upper classes still know how to have a good time. The Los Angeles depicted in *Blade Runner* appears with its current day polarities between horizontal and vertical merely enhanced. The cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (cited by Sobchack, *Cities*) writes:

The vertical versus the horizontal dimension?...[A] common response is to see them symbolically as the antithesis between transcendence and immanence, between the ideal of the disembodied consciousness (a skyward spirituality) and the idea of earth-bound identification. Vertical elements...evoke a sense of striving, a defiance of gravity, while the horizontal elements call to mind acceptance and rest. (129)

For Roy Batty, the android protagonist of *Blade Runner*, the central conflict is most certainly between transcendence and immanence, literally life and death as it were. His encounter with Mr. Tyrrel recalls the foreman's meeting with Freder's father in *Metropolis* in that it takes place high above the horizontal or subterranean milieu reserved for laborers. A significant contrast between the two is in the reversal of subjects. In *Metropolis*, the workers labor below to support the pleasure gardens of Metropolis, the film opens with Freder and his girlfriend playing by the fountain. Made as it was in the heyday of modernism, *Metropolis* reinforces the notion of vertical striving as being somehow concomitant with finer appreciation, aestheticism, if you like, and certainly never questions the desirability of such a state. It also recognizes the mass upon which that edifice is built, however. All this refinement and good taste was built on the backs of working people, an inherently political statement. One of the principal ironies of *Blade Runner* is that it infuses the androids with life, even humanity, while the upper classes, in their high towers, are more robot-like and flat of affect than the androids. While the Mr. Tyrrels of the world continue to inhabit the high places, the world of play is now *below*, whether in the teeming streets

and bars of downtown Los Angeles or in the derelict hotel inhabited by J.F. Sebastian and his old-fashioned toys, an interesting reversal on *Metropolis*, where play is reserved for the upper classes. One reason for this is that the corporate entities of *Blade Runner* differ substantially from the aesthetes of *Metropolis*, presumably because the corporate preoccupation with making money allows little time for frivolity. The original impetus for that vertical striving, a truly modernist impulse, has become increasingly sterile. Staiger notes:

...as modernism continues to respond only to the aesthetics of a select few and capitalism's benefits fail to spread evenly, the signifiers for high modernism and monopoly capitalism are potential sites for a dialogical rewriting that implies the alienating decay and deadening of that vision. (98)

Part of that decay is in the very cities that were intended to remedy the conditions of the non-select.

The hope that all could share in the benefits of capitalism is still at work in *Metropolis* but what ultimately separates *Blade Runner* from *Metropolis* is the former's dystopian view of city space and vertical ascension. As Sobchack comments:

[An] image of the failure of the aspiring city is...retaining the city's highness, but temporizing its value as 'past'. Here, the city's lofty architecture is not destroyed; rather, the originally positive and transcendent value of architectural 'highness' becomes dominated by the negative and nihilistic value of 'emptiness'. Highness thus remains an ideal value but now has little to do with human beings. (*Cities* 131)

This 'emptiness' is on display in each of the films discussed. Recall the opening scene in *Metropolis*, where Maria confronts Freder with his 'brothers and sisters'. There are still enough traces of humanity in Freder for him to become aware of the lack of social justice in his own society, but he seems to be an exception. The rest of the upper classes are more than content to party down as their world collapses around them, exhorted by robot Maria to 'watch the world go to the devil'. Later, in *2001*, this emptiness reveals itself in both the cavernous space of the spacecraft itself and the vapidness of the human players. HAL has more human qualities than either of the crewman, suggesting that technological evolution

has indeed enabled man to reach the stars but at the cost of part of his humanness. In *Blade Runner*, not only are the androids more human than the humans but the higher spaces are dominated by those who have become more robot than human. The spirit of robot Maria, her will to act, lives on in Roy Batty, although he still believes enough in the modernist impulse to save Deckard from falling, literally and figuratively, into the horizontal spaces below. Deckard merely does what any fictional American hero would do when faced with urbanization; like Huck Finn, he heads for the territories.

In the end it is the android Roy Blatty who delivers what Sobchack calls an ‘elegy to high modernism: “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe...Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion...All these things will be lost in time...like tears in rain” (*Space* 273). The emphasis on time, in this case the loss of time, is also a break between modernism and post-modernism. In *Metropolis* time is significantly present; clocks abound, especially in the recurring image of the clock face/mechanical wheel that seems to control the giant machinery. The slavery of the workers to time is no doubt meant to represent submission to the mass production techniques of the machine age but whatever the reason, time is foregrounded. Similarly in *2001*, which most certainly is preoccupied with diachronic transformation of both humans and technology. In *Blade Runner*, time is seconded to space, in this case the elaborate set design of the film, which is never out of view. While elaborate sets are also present in *Metropolis*, they do not approach the ‘excess sceneography’ of *Blade Runner* which led one critic to say that “the setting *is* the film” (Sobchack, *Space* 262). This point will be discussed further in the next chapter but here it is worth mentioning that in *The Matrix* set design is subordinate to special effects and time is irrelevant, as is the modernist hope in the city as a space for human growth and emancipation.

This spatial and dimensional separation of classes is, in Western culture at least, as old as the Middle Ages, when peasants labored in the fields to support the lord in his high castle

(cf. *Metropolis*). Thus any depiction of this relationship is less representation than faithful description of the way things really are. Class movement is inevitably depicted as vertical ascension, and justifiably so, since that's exactly what it is. So it is right to assume that cinematic representation of space has inevitably to do with some sort of class distinction, a distinction extended to both the ownership of a particular space and the right, or lack, of another class to be in that space. All too frequently that distinction descends into ontological differentiation, whether based on race, gender or speciation. In science fiction, that relationship inevitably has something to do with technological processes as well, especially since, as described in Chapter One, the exploration and exploitation of new space is irrevocably tied to the development of new technologies.

Earlier, an attempt was made to show how the conquest of horizontal space was made possible by technological advances harnessed to ontological differentiation and how, upon the exhaustion of that space, similar energies were used to effect the conquest of earth-based vertical space. Representations of these have found their way into science fiction, consistent with Kuhn's observation that science fiction reflects the preoccupations of the age (*Alien Zone 10*).

Each of the films discussed above incorporates the joint themes of space, technology and ontology. An attempt has been made to show how the dominant spatiality of the modernist and postmodernist movements is reflected in the spaces represented in these films, and how each of those spaces is interrelated with both technology and its growing ontological emancipation from human control. This same methodology will be brought to bear in the following and concluding chapter.

Chapter III

CYBERSPACE, POSTMODERNISM, AND *THE MATRIX*

The previous two chapters defined and exemplified how the exploration and exploitation of new spaces are intimately connected with new technologies and how ontological doubts come into play when those spaces are contested. In Chapter One, I tried to describe how the horizontal exploitation and domination of the United States was made possible by the locomotive and the automobile, and how these represent the technological achievements of the first stage of capitalism, described by Jameson (following Mandel). The third stage of capitalism, the current period, is characterized by the rise of electronic technologies and multinational capitalism, of which cyberspace is both part and parcel.

The first and most immediate thing about cyberspace is that it is created space, access to which is available to anyone with a computer and telephone service. Since the latter are the specific domain of those multinationals involved in the electronics and communications industries, no one enters this space without somehow paying the multinational corporations that are the owners of the space itself. This gives special meaning to Jameson's assertion that late capitalism, or postmodernism, is the cultural dominant of the day and that any cultural output takes place within the field of postmodernism. Certainly anything that takes place in cyberspace is, a priori, an event within the framework of the multinational corporations that constitute globalization and late capitalism.

Arguably, this is true about previous spatial incursions. Capitalism itself is intrinsically connected to the opening and exploitation of new spaces through mass production of the cars, locomotives or cheap high-speed computers used in those spaces. But unlike previous spatial incursions which had little to do with cultural output, except perhaps for thematic content, cyberspace has already had an enormous impact on the *forms*

of cultural production, from hypertext and made-for-internet films to interactive pornography and MUDs that involve literally millions of players worldwide.

The ontological uncertainties that accompany such novel forms of production were briefly discussed in Chapter One but from a capitalist standpoint what is necessary to believe about cyberspace is what was necessary to believe about other spaces, whether horizontal like the Frontier or vertical, like outer space, i.e. its (seemingly) infinite quality. Giordano Bruno, the Renaissance Italian philosopher, wrote, “Infinite space is endowed with infinite quality and in the infinite quality is lauded the infinite act of existence” (qtd. in Harvey 244). Domination of infinite space would then presumably involve domination of both quality and existence, which certainly seems to have been the case for much of human history. With this notion as a starting point it is relatively easy to imagine how one seemingly infinite space came to be supplanted by another, as the first was either proved to be non-infinite or another’s potential became theoretically more accessible. How else can one understand either colonialism or imperialism? No country ever set out to acquire another country’s land until it had begun to exhaust the material benefits of its own. That domination of space is connected with domination of existence is made readily apparent today when one considers the superior military strength of the United States. Such strength is based purely on vertical domination, air power, which led one American general to gleefully point out that in the upcoming war against Iraq the Americans would ‘own the sky’.

The exhaustion of future, city space for anything other than dystopian musings over the failure of the modernist urban dream opens the way to postmodern contemplation about cyberspace, the space of late capitalism. The intrinsic postmodernism of cyberspace lies in both its being a product of late capitalism and in its dissolution of certain ontological boundaries that in the past were identified with modernism. In fact, as David Harvey points

out, one of the distinguishing features of postmodern literature and film is its compression of spaces, both physical and ontological. Unlike modernism, which often involves attempts across time to piece together the ‘mystery’ of a central character’s life (Harvey gives *Citizen Kane* as a cinematic example, I would suggest *2001: A Space Odyssey* as well), postmodern works often entail the superimposition of one ‘world’ over another. Regarding the David Lynch film *Blue Velvet*, Harvey writes:

In the more post-modern format of the contemporary cinema we find, in a film like *Blue Velvet*, the central character revolving between two quite incongruous worlds – that of a conventional 1950’s small-town America with its high school, drugstore culture, and a bizarre violent, sex-crazed underworld of drugs, dementia, and sexual perversion. It seems impossible that these two worlds should exist in the same space, and the central character moves between them, unsure which is the true reality, until the two worlds collide in a terrible denouement. (48)

Harvey adds, “Characters no longer contemplate how they can unravel or unmask a central mystery, but are forced to ask, ‘Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of myself is to do it?’ instead” (48). Such questions abound in both *Blade Runner* and, especially, *The Matrix*.

This is a characteristic of postmodern fiction in general, with its preoccupation with ‘other worlds’ and otherness. The acknowledgement of different ‘worlds’ is, in one sense, merely recognition of demographic reality, at least in large cities in the industrialized western world, and precisely the sort of city space one sees in *Blade Runner*. In that film the predominant sense of space is vertical, with the higher spaces reserved for the economic and cultural elite (Deckard’s initial reluctance to track down the replicants is removed once he is threatened with being relegated to ‘little person’ status). The lower regions are inhabited by third world immigrants, who are imprisoned below by the combined, and interdependent, forces of capitalist exigency and ontological relegation. A similar geography is revealed in *Metropolis* and *The Matrix*.

The Matrix has already become a paradigmatic example of cinematic cyberspace fiction and reflects both the late capitalism described by Jameson and the ontological questions mentioned above. In this sense *The Matrix* is postmodern in both form and content because it is produced by a multimedia multinational involved in every aspect of transmission, from fiber optic cable to Internet provider. In content, it is the logical and inevitable conclusion of the merging of the tripartite themes of space, technology and ontology precipitated by the three films already discussed. Another way of putting this is to say that its base, electronic reproduction, is reinscribed by its superstructure, computerized simulacra and video games.

The Matrix is heavily informed by *Metropolis*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and *Blade Runner*. These films all share the tripartite themes of space, ontology and technology, foregrounding, for the audience, one over the others in varying degrees. Each of these films, and the myriad others that they either spawned or were derived from, take place in what may be called *concrete* space, in order to distinguish that space from the *imaginary* space of *The Matrix*, and its own literary and cinematic brethren. The latter group includes such diverse literary and cinematic efforts as the oneiric spaces of H.P Lovecraft's *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* and *The Wizard of Oz* to present day works like *Total Recall* and *Vanilla Sky* and the entire cyberpunk corpus. The difference between other abstract spaces and cyberspace is that cyberspace exists, and already brings with it emergent ontological problems, as referred to in Chapter One. The point here is not whether such possibilities as complete ontological equivalence are necessarily real but that enough is present to suggest that they represent artistic and social concerns about the possible outcomes of computer technology.

The Matrix derives its name from a trope used in the cyberpunk novels of William Gibson and features many of the visual and stylistic references that dominate the cyberpunk

sub-genre, including flattened affect, gratuitous violence and comic books, the last in both form and content. It was in comic books after all that the questionable ontologies of man-machines and mutants first took *visual* form. Many of these are finding their way into films, from *The X-Men* and *Spiderman* to the soon to be released *The Hulk* (directed by Chinese auteur Ang Lee, no less), all of which refer somehow to technology gone out of control. The spaces represented in those films are also present in *The Matrix* and as this dissertation is primarily concerned with spaces, *The Matrix* will be analyzed along those terms.

The film represents three spaces: the cyberspace reconstruction of present day city space, future earth space (depicted as outer space), and, to a lesser degree, cyberspace itself (in its digital form). The vertical, horizontal, and subterranean dimensions discussed above also figure in these representations. .

City Space (s)

The Matrix represents a familiar (present) city space, although unlike most science fiction it does not reveal which city is being depicted (the film was shot in Sydney, Australia but street names recollect Los Angeles). The same above and below dimensional references that inform *Blade Runner* and *Metropolis* dominate this urban landscape too, along with the now familiar ontological references associated with those spaces: the higher spaces are reserved for superior beings. The high places, in this case the corporate towers, are dominated by the Agents, the sentient programs that police the matrix. We are told that no human has ever survived an encounter with the agents; their only hope is to run. Interviews and interrogations conducted by the Agents take place in these towers and it is Neo and Trinity's assault on one that is the climax of the film.

Much is made of Neo being the 'One', i.e. the human being capable of reasserting human mastery over technology. It is significant, from a spatial viewpoint, that his gradual assumption of that role takes place in each of the spatial dimensions (vertical, horizontal and

subterranean) referred to above. His first successful encounter with an agent actually happens on the rooftop of a skyscraper, the limit of vertical, city space as it were. His survival is an indication that he may be the 'one' after all; this encounter is determined by technology: helicopters and firearms. Neo's subsequent encounter with Agent Smith takes place in the subterranean space of the urban metro, whose sole inhabitant is a derelict. After a brief exchange of gunfire, Neo and the agent engage in a brutal test of physical strength, which is finally settled by an oncoming train that smashes into the agent; a timely apparition from the first stage of capitalism. Neo's final conquest occurs, appropriately enough, in the narrow corridor of the inner city hotel used by the group as a base. Here Neo masters the technology of cyberspace itself, decoding the material representations of both the agents and the milieu into digitized computer space. In other words, mastery of space, technology and ontology occur simultaneously.

Represented city space in *The Matrix* recalls Lefebvre's definition of abstract space mentioned in Chapter One (p. 21); similar associations are made, whether social, political, economic or, in the matrix, ontological. The vertical spaces are associated with power, that of the agents, the subterranean with death (Neo is literally washed down into a sewer after being disconnected from the matrix). On two occasions, the first when Morpheus introduces Neo to a computer simulation of the matrix itself (a replication of a replication), and the second in the Lincoln on their way to meet the oracle, there is a combination of horizontal space and horizontal movement; the crowds are passing by. Here Morpheus informs Neo of the sheep like nature of most humans, thus providing the necessary justification for destroying them since they are in a state of willing submission. Just as the previous technological incarnations discussed in Chapter Two, robot Maria, HAL and the androids of *Blade Runner*, all somehow usurped the will to act from their increasingly dehumanized

masters, it is Neo's reassertion of that will, the 'essence of humanity' that enables him to overcome the agents.

All this is very playful, in the best postmodernist sense. Earlier, a reference was made to the influence of comic books on *The Matrix*, which inform both the look and content of the film. The opening sequence, for example, when Trinity is trapped in the warehouse, has all the tight framing and lighting one usually sees in comics, including the suspended movements and reverse frame shots. In terms of the story however, it is Neo's transformation from mild-mannered computer programmer to ass-kicking cybernaut that most closely resembles the entire comic-book oeuvre, which is nearly always based on the hero's alternating between different ontologies (cf. *Spiderman*, *X-Men*, etc.). Part of that transformation is the hero's recognition and acceptance of his differentness, due to some superhuman power, followed by his willingness to use that power for good or evil and endurance of the ensuing estrangement from his previous life. Freder and Decker, of *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner* respectively, also suffer estrangement of sorts, which is shown visually in their alternating between the two worlds, above and below, which dominate their environment. Neo's differentness is established in an early scene.

We first meet him in his squalid apartment, asleep in front of his computer, which never sleeps. He answers a knock at the door and after a brief exchange over some outlaw CD-ROM he agrees to go out with a group of people to a nightclub. There we see him standing apart from the group, unable or unwilling to participate in the party. The next day he receives a lecture at work from his unsympathetic boss and meekly accepts his rebuke, scurrying to his isolated cubicle. This is well within the Clark Kent/Superman or Peter Parker/Spiderman tradition of mild-mannered office worker about to emerge as something more. Consistent with this transformation is the hero's reluctance to either recognize or assume the responsibility implicit in his differentness, hence Neo's ongoing doubts about

whether he is really ‘the one’. In Neo’s case the estrangement from normal society is even more drastic, although he does express a desire to go back to the matrix in a later scene with Morpheus.

The filmmakers have great fun compounding the imagery from *Superman* comics into Neo’s encounters with agents. Part of the Superman myth, i.e. the comic book, is the hero’s physical ability to “leap tall buildings in a single bound, outrun a speeding locomotive and stop bullets”. All of these were included in the opening credits of the 1950’s television series *Superman*, images of which figure prominently in Neo’s growing mastery over the agents. I will expand this connection later but refer to: 1) his battle with Agent Smith in the subway in which he leaps to freedom while the agent is run over by the train; 2) he literally stops bullets in the scene in the hotel corridor and 3) the end of the film where he leaves the phone booth and soars into the sky; the phone booth itself a recurring visual homage to Superman. Thus, for all its high-art homage to *Blade Runner* and *Metropolis*, *The Matrix* acknowledges its low-art roots as well, in the kitschy comic book content of its hero’s abilities. If pastiche is in fact a defining feature of postmodernism, then *The Matrix* certainly fits the category.

The offense that Jameson takes with pastiche is due to what he perceives as its emptiness, or rather its lack of humor; he refers to it alternately as blank parody or a statue without eyeballs (*Logic* 16-17)* . It is a result of a kind of historical derailment that ransacks the past instead of creating a new style, and thus interrupts our cultural advance by raping it instead of building upon it. Sometimes Jameson seems like one of those people to whom you have to explain jokes, or who make you feel guilty for having bad taste. For example, approaching Florianópolis one is greeted with the architectural and cultural incongruity of

* During the defense of this dissertation, Prof. Sergio Bellei pointed out to the author the meaning of this metaphor: such a statue is depthless, i.e. it cannot be seen into, and thus exists merely on the surface. My critique of *The Matrix* supports the description. I’m grateful to Prof. Bellei for the insight.

Havan, a pastiche of classical Greek architecture and American patriotic symbolism. A temple of consumerism, whose name refers to the capital of a country which is the last one in the Western Hemisphere that continues to resist the capitalist ideals it invokes in both form and content. The responses to the extravagant bad taste of this building run anywhere from a smile to a diatribe on the way the world has gone to hell; one can only imagine Jameson's critique. But not getting the joke that someone else does is hardly a reason for proclaiming that no joke exists. A film like *The Matrix*, which includes numerous cultural references in its pastiche accomplishes the same objectives of parody, especially when it includes a vast amount of low-culture references (comic books and television shows) that in fact make up the cultural exposure of most of its audience. By agglomerating the past, the Superman artifact specifically, it helps to show us that much of what we take as normal cultural attitudes ("Truth, Justice and the American Way") were inculcated in us by comic books as much as by anything else. In other words, they are neither divinely inspired nor inherently true, but merely forms of social conditioning.

The pastiche involved in referencing both high and low art within the same film is transferred onto space, time and technology as well; the entire film may be viewed as a pastiche of styles, or better, time/styles. Jameson takes offense with this characteristic yet it can be seen as merely a reflection of the diversity that actually defines the present day. And while the modernists may stake a claim to diversity, their cultural references were inevitably as high-minded as the works they produced. Two scenes connected by a peculiar choice of vehicle exhibit this compound sense, this postmodern compression of worlds and times.

Neo's first return to the matrix begins with the group's insertion into a derelict downtown building, homage to the Bradbury Building of downtown Los Angeles, used in *Blade Runner* as the home of J.F. Sebastian. The intense *haute couture* styling of the heroes is highlighted in a framed group shot reminiscent of comic super-hero posing (read *X-Men*

or *The Justice League of America*). They look like Italian super-models, a bit fetishistic in black and white leather and flat of affect, always in contrast with the drab, early sixties looking attire of the agents, who resemble either FBI agents or IBM salesmen and who are even flatter than the heroes. After this shot, the group piles into a black 1962 Lincoln Continental with 'suicide' doors, a truly iconographic car. This image of compound time/styles is actually not uncommon in Los Angeles, a city that has little in the way of defining architectural landmarks (the Capital Records building, which looks like a record player, and older apartment buildings that look like steamships are some exceptions). However, it does have many stylistic incongruities that help define the place: car-culture and chic are two examples. The group proceeds to a housing project with an Australian aboriginal seated in the lobby. Morpheus and Neo enter an elevator, which features an Arabic graffiti of the name All-h, and finally enter the Oracle's flat, which contains representatives from different cultural backgrounds, including a white Hare Krishna boy speaking in an antipodal English accent. If that were not enough, the Oracle, a black American woman, points out a quotation in (bad) Latin that refers to a Greek propheticess that she herself is a reference to. If all this seems a bit confused it is because the film itself is a melange of philosophy, vaguely familiar mythologies, political commentary (and critical theory) and popular culture, i.e. pastiche, one of the hallmarks of postmodernism that distinguishes it from the parody associated with modernism.

Parody, the satirical imitation of an original, has been used as a form of criticism since the classical period and the subjects to which it has been applied ranges from the serious to the mundane. As a political tool, parody has always had the potential to subvert existing opinion and conduct but can only be effective when the political structure it is criticizing allows it to be published, otherwise one has to resort to allegory, of which more will be said shortly. The subversive potential of parody, for example, is present in *Metropolis*, which

confounds the illusion that a perfectly functioning city is equally just in its distribution of benefits and that workers are just good-natured imbeciles content with their lot, a commonly held belief of 1920's industrialists like Henry Ford. The film's withering depiction of a mindless, hedonistic and ineffectual upper class content to fiddle as their world crumbles around them must have been an eye opener to both the Weimar elite and Jazz Age Americans. *2001* parodies the heroic tradition of science fiction space travel, this time by revealing both its banality and its complete dependence on technology, de-mythologizing both the explorers and the enterprise itself. Recall that this film was produced at a time when humans reaching the moon was looked on as cosmic manifest destiny and astronauts as modern day Magellans, although nothing could be blander than *2001*'s deadpan treatment of space travel. Of course, parody demands that there is something to parody, even if it is merely high art itself. Arthur Kroker and David Cook write: "Parody is no longer possible because in America today, which is to say in the system of advanced modern societies, the real is parody...As Nietzsche predicted, we have finally passed through into that purely perspectival zone of virtual technology, virtual bodies, and virtual imagining systems" (qtd. in Hutcheon 303).

This quotation is a bit breathless, like similar things one finds in the writings of Jean Baudrillard, who asserts that Disneyland is the 'real' and that the Los Angeles that surrounds it belongs to the order of simulation (*Simulacra* 12); surely news to anyone mired in the gang violence or poverty of that city. Anyone looking for something to parody might consider the stylistic and intellectual excesses of some postmodern writing. Of course, Baudrillard's comment recalls the plot of *The Matrix*, a film filled with pastiche. And while a unified narrative somehow comes out of all this, a genuine political impulse does not. The central contradiction of *The Matrix* is that while its very narrative is one of creative destruction of the totalizing communications, electronic cyberspace world we inhabit it does

take any position on what to replace the existing structure with. Humans are to be liberated, but to what end? In *The Matrix*, enough eggs are broken, but where's the omelet?

The film's story is familiar enough. A vast conspiracy is at work to conceal some hidden and powerful secret that, if revealed, will change everything (read *JFK*, *The Parallax View*, *Winter Kills*, *Total Recall*, *The Truman Show*, et.al.). According to Jameson this type of conspiracy world-view is based on our inability to even think about the totalizing structure of multinational capitalism, thus the need to allegorize it in some way. But there is a contradiction here. Allegory is the deliberate process of substituting (or encoding) one figure for another, whether as a means of effecting a religious discourse, as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or a political one, as in *Animal Farm*. It is neither an accidental nor unconscious, unthinking process. Furthermore, a political allegory originates from an opposite or at least variant political position on the part of the author. Thus it is not only *meant* to critique, but does so by making readers do the work of figuring it out, as George Orwell demonstrated in *Animal Farm*.

The problem with Jameson's idea is that when applied to a film like *The Matrix*, which seems at once to beg for his allegorical interpretation, one opens the door for other allegorical readings, themselves embraced by the film's pastiche of philosophy, politics, and college freshman metaphysics. Besides, even if one applied an allegorical reading based on Jameson's remarks such a position implicitly contains some sort of critique of multinational capitalism which, given the fact that the producer is a multinational corporation, seems highly improbable. Even if that were the case, such a critique would have to somehow be present in the text itself. Yet at the heart of *The Matrix* is the same 'emptiness' revealed in the previous films discussed, only this time it is in the lack of any alternative political position to what the film is supposedly criticizing.

The lack of a coherent political discourse is what finally defines *The Matrix* and separates it from its cinematic ancestors *Metropolis* and, to a lesser extent, *Blade Runner* and *2001*. And it is this lack of a political position, of whatever bent, that sets postmodernism apart from previous aesthetic movements. As applied here, this is one indication of the ‘relief’ of postmodernism that Jameson describes, its liberation from the confines of positions that both defined previous movements and, at the same time, eventually trapped them in a discourse that, once exhausted, had nothing more to do than devour itself. Thus if we view *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* in the same type of continuum that we looked at *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner* we see *The Matrix* as a more mature post-modern work, since it no longer establishes its positions in any way with modernism. In *Blade Runner*, recall that the film’s postmodernism is mainly established by way of difference with *Metropolis*, most notably in its dystopian future and attempted recollections of the past, nearly all of which are false; recall the spurious family histories implanted in the androids and the reaction of one to the request “Tell me about your mother”. But no such connection exists between *The Matrix* and its cinematic past because, as will be shown, in this film the past can neither be recovered nor remembered, only reconstructed as a simulacra of what it was hoped to be.

This is made apparent in the character of Ciphher who, as his name suggests, cannot be ‘read’ with the same conventional apparatus that we read the other characters; Neo, Morpheus, and Trinity are all names that conjure up Judeo-Christian meta-narrative or Western philosophy/mythology. In terms of narrative, Ciphher functions as flesh and blood antagonist to Neo’s protagonist and ends up betraying the group to the Agents in exchange for a good life in the matrix. One is tempted here to recall Trotsky’s observation that inside every proletarian lies the heart of a bourgeois. The film has him say, very funnily, that he wants to be somebody important “like a movie producer”, but in the scene in which he

parlays his betrayal he comments on the luxuries available in the matrix, however unreal they may be. Relishing his steak and swirling his wine he is the true Dionysius, the arch consumer of pleasure and experience.

Jameson rightly notes that in the postmodernist rejection of ideology any misgivings about materialism (here read in the American sense, i.e. consumerism) are misplaced. Since consumerism is in a very real sense the antidote to the hair shirt of ideology, any residual guilt is banished along with the ideology that created it (*Logic* 387). This is doubly true in Cipher's case since he is not rejecting any particular political construct, there simply is not one, but instead rejecting the Western ideological principle that it is better to be free and know it than to be a slave and not know it. Put another way, Cipher chooses to reify the matrix.

As used by Jameson, reification means effacement of the traces of production from the commodity produced (*Logic* 314). Seen from Cipher's point of view it means that his re-entry into the matrix is done without his having any memory of the means of its production, i.e. the use of humans as batteries for generating what he will consume, "I want to remember nothing, nothing!" he insists. As Jameson puts it: "...you don't want to have to think about Third World women every time you pull yourself up to your word processor... or when you decide to consume your other luxury products" (*Logic* 315). While consumerist culture certainly involves other factors, this effacement is indispensable to its construction (315); 'guilt-free and loving it' might well be the advertising slogan of the entire post-modern era.

Of course the world that Cipher wants to return to is our world, our present, albeit one that functions a little better; in our world we don't find working pay phones in subway stations. Usually in a science fiction film, its past is our present, but in *The Matrix* its 'present' is ours. In either case, nostalgia is the operative mode. In *The Matrix*, nostalgia

takes the form of consumer items, specifically technology. Several items are foregrounded in the film, most notably an old-fashioned telephone receiver and a console, floor model television set, status products of the 1960's. The television appears in the scene where Morpheus explains the matrix to Neo. They appear in infinite, white, dimensionless space whose visual context is finally given by two leather armchairs with the television in the middle. The irony, intended or not, by having a living room limit otherwise infinite space is the film's acknowledgement of the central position that television occupies in our lives. The television itself is a reminder of a time when such models were considered more as furniture than simply electronic appliances, at once reminding us that there was indeed a time when such things had a value apart from what they transmitted, when the media was not the only message. In other words, technology was not always so disposable. In the '60's, telephones and televisions were still made in the United States, effacing their production would have meant effacing one's neighbors, even oneself. Later, Cypher throws his cell phone into a garbage pail. The point here is that nostalgia cannot extend back far enough to its pre-technological, specifically pre-electronic communications, period.

Insistence on forgetting everything is a recurring theme in *The Matrix*, which manifests itself in the form of consumption as well. There is a scene that takes place on the Nebuchadnezzar, Morpheus' ship, in which the crew discuss what food tastes like in the matrix. One character, Mouse, expresses his longing for "tasty wheat", a breakfast cereal he used to eat in the matrix. After some discussion about how the computers could 'know' how it could have tasted, Dozer brusquely informs them that the tasteless slop they are eating has all the amino acids and proteins they need. What is implicit in Mouse's minor mutiny is a longing for consumption, an option that no longer exists on a devastated planet. Just as many texts express nostalgia for space, or fresh air or better manners there is often a similar nostalgia for unbridled consumption. Hence the Lincoln Continental the group uses in the

matrix, as gas guzzling a car that has ever existed. Of course, it is not really consuming anything as nothing exists to be consumed, but it does satisfy a nostalgic consumer dream for the time when reckless gasoline consumption was normal and guilt-free. What is on display here is *virtual* consumption, which is a central theme of *The Matrix* and the essential project behind both it and cyberspace in general. An indication of this is the vicariousness and virtuality of the experiences that comprise most of the story.

Huge media conglomerates have invested heavily to make unreality a reality and however far they may be from the fiction of the film, they have succeeded in selling the virtues of vicarious experience to an economically isolated underclass that is increasingly deprived of the possibility of ever enjoying those experiences first hand. Films such as *The Matrix* help prepare the public for the introduction of new entertainment technologies which induce the very sleep the film seems to warn against – that vicarious experience is a legitimate substitute for the real. The same can be said about other representative communications media, including films, television and video games, but it is the unique ability of cyberspace to replicate every other form of communication that makes those forms increasingly irrelevant as products. One principal target is the written word.

In *The Matrix*, the written word appears on four occasions. The first is in Neo's apartment where a message appears on his computer screen. Shortly after, he is seen retrieving a computer disc from a hollowed out book, Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, a reference to the forthcoming revelations about the matrix. That a book is used to conceal the disc reflects the status of the written word in a cyberspace world. The book is a perfect hiding place because nobody would ever look in a book and since the book is empty there is nothing in books anyway. Compare this with Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, written at a time when the written word was so dominant that a letter could be hidden in plain sight, invisible precisely because of its ubiquity. In *The Matrix*, the book is a perfect

hiding spot because of its irrelevance. Later, when the agents question Neo, an enormous file folder is placed on the desk separating him from the agent. The agent opens the file, briefly looks inside and pushes it aside, leaving a visual image of the marginalization of the written word.⁴

In fact, with the sole exception of the initial computerized message to Neo, the film treats all written material as either in need of translation or indecipherable. Consider the Latin inscription in the Oracle's apartment *Tenet Nosce*, which has to be translated for Neo as 'know thyself' (the Oracle herself seems in need of translation, better *nosce te ipsum*). Similarly, the computer code of the matrix itself, which flashes across computer screens as an unknown language that can only be read, as it were, by translating it into the visual images that constitute the unreality of the matrix. Even the literary references within the story itself reflect translation or interpretation of other types of texts; dreams, more specifically. Neo is invited to go down the 'rabbit hole', a reference to Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*, whose adventures begin when reading stops and dreaming begins, and reminded like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* that he's "not going to be in Kansas anymore". This last is an example of the general literary muddle-headedness of the film since Neo is told this when he is in fact in the film's equivalent Oz instead of its Kansas. There is even a reference to that famed biblical dreamer Nebachudnezzar, whose name graces Morpheus' ship, Morpheus himself a sleeper of some mythological renown. A similar translation, this time of the spoken word, occurs when Neo is insultingly called a 'copper top' by one of Morpheus' crew, meaningless as an epithet but well-known as a commercial slogan for Duracell batteries. Its significance is revealed only when Morpheus holds up the battery to Neo's face for him to see.

While *The Matrix* seems almost at times to plead for different critical interpretation, its own internal preoccupation is with translation into the visual image. The fiber optic

method for doing so is privileged throughout, transmitting both knowledge, as in learning kung fu or how to fly a helicopter, and the vicarious experience of using that knowledge. It is in its ambivalent treatment of vicarious experience that *The Matrix* poses a challenge to a class-based, materialist criticism. The film may have a lot to say about over dependence on technology, but it cannot avoid its own role as a product and producer of the very process it seems to condemn. Computer generated vicarious experience is not only a burgeoning reality but is becoming both a valid and acceptable alternative for those who do not have the material means of participating in genuine experience. And that says a lot about class.

Anyone trying to consider class distinctions in *The Matrix* is faced with a problem. In the film's reality, all humans, with the exception of the Nebuchadnezzar's crew, are proletarians. Besides abolishing class distinctions among humans who live in the matrix, the film also places machines as the dominant class. Any class struggle occurs is between them and a small group of human revolutionaries, but it is hard to talk about classes when one is made up of machines. There is certainly exploitation of labor and resources by machines of humans, a point that could be interpreted as a commentary on globalization and the perils of unrestrained capitalism. But the film's internal logic does not seem to allow for anything other than that, ignoring as it does any commentary on the subterranean human community, Zion, that exists outside of the domain of the machines. In other words, there is no reason to suspect that life in Zion is any different than life in the matrix or on board the ship, with a captain and a crew whose functions seem to say as much about class division as the digital world of the matrix.

The film includes some startling images of this division in its representation of who actually works in the real world. The two black crewmen, Tank and Dozer, are 'pure' humans, born in Zion, who seem to do most of the work on the ship; interestingly, while not machines, they have machine sounding names (read bulldozer). It is Tank who has to handle

all the equipment while the white crew members lay back on the chair and either play virtual reality simulations or go out and try to save the human race from machines. The only other crew member observed actually working on the ship is Cipher, who has some choice comments about being ordered around by Morpheus and who decides to trade in reality for imagination instead of asking to go to Zion. In fact, Cipher and Mouse are the only two characters that actually seem like proletarians, both visually and behaviorally, something that reinforces the underlying ideology of the film. Besides their low-life visual appearance, which stands in sharp contrast to the stylish, well bred and healthy other crew members they also seem to be the only ones interested in having a drink and a decent meal, or satisfying their sexual drives.

Physical contact of any sort is at a premium in the film. Besides the mayhem that occurs in the matrix, the only contact between humans is a brief handshake and a chaste kiss near the end of the film, in yet another cultural reference, this time to *Sleeping Beauty*. The only other references to sexual needs and desires emanate from Cipher and Mouse, the two *lumpenprole* crew members. Mouse designs *The Lady in Red* program which distracts Neo on his first foray into the matrix training program, and later tries to solicit some response from Neo on her allure; Cipher tries to do the same, inquiring about Neo's 'luck' with Trinity. Both of these characters are presented to us as white trash by their physical appearance and physical appetites. The implication is that perhaps Neo and Trinity will find romance and make love, while Cipher and Mouse can only aspire to getting (well). This is precisely the predominant ideological discourse in the United States today where class distinctions are as determined by visual appearance as they are by the types of pleasures available to each class. Thus economic classes, and even cultural positions, are immediately identifiable by clothing; rappers, skinheads and even Generation X have uniforms. It may be argued that the other crewmembers are ruthlessly dedicated and single-minded

revolutionaries who do not have time for the grosser pleasures of life but they certainly do not deny themselves the accouterment of chic-ness when they enter the matrix. In fact, it is visual appearance that determines class in *The Matrix*, in keeping with the general ideology at work in the culture that produced it. Even dialogue is kept to a minimum; the only literate, thoughtful, and thus meaningful, dialogue is given to the agent and to Ciper. The sole reason, it seems, to overcome the machines and restore human hegemony is some vague reference to freedom, which is most certainly at the heart of the general ideology of the United States, in both comic books and geo-political discourse (it is becoming hard to tell which influenced the other). This was always a central feature of the anti-Communist movement as well, a fact made even more perversely relevant as freedom came to signify the right to unlimited consumption; communist bloc countries were always depicted as not having enough food, televisions, batteries etc. on the shelf. The relentless privileging of the visual above both the spoken and written word was also part of that ideology and is intrinsic to the use of cyberspace itself. After all, it is we consumers who have reified cyberspace, here meant in the literal sense of thinking or converting it into a material thing.

There is another type of reification that is of particular use in analyzing *The Matrix*. As (re) defined by Jameson the term includes “the way a product somehow shuts us out from even a sympathetic participation, by imagination, in its production. It comes before us, no questions asked, as something we could not begin to imagine doing for ourselves” (*Logic* 317). This notion of reification would seem to include any film, not just big-budget science fiction. But Jameson uses the term to indicate what is perhaps the most significant contribution or achievement of postmodernism, in terms of its relationship with modernism. The above quotation refers to what happened to modernism itself, and the canonization of many of its cultural artifacts. He writes:

It was only after Picasso that Picasso’s remarkably unselfconscious improvisations became stamped as unique activities of modernist style and genius inaccessible to

other people. Most of the modernist “classics”, however wanted to stand as figures for the unblocking of human energy; the contradiction of modernism lay in the way in which that universal value of human production could achieve figuration only by way of the unique and restricted signature of the modernist seer or prophet, thus slowly canceling itself out again for all but the disciples. (*Logic* 317)

The relief brought by postmodernism originally meant a return to this ‘unblocking’, or liberation of human productive energy, but at the cost of modernist formal values (the process of creative destruction again) now considered elitist (*Logic* 317). This suggests the democratization of art, liberation from the canonical and academic sovereignty which decides what is art and what is kitsch. A clear and literally graphic example of this process can be appreciated by merely observing how the credits of current films stand out when compared with older ones, especially those from an earlier stage of capitalism. *Metropolis*, for example, although not a product of the Hollywood film monopoly, is still a product of the monopoly stage of capitalism. The studio that produced it, UFA, functioned in any case in the same way that the Hollywood studios did, if only by economic necessity. Yet even though the film’s elaborate sets dominate attention, their builders will forever remain anonymous to us. The film, as does nearly every film made until the postmodern era, merely acknowledges the set designer, as if these wondrous futuristic visions sprang ready-made from his mind onto celluloid without passing into the hands of the laborers who must have built them. The workers are in fact left out of the creative process and distanced from the work of art they helped to produce. Contrast that with the closing credits of *The Matrix*, which run into nearly 10 minutes of screen time and cite literally hundreds of people who were somehow involved in the collaborative effort of getting this film made.

Much of those credits involve the special effects that went into the film’s production. Here we are also not left out of the loop since any curiosity about how all of this was done is readily satisfied by surfing the film’s Internet site, or by viewing the extended trailers attached to DvD reproductions. Thus a big-budget science fiction film like *The Matrix*

stands out sharply against the modernist vision of the work of art produced by the single act of individual genius (the film was actually directed by two people), going so far to insist that it should not be conceived as such.⁵

While space has been foregrounded throughout this dissertation it may be seen that the notion of time, specifically the historical past, has been steadily diminishing. Much has been made recently of the so-called end of history, as if this were a sudden development associated with the worst postmodern tendencies. Yet it was this notion that actually informed the modernist movement, compelling the American poet, and modernist icon, Laura Riding to assert, in the 1930's, that all historical events had happened.⁶ Implicit in this idea was the radical change that technological progress had made in everyday life, which can be appreciated by considering that a person who went to sleep in 1750 London and woke up in that city in 1850 would be far less traumatized than one who went to sleep in 1850 and woke up in 1950. The first would greet a city not much different than the one he or she knew, while the second would find Metropolis: cars, airplanes and skyscrapers. I am not suggesting that there were no other factors involved in modernist perceptions but merely point out the almost forgotten, revolutionary impact that technology first had. Unburdening ourselves from the historical past enables us to perceive a limitless future, one made even more malleable by the new wonder engines of the technological age. But much has to be discarded in order to achieve such a dream. Apparently, the revolution needs neither historians nor history.

In *Metropolis*, the modernist impulse to destroy in order to create is followed to its logical end. The city of Metropolis, more specifically the low cost housing of the workers, is destroyed in order to form a better world, one seemingly based on the Marxist notion of the working class being the agent of human liberation. Together, the workers and the overlords will forge a new and presumably better world for both of them. Robot Maria

could be read as the agent of creative destruction in that case since it is she (read technology) that is the impetus of that destruction; appropriately enough she herself is destroyed. What is on display in *Metropolis* are all the good intentions of modernism; however skewed they might have become they are still valid and salvageable, the future is still possible.

No such feeling informs *The Matrix*, which promises little more than a destroyed, uninhabitable world. At least *Blade Runner*, bereft of any modernist hope for live-able cities, machines for living as it were, that its cinematic ancestor *Metropolis* had, still imagines a territory to escape to. In *The Matrix*, people not only do not know where they are, they do not even know *when* they are, hence the final obliteration of time and its usurpation by nostalgia. With no future to look forward to, we must turn to the past, or more specifically, what we hope it was.⁷

Of course, all this nostalgia has to take place somewhere, usually in instant architectural landmarks. This is one reason that Jameson focuses so heavily on architecture as a means of identifying postmodern spatial discourse and where he finds so much to criticize. Whether it is nostalgic representations of earlier styles or kitsch like Las Vegas (cf. Caesar's Palace and the Luxor Hotel), postmodern architecture ransacks the past for its inspiration and, at the very least, seems to repudiate the modernist hope in spatial organization as a means for uplifting the masses. Hope implies the future but nostalgia is little more than a hopeless endeavor to recapture the past. What is indisputable however, is architecture's relationship with capitalism. No other art form is as dependent on capitalism to express itself, mainly because of the vast sums needed to translate an idea into reality, especially on an urban scale. Yet capitalism has always been involved with space, as was shown earlier with Mandel's three stages of capitalism and the technological advances associated with them. Each of those, locomotives, cars, electronic technologies (one could

add boats, planes, etc., as well) involve either the reduction or elimination of space. What is remarkably different about this stage is that the computer, its principal mode of transportation contains the very space it is traversing: cyberspace.

More than anything else, the shift from outer space to cyberspace in current science fiction reflects the capitalist impulse to create both new spaces and the means for navigating them. This occurred previously with the locomotive and automobile, and throughout the space program, which generated tens of billions of dollars for defense contractors over the years. It is the exhaustion of one space that creates the market for the next and it is more than fair to suggest that the dominant space of today is cyberspace; certainly, it is the only space unknown to the modernist movement.

Whatever its merits as a film, *The Matrix* is a product of a multinational corporation, AOL Time-Warner, actively engaged in promoting cyberspace form and content, from the fiber optic cable that carries the Internet to the material transmitted over that cable. Jameson points out the use of opening credits as a means of cueing the audience's perception to what is expected of them (*Geopolitical* 13), i.e. streams of information. It is not a coincidence that the opening credits of *The Matrix*, bits of luminescent computer code falling down the screen, are precisely those used in CNN's advertisements; both are products of AOL Time-Warner. The very real functions of the Internet today are themselves an indication of the consolidation of markets that capitalism has always aspired to, along with the vast fortunes that have been made with a minimum of labor costs and as wide a profit margin that has ever existed. In any case, cyberspace is both the creation and property of multinational corporations, which by Jameson's definition would place it squarely in the postmodern category by virtue of that alone. In a marvelous irony, the stock market crash of 1929 was precipitated by a collapse in radio stock, the Internet of its day, and paralleled by the recent crash brought on by tech stocks (Thomas and Witts 108-131). But besides its intrinsic

connection to multinational capitalism, there are some other aspects of cyberspace that need to be considered as well, all of which also indicate its essential postmodernism.

One of the visual sight gags employed in *The Matrix* occurs early in the film when Neo retrieves a floppy disc he has secreted in a hollowed out book. The book is Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulacrum*, another example of the film's visual puns and playfulness. The pun depends on understanding both Baudrillard's ideas and the fact that it is his book that it is emptied of content to hide the disk. Baudrillard's notion of simulacra, a copy so perfect as to be indistinguishable from the original, is at the heart of *The Matrix*, and the replication form of current capitalism, as well. The city represented is so perfectly familiar to the audience, we are quite unprepared to learn that it is merely a copy of an original, in this case the time and place(s) we know.

But apart from the philosophical, and metaphysical, dangers in accepting simulacra as the 'real', the advantages, from the capitalist viewpoint, are immeasurable. Some of these were pointed out in chapter one of this paper, the use of computer simulations to represent actors and physical locations, the Roman Coliseum in *Gladiator*, for example. The resulting ontological questions that emerge when computer simulations assume the character of performer in a film have yet to be understood, but besides any ontological issues they certainly save multinational entertainment purveyors an enormous amount of money in the way of salary to movie stars. While no self-respecting Marxist is going to lose sleep over that, what about the union set-builder jobs lost to a computer simulation of the Coliseum? The point here is that preparation of audiences for increasing computer simulation and the ontological uncertainties implicit in cyberspace to begin with are essentially an extended foregrounding of technology that either already exists or is in the works. Adding to that is the plan to release films directly onto to the Internet, bypassing cinemas, videos, dvd's, and cable television entirely, in much the same way that books have already been released, i.e.,

as a form of excluding anyone without access to the Internet. Above all else, cyberspace has had an effect on the forms of cultural output, the results of which are only starting to be seen, heard and felt.

CONCLUSIONS

All of the films discussed in this dissertation reveal temporal preoccupations with the exigencies of spatial exploration and expansion. Such expansion seems to be irrevocably linked to technology, whether as real machinery or the fanciful imaginings of science fictionists. In either case, the technology that enables the exploration of space brings with it an underlying ontological question about interactions between humans and machines. Thus early films exhibit a fascination with cars and locomotives, both intimately connected with spatial domination, often referring to these mechanical objects as having a will of their own. This same willfulness grows with the sophistication of the objects, until we finally arrive at the usurpation of human superiority by sentient machines. The end result in science fiction, in these films and much else in the genre, is a dynamic exchange between space, technology and ontology.

Related to this exchange is the transition between artistic movements that is of such concern to theorists. If the line between modernism and postmodernism is relatively well defined in terms of critical characteristics, parody versus pastiche, for example, it may be further defined by attitudes towards space. Some of these attitudes are reflected in cultural output, a process that was traced diachronically in this dissertation. Thus the modernist hopes in the possibility of urban space, a theme that arose in the early part of the 20th Century and was expressed in *Metropolis*, collapse in the face of the urban realities that influence *Blade Runner* made nearer the end of that same century. A similar transition may be observed between the hopeful aspirations of 1950's outer space fiction and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which the possibilities of deep space travel succumb to reality. The floods of technology in the present day, on the other hand, whose effects are displayed in *The Matrix*, have created an entirely different space in which the concurrent themes of space, technology and ontology are barely distinguishable.

The science fiction spaces discussed in this dissertation are representations of both real and potential spaces, the latter owing their potentialities to technological innovations. Those innovations are invariably connected to capitalist processes, most of which are also connected to spatial expansion. In fact, it might be more appropriate to refer to the exchange between space, technology and ontology as one both created and fueled by capitalist expansion. This is most certainly true of cyberspace, a technological innovation that pervades daily life to an extent that previous innovations never did.

The intimate relationship between cyberspace and capitalist expansion is reflected in both the form and content of recent cultural output, particularly that of science fiction. The novels of William Gibson, the cyberpunk pioneer who provided the name “The Matrix”, are all deeply imbued with the notion of ‘biz’, i.e. business, and feature heroes who unabashedly pursue the accumulation of wealth with a zeal that would make Mr. Tyrrel of *Blade Runner* blush; at least he maintains a modicum of grandeur and good taste. Besides providing a different space, cyberspace has also altered the very form of cultural production, whether in hypertext novels and worldwide fantasy games, or films produced expressly for the Internet. Given the magnitude of its intrusion it is hardly surprising that cyberspace has come to challenge traditional science fiction spaces like urban and outer space for big screen hegemony.

One hegemony that is often overlooked is that of the increasing consolidation of entertainment companies like AOL Time Warner, Sony and Vivendi. Each of these multinational corporations has given rise to a new form of octopus: electronic empires involved in every aspect of production and distribution of culture, especially that of the United States. While there has been much attention paid to the increasing power of multinationals in a globalized economy, there is little said of these multimedia giants which, coincidentally enough, are frequently involved in the news ‘business’ as well. The radical

shift in attention from print media and television sourcing of information to the Internet is a further indication of the pervasiveness of cyberspace in everyday life.

The rise of these multi-media multinationals occurred after Jameson asserted that anything produced today is a priori postmodern. Such an assertion can neither be proved nor disproved, or is at most a tautology; it is a bit like saying that anything produced in 19th Century London is Victorian. What makes this assertion worthy of attention is the simple fact that in terms of big-budget science fiction films at least, such as *The Matrix*, many products are indeed those of multi-national corporations. This creates its own dilemma in terms of criticism since the nature of production takes so many different forms. The essence of parody lies in the individual style of the producer or artist, hence the relative ease in parodying the acknowledged masters of modernism. Postmodern pastiche, on the other hand, lies not merely in the content of the cultural output being considered but in the form of its production. Thus, in films, the very notion of the auteur, which helped lead to films being taken seriously and is so apparent in *Metropolis* and *2001*, is put into serious doubt when a film has *two* directors, as is the case with *The Matrix*. The corporate nature of the latter film is consistent with the corporate nature of so much artistic output in general these days.⁸

The role of technology in the production of art is beyond the scope of this dissertation but it is valid to observe that in terms of actual production *Metropolis* could easily be reproduced today while *The Matrix* most certainly could not have been made in 1926. The distinguishing feature between the modernist and postmodern eras is, in fact, technology and any appraisal of the differences between the two must take that under consideration. Since technology is so intimately connected with capitalism and the creation and exploration of new spaces it is equally valid to assert that space is, for want of a better word, the battleground between the old and the new.

In some way, each generation is faced with the modernist dilemma of what to maintain and what to leave behind, the process of creative destruction again. For the modernists, that process was dynamic; they lived the moment of decision. For the postmodernists, and here I mean all of us living in the postmodern era, not just artists, that decision is out of our hands. We can choose to resort to nostalgia for what either has already been lost or is disappearing so rapidly as to become irretrievable before we perceive its loss or we can opt for a genuine political stance, one aimed at becoming better people. Terry Eagleton describes this as something concrete and practical, i.e. genuine moral argument, “which sees the relations between individual qualities and values and our whole material existence” (*Literary Theory* 213). Descent into the vicarious experience of created cyberspace would seem to offer little in attaining such a position, particularly when a film like *The Matrix* is filled with what Jameson, in another context refers to as: “An energy that blasts open social convention and needs no other ideological justification than the hatred of masters and of the social order” (*Geopolitical* 57).

Most of the spaces depicted in this dissertation have been lost to us. The hopeful urban paradise of *Metropolis*, the boundless outer space of *2001* and the colorful depths of globalized urbanity depicted in *Blade Runner*. What we are left with is cyberspace, a space we may use to reproduce all that has gone before, in a static recreation of an imagined past or fantastic present. The future does not exist in cyberspace.

Nostalgia is one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism. The roots of the word are in the Greek *nostos* and *algos*, return and pain, respectively. The concept of time is thus implicit in both the word and the sentiment. In *The Matrix*, there is nostalgic remembrance for nearly everything, including simpler technology. The joke of course is that it is *our* present that is longed for, while we in turn long for the past. The unique ability, real or imagined, to reproduce lost spaces within cyberspace is the latest inclination to create

Utopia, even if only as a simulation; it is no accident that the one of the most popular computer games is *SimCity*, an exercise in creating perfect cities. The vicarious thrill of doing so does not obviate the fact that we have practically given up the modernist dream of building such cities in the real world.

Pertaining to the principal hypothesis of this dissertation, the possibility that we are in the midst of a shift towards cyberspace within the science fiction genre, several conclusions may be drawn. The first is that there is a strong connection between cultural output and concurrent technological changes, as witnessed by the discussion presented in Chapters One and Two. Here Jameson's assertion of cultural dominants takes on special meaning, since those processes are inextricably bound up with capitalist evolution, particularly true regarding space. A second conclusion is that whatever the infiltration of cyberspace into cultural output as content, there is little doubt that the forms of cultural production have already changed drastically, as witnessed, for example, by the production of *The Matrix* itself, along with a host of other big-budget science fiction films, nearly all of which are made on computers themselves. The implications of this type of production on phenomenology and narrative construction would seem to warrant more research.

Finally, if it is true that we as a species are faced with the imminent dissolution and loss of space that has been predicted for so long, then cyberspace stands as a last hope for the spatial expansion and renewal that has characterized both historical and fictional accounts for centuries. Thus films like *The Matrix* serve two purposes. On one hand they advertise all the wonders implicit in this new technology, all the possibilities of creating tailor-made space, while on the other, they reflect the fears of disappearing into virtuality and simulacra. Maybe we have run out of space, but the doubts about the new space are quite real.

NOTES TO CHAPTERS:

Chapter I:

¹An exhaustive list would require another dissertation but more to the point is the representation of such superior/inferior relationships in American culture. The song *Over the Rainbow*, for example, the signature tune of *The Wizard of Oz*, contains the lines: Somewhere over the rainbow/Way up high/There is a land I heard of/Once in a lullaby. Less 'dreamy' and more realistic is the theme song from the 80's television show *The Jeffersons*, featuring a *nouveau riche* black family in Manhattan that leaves the slums to live 'uptown': Moving on up/to the East Side/to a deluxe apartment/ in the sky.

²As an extended example from a previous age, consider the following categorical extension of monopoly capitalism - city space (with overlaps) in terms of the cultural output of one motion picture, the 1940 Warner Brothers' *City for Conquest*.

City for Conquest was made during the Great Depression, precipitated by the stock market crash of 1929. Even though the film is quite realistic, a defining mark of Warner Brothers studio during the depression, it also has its moments of high modernism. The plot is familiar. James Cagney plays a tough New York City kid from the slums of Hell's Kitchen who goes on to become a famous prizefighter. His younger brother, played by Arthur Kennedy, is an aspiring composer whose masterpiece in progress is a hymn to the 'City' itself, in the spirit of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Both are in love with the same girl, Ann Sheridan, but Cagney is unaware that she really loves his younger brother, whose musical studies Cagney is supporting by regularly getting his head bashed in. At one point Cagney assures Sheridan that life will not always have to be as squalid as it is. Standing on the fire escape of her parents' crummy slum apartment he tells her they will not have to live there after they get married, "We could move to the Bronx", he says.

The Bronx, of course, is uptown, i.e. north (vertical). In 1940, it represented the height in urban living, planned as it was with wide, sweeping boulevards in the style of Baron Hausmann's reconstructed Paris and bisected by the spectacular Grand Concourse, itself a new world borrowing of the Champs Elysee; modernism, in other words. But by the 1970's the Bronx would become synonymous with the decline of American cities, its very name suggestive of urban blight, decay and despair, and its once elegant streets more reminiscent of post-war Berlin than the modernist hope for a better world. But people could not see that in 1940. Besides, there were no other spatial alternatives available; suburbia would not arrive until the end of World War Two.

The film's climax arrives when Cagney, warned not to fight again because his vision is threatened, is forced to fight to save his brother from the clutches of gangsters (!). Blinded and broke, another Depression casualty, he is reduced to selling newspapers on a street corner, where he hears his brother's symphony *City for Conquest* on the radio. The beauty and force of the music is enough to uplift him, bringing tears to his eyes, themselves the sacrifice made for art. The city open for conquest, which Cagney could not win with his fists, falls to the sonorous elegance of his brother's musical composition.

I have inserted my own category of space with the type of capitalism prevalent in a particular era and the movement associated with that era for the purpose of illustrating what is not evident in the chart, namely the economic associations that inform these categorizations. For example, *City for Conquest* implicitly and realistically acknowledges

that one of the only means of escape from grinding poverty then available to the urban, and ethnic, lower classes of the Depression was through sports or entertainment. That the film 'modernizes' that dichotomy, by making Kennedy's character a serious composer instead of a singer, for example, thus imbuing his pursuit with high culture, does not preclude the lack of options, one of which, ethnic gangsterism (a Warner Brothers favorite), is also featured. Yet the fact that such modernism infiltrates an otherwise 'realistic' film is an indication of how the cultural dominant can affect diverse forms of cultural production. Instead of questioning the rightness or fairness of this economic reality, the film reinscribes the same virtues of hard work and perseverance that were, and continue to be, present in American ideology. What is different about this film is that those values are reinscribed on a social class that in the socialist (by American standards) thirties was beginning to doubt their validity. It is no accident that the ethnic group of which Cagney and Kennedy were part of was, both fictionally and in real life, Irish. The traditional lower class status of the Irish was already beginning to change in urban America as they began to assume many of the infrastructure jobs (police, fireman, etc.) that had long been the domain of so-called nativist Americans, i.e. white Anglo-Saxon protestants. Thus Kennedy's entrance into high culture is both vindication of the hard work ethic and the possibility of social and economic, i.e., vertical ascension. On the other hand, Cagney's fall is moralized as the price of what is after all low culture, a fact reinforced even further by his final defeat, which comes at the hand of a black prizefighter. The Irish cannot have it both ways: they cannot have high and low culture at the same time. Thus Cagney gets knocked down, literally and figuratively, while his brother ends up at Carnegie Hall, at once indicating the vertical ascension of the 'cultured' Irish and the descent of the uncultured, who are replaced at the gladiatorial level by blacks.

This same relationship is on display today in rap music 'culture', which incorporates all three elements of sport, entertainment and gangsterism, sometimes in the being of one person, Mike Tyson, for example, or in the blissfully perfect marriage of 'rock and wrestling'. What's different today of course is the complete disinterest on the part of these 'artists' in anything other than getting paid, a sharp contrast to the modernist struggle for production. As Jameson puts it: "As a form of production, then, modernism (including the Great Artists and producers) gives off a message that has little to do with the content of the individual works: it is the aesthetic as sheer autonomy, as the satisfaction of handicraft transfigured" (*Logic* 307). The modernist stereotype of the struggling artist slaving away in his lonely garret, desperately trying to produce the work of art, is today as *passé* as moving to the Bronx.

Chapter II:

³ Two films as disparate as possible, the 1939 *The Wizard of Oz* and the 1940 *The Grapes of Wrath*, display alternate approaches to the disappearance of agricultural space brought about by the Great Depression and the terrible drought that struck the United States in the 1930's. The severe economic consequences of the latter, untold numbers of rural poor and tenant farmers were evicted from their land, resulted in a vast, internal migration from the southern and mid-western United States to northern industrial cities like Detroit and Chicago, where the promise of relatively well-paid factory jobs, however scarce, was infinitely preferable to the inertia and suffering of the Dust Bowl (Allen, *Yesterday* 157-162). Both of these films acknowledge this reality in different ways but end up with the same project.

The genre bending *The Wizard of Oz* tells the story of how Dorothy gets transported from 1939 Kansas to the magical land of Oz. In order to get home again she has to find the Wizard, a semi-mythical figure imbued with the power to transform wishes into reality. Accompanied by the Tin Man, Scarecrow and Cowardly Lion (each of whom searches for ontological elevation through acquiring human ‘organs’ or characteristics; respectively, a heart, a brain and courage) she undergoes a series of adventures until the group finds the Wizard, who turns out to be a phony after all, despite his technological gadgets and pretensions to power. Ultimately, in order to return to Kansas all Dorothy has to do is to click her ruby slippers and repeat, mantra-like, the signature phrase of the film, “There’s no place like home”.

The depression, dust bowl Kansas to which Dorothy happily returns, surrounded by her aunt and uncle and loyal farmhands, is the same Kansas that people were desperately trying to escape from in 1939. Most of those people, collectively called Okies, referring to the neighboring state of Oklahoma, were west bound for California, a state that was still a virginal paradise for monopoly capitalists like orange growers associations and Hollywood film studios, neither of which was very pleased with the influx of destitute migrants and their rabble rousing ‘Bolshevik’ politics. The film studios in particular were at the height of their power, controlling as they did all aspects of production and distribution, including vast ‘fleets’ of movie theaters that devoted their space to exclusive screenings made by their respective studios. The film’s mantra “There’s no place like home” reinscribes both a political expediency, keeping the Okies out of California, and the capitalist necessity of getting them into movie theaters.

By 1939, movie fans were ready for another technological innovation, similar to the introduction of sound in 1929. This time it would be color spectaculars that rattled the imagination. The still impressive transition in the film from dreary black and white Kansas to Technicolor Oz is precisely what greeted depression era film goers the moment they left their own dreary lives and entered a movie palace. Hollywood’s message was similar to the one on display in *The Matrix* (which acknowledges *The Wizard of Oz*): don’t leave town, go to the movies instead. The medium may change but the carrot is still the same, technological innovation offering vicarious release from an increasingly drab and downtrodden existence.

The project of *The Grapes of Wrath* is similar, despite its overtly political stance. An icon of American realism, it portrays the fictional Joad family as good but down and out people forced off their ancestral Oklahoma farms by a combination of drought and merchant banking. The practically pre-technological Joads, much of the novel on which the film is based involves the difficulty they have with their dilapidated car, are depicted more as a force of nature than anything else. The ominous ending scene, with Ma Joad invoking the specter of innumerable Okies descending on the fertile California soil, “We just keep on comin’”, is itself a reminder of the waves of white colonization that had usurped the land from the Indians in the first place.

One of the ironies of *The Grapes of Wrath* is that its fictional Okie protagonists were representative of the same people that had been, and were still being, extolled in countless Hollywood Westerns for their pioneer spirit and enduring toughness. The real life dispossession of the Okies during the 1930’s is nothing less than a repeat of what they themselves had done to the Indians, while the treatment the Okies received in California was hardly worse than what they had imposed on native Americans. In an oddball political cum ontological mixed metaphor, the Okies end up being called Reds by the growers associations after they try to organize for better working conditions, an ironic play on Redskins, the Okie pejorative for Native Americans.

It is impossible to know how these films were received by audiences in the Dust Bowl, but it is hard to imagine a clearer message: stay home. One only has to look at the

discrepancy between the Midwestern farm girls portrayed in each. The virginal but heroic Dorothy (nobody gets into her space) is rewarded for her trials and sufferings by being received back into the bosom of her loving and adoring extended family, presumably never to leave good old Kansas again. Roseasharn Joad, the less than virginal ingenue of *The Grapes of Wrath* gets left with a baby by her shiftless fiancé and ends up breast feeding a half-dead Okie fruit picker in the California desert, a still-shocking image that relegates the Okies to some pre-human ontological state.

Chapter III:

⁴In this scene, Neo tells Agent Smith off and is rewarded for his trouble by having his mouth disappear, a visual homage to Harlan Ellison's 1964 short story "I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream". In that story, a man is trapped inside a giant computer and tortured by the machine, which, when finally questioned by the man about its motives, responds with unbridled and eternal hatred for humans. Compare this with Agent Smith's diatribe to a trapped Morpheus.

There is little doubt, in my mind, that this story influenced *2001* as well. Besides the image of the spaceship itself, which can only function with HAL's guidance and thus may be read as a giant computer in its own right, there is the added fact of HAL's neurotic unreasonableness. In the Ellison story, the computer manifests an entire world for the sole purpose of tormenting one human inhabitant, a form of psychotic maltreatment that is justified by the simple fact that it hates humans, presumably for the mere fact of having been created by them. Compare this, once again, to *Frankenstein*, whose monster

goes to macabre ends to ensure that its creator suffers the torments of the damned for a similar transgression.

The notion of being trapped inside machinery dates back to Chaplin's *Modern Times* and has undergone numerous cinematic interpretations. One of the most interesting is the Canadian film *Cube*, an oddball mixture of mathematics and mechanical engineering which features an enormous and extremely complex metallic cube whose prisoners must navigate through at the risk of their lives, playthings for an unseen and unknowable higher force.

The heroes of *The Matrix* also get trapped, but this time between the walls of a run-down inner city building, a noteworthy comment on the confinement of inner cities when compared with the infinite and mutable qualities ascribed to cyberspace.

⁵As evidence, consider the text that accompanies the 'collector's edition' video:

Perception: that world (sic) is a hoax, an elaborate deception spun by all-powerful machines of artificial intelligence that control us. Whoa.

Mind-warp stunts. Techno-slammin' visuals. Mega-kick action. **Keanu Reeves** and **Laurence Fishburne** lead the fight to free human-kind in *The Matrix*, the see-and-see again cyberthriller written and directed by the Wachowski Brothers (Bound). The story sears, the special effects stake out new moviemaking territory – the movie flat-out rocks. **Perception:** *The Matrix* is "Stylish. Savvy. The ultimate in cyberescapism" (Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*). **Reality:** Ditto.

The marketing approach in this blurb is yet another indicator of the mixture of high and low culture that we have come to associate with postmodernism, the high aspect covered with the quote from the film critic of *The New York Times*. It makes an interesting contrast to the text that accompanies *Metropolis*: "biting social criticism" that has become one of the 'hippest' science fiction films ever.

⁶The full text reads:

All the Chinese bandits having chopped off all the foreign ears, we have time to consider not only the subject Atrocity, but the subject Bandits, and the subject Missionaries, and the subject Foreigners, and the subject Chinese. All the

politicians who are going to be elected have been elected; and all the artificial excitement in events which no one really regards as either very important or very interesting has been exhausted. All the historical events have happened. (qtd. in O'Prey 16-17)

⁷ Nostalgia is the obvious analgesic to distressful musings over a murky and unpromising future, borne out in the recent *Kate and Leopold*, a postmodern twist on H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. This film contains nearly all the thematic devices one associates with postmodernism, with the added, perhaps inevitable, bonus of crass Hollywood cynicism.

Kate is a successful New York advertising executive who falls in love with Leopold, an English duke transported from 1876 New York to the current day city by means of a time portal discovered by Kate's former boyfriend and still upstairs neighbor. The duke was in New York looking for a wife, a device through which the film recognizes the curious but long forgotten fact that, in the 19th Century, it was relatively common for impoverished English aristocrats to travel to America to marry rich American heiresses. The aristocrats got the money and the families of the women gained titles and social acceptance, a leap in one bound from the rich mercantile class to the upper reaches of society. But this is no ordinary duke. It turns out that he is an inventor as well and is actively seeking money to further his research into elevators, believing that "building are only going to get higher and higher".

The film opens in 1876 with the duke witnessing the celebration of the completion of the two towers (!) of the Brooklyn Bridge, at that time the tallest man-made structures in the world. A devout, if early, modernist, the duke marvels at such progress and envisions a world with gleaming 'edifices' soaring into the sky. Later, after he is transported to current day New York, his invention has not been invented (the time travel paradox) and people are stranded in their skyscrapers because, all of a sudden, they have no way to get up; the elevators have stopped working.

Elevation is all over the film. A sub-plot of the film is Kate's own striving to 'get ahead' in the business world, in the same way that the 19th Century heiresses are drooling over the duke to get ahead in the social world. The duke however, is beyond reproach. Besides his impeccable table manners and forthright gentlemanly behavior he is also incorruptible. Thus when Kate has the idea of using him in a television commercial to sell margarine, he balks at the lying involved in such a profession and refuses to go forward with the charade, chastising Kate for her own participation in such a dishonorable profession. There are shades of the simulacra here as well. The product is a tasteless substitute for butter, which is being marketed to upscale consumers as if it were as good as butter but you won't get fat eating it. Several candidates are auditioned as the spokesman, all actors trying to look like English lords, until Leopold lands the part. Kate reprimands him for his scruples by saying, "Of course women know they are being lied to, they want to be lied to". Thus Hollywood.

Verticality is also used throughout the film to depict the duke's inherent superiority. The apartment he stays in, which belongs to Kate's former boyfriend, is above hers, so he is always pictured as literally descending to her level. Similarly, when the duke goes out with Kate's brother one night it is to an underground club, this in both the literal and metaphorical senses, he regales everyone with his vast cultural knowledge, including what is stored in the basement of the Louvre. Leopold's final conquest of Kate occurs on the rooftop of their apartment building. In this scene, Kate asks the duke what he misses most from his world and he responds by saying the sense of time.

This final homage to modernism is what perhaps compels Kate to abandon her successful, materialistic, but hectic, life in current day New York and go back to the past to marry the duke. The nostalgia here is certainly for something that once existed, but for whom?

It is in its depiction of the past that the film descends into postmodern schizophrenia and reification. Leopold had been staying in a stately house where the ball at which he will choose his wife will take place. The story situates this house within walking distance of the Brooklyn Bridge, a geographical anomaly that helps the narrative along, but at the expense of historical, economic reality. The story plants this house, the scene of the literal marriage between the aristocracy and the realized bourgeoisie, in the middle of what, in 1876, was one of the worst ghettos in New York City, the home of the economically deprived immigrant class on whose backs the mercantile fortunes had been built. Yet this is completely absent from the film. Upon her arrival in 1876, Kate is shown rushing through the deserted riverfront streets towards the mansion. To do so today would be risky, but in 1876 it would have been suicidal. Anyone who saw Martin Scorsese's recent *The Gangs of New York* will appreciate this anomaly if they realize that the setting of that film occurs less than 200 meters from the fictional location of the mansion in *Kate and Leopold* and that both films take place at about the same time. The realities could hardly be more different.

The mansion itself is actually the real-life Morgan Library, the former home of J. Pierpont Morgan, legendary robber baron and icon of monopoly capitalism. Morgan had the house built much further uptown at a time when the south of Manhattan, i.e. downtown, had long been surrendered to the immigrants; that vertical movement again. Coincidentally, Morgan was a collector of rare manuscripts and his former home is now a major resource library for antiquarian scholars. When Kate and Leopold come across the house in 2002 New York, Leopold enters the bedroom where he had stayed in the past and finds his diary where he had hidden it so many years before, another example of the Book as dusty, archeological relic. The irony in this, intentional or not, is set off by the squabbling between Kate and her former boyfriend over possession of a Newton, one of those portable writing pad computers that have replaced pencils and paper.

Another historical confusion, this time deliberate, has the duke being the inventor of elevators. Ordinarily, one does not expect historical accuracy in Hollywood films, especially one like this, but throughout the film there are references to the duke's butler, Otis, a knowing wink to anyone who has ever ridden an elevator in an American skyscraper; Otis Elevators is the manufacturer. This bit of historical fiction is significant because it guarantees what the audience has come to expect. Since Kate has abandoned her successful advertising career to marry a down and out 19th Century duke there is only one thing missing from the Cinderella fantasy: money. Thus we know that the duke and Kate will be fabulously rich because their new elevator business will be named after the duke's faithful manservant, Otis.

One has to wait to nearly all the credits have been shown to find an acknowledgement that this is not historically true, as if it mattered. What does matter is that the general ideology of the United States, i.e. you really do have to have heaps of money to be genuinely happy, is officially reinscribed over what is a harmless, and funny, fantasy. Steven Spielberg did a similar thing in a similar film, *Back to the Future*, in which the dreary real life of the hero's family is transformed by his traveling back in time, this time from dull, lower class California with a brother working at McDonald's to flash and upscale suburbia and a brother working as a stockbroker.

There is one other priceless moment of postmodern anti-historicism in this weirdly remarkable film. At the party where Kate is to receive her long sought promotion to advertising director, her boss, who had previously been humiliated by the duke for his

inventing history, defends himself and, by extension, the advertising profession with the following, rhetorical, question: “What’s wrong with trying to make people happy?” A sturdy defense of advertising, this film, and the postmodernist era in general whose counter-argument could only be a critique based on what has been omitted, the real economic consequences from which there is no escape. The challenge there would be to do so with a sense of humor, something inevitably lacking in such critiques.

Conclusions

⁸ I refer here not just to the Wachowski brothers but to the sibling director teams of the Hughes, Keneally and Coen brothers, as well. Collaborative efforts have always existed in the arts but joint film direction is recent phenomenon.

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