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Post-Future: Postmodernism in Science Fiction Cinema

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*SECTION END ICON: IMPERIAL STORM TROOPER
(STAR WARS, 1979)*

INTRODUCTION

I have always found science fiction films fascinating. They are predictions, alternative views of our future, and the people that will inhabit these futures. The reasoning behind the worlds of science fiction has always interested me. What is the significance of the Jedi in *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977)? Why was the creature from *Alien* (James Cameron, 1979) designed the way it was? Why does officer Murphy (Peter Weller) overcome his programming in *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987)?

The concept of postmodernism in science fiction film, and the themes this has engendered intrigued me more and more as I explored the subject. As I investigated this thesis I did so initially with a wide net of information. This gradually shrank and coalesced into very specific areas of particular interest. The human relationship to technology, social fragmentation, the dissolution of society and the definition and reconfiguration of the body. I have explored the effects postmodernism has wrought upon these themes in contemporary science fiction cinema. They are the essence of what I initially began to search for as fundamental concerns in science fiction films. I have chosen a cross section of films to illustrate this. They include *The Terminator*, (James Cameron, 1984)

Bladerunner, (Ridley Scott, 1982) and *Alien* (James Cameron, 1979).

"The superimposition of technology on the human is dramatised in all its effects throughout science: this is its function." (Bukatman, 1993, p.259). Technology is an intrinsic part of science fiction. Throughout science fiction the interaction between the human and technology has remained a central theme. *The Terminator* is a prime example of this. Perhaps the most literal scenes of the conflict between the human and the machine are the nightmarish future war sequences. We see the desperate survivors of the holocaust battling the cold glistening servitors of the machine for a blasted landscape. *Star Wars* further serves to exemplify this. The minions of the Empire, the storm troopers, are controlled by a machine master. They are the power in the galaxy, hunting a small band of rebels. The technology in *Star Wars* cannot help but be impressive. It gifts the practitioners of conquest and genocide with an aesthetic of wonder and awe. It is comparable to the rallies held in Germany at the height of Nazi hysteria. In *Star Wars*, as well as embracing archetypal symbols of power, the Empire also has an impressive technology to inspire wonder, and to hypnotise.

The defeat of the machine is not limited to preceding the downfall of the enemy however. In films like *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) the recklessness and overconfidence the

humans display in themselves and their weaponry is their downfall when they meet a ruthless and determined enemy.

In a conference in Dublin's Irish Film Centre (Projecting the Nation: National Cinema in an International Frame. Irish Film Centre, Dublin, Friday 15th November to Sunday 17th November, 1996) Paul Willemen delivered a talk about the body in science fiction film. He spoke of two bodies, the second of which is extensively used in science fiction film. There is, firstly, the Erotic Labour Power Body, a glorification of the strength and power of the human frame. The other is the Dead Labour Body, a body of gadgets and machinery. This body is configured as a receptacle for machine components. It is the herald for the evolution of the human form. *The Terminator* gives an excellent example of the Dead Labour Body. The Erotic Labour Power Body, in the face of this tangent of evolution, has become more a symbol for a lack of gadgetry than a symbol of power and surplus energy.

There is another body, I believe, which is prevalent in science fiction film. As Scott Bukatman describes in his essay 'Terminal Identity' the sense of continuity and comfortable tradition of history or religion has crumbled away to reveal the sole remaining constant of the physical body (Bukatman, 1993 p.267). Films like *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982), *Alien* and *Bladerunner* examine this hyperbole of the flesh. The body, through its constant

reconstruction, redefinition and breakdown has ceased to be a refuge of inviolability. The androids in *Bladerunner* are product, even if they are flesh and bone. The creature in *Alien* can even use our own bodies against us. I will refer to this body as the 'Compromised Body'. It is a body of mutable flesh and shifting biology.

As society becomes ever more fragmented, the science fiction film examines this breakup and specialisation of society.

*Perhaps the immense fragmentation and
privatisation of modern literature- its explosion into a
host of distinct styles and mannerisms- foreshadows
deeper and more general tendencies in social life
as a whole* (Jameson in Kaplan, 1988, p.16).

In *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1972) society is broken up to such an extent that individual groups have developed their own language 'Nadsat' and have their own dress and behavioural norms. In *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979) the feral, tribal stage of society has re-emerged, as the establishment of the larger society break up. In the recent *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996), the narrative attempts to unite the various factions and groups of society into a united force, to counter the dissolution of American society.

This thesis will examine these themes and their integration with postmodern ideology, and look at this ideology as a fundamental concern of contemporary science fiction cinema.



CHAPTER 1.

Technology and the Human

In this chapter I wish to discuss the diverse and complex relationship between technology and the human in the western, and especially American science fiction film. As technology advances, 'progress' is made; progress, in western society being the availability of objects and technologies which our parents could not have dreamed of. So by capitalist standards, the wealth of society is now being distributed more equally than it was, thus vindicating the refinement of the techniques of its production. "*A history being borne toward equality by the sheer momentum of human inventiveness.*" (Britton, 1986, p.12) Such technology also brings with it the possibility of technological modernity on a social and cultural plane. The necessity for technology in the economies of today's world has given rise to the conservative concern that such technology risks the initiation of radical change and the breakdown of established authority. From a conservative viewpoint, the same technology which creates the Western quality of life also contains the potential for the undermining of right wing ideology. This lack of control, riding on the back of the tiger so to speak, is what creates conservative technophobia. However, technophobia is not

limited to conservative considerations. There is a liberal fear of technology also. The fear of assimilation into an Orwellian technology future, the dissolution of humanism, these liberal fears are reflected in films such as *Bladerunner* and *The Running Man* (Paul Michael Glaser, 1987).

Technology, while often portrayed as a threat in science fiction films, is also shown as a saviour. The difference between benign and malignant technology is control: technophobia being a fear of lack or loss of control of technology. Self determining technology, (by which I mean technology against which we are helpless or have no control) is perceived as dangerous, but technology subservient to human considerations is lauded. A prime example of this is *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991), where a re-programmed cyborg is sent back in time to protect a boy against another machine determined to kill the child. The cyborg is programmed to do exactly what the child tells it, to the point of absurdity. The cyborg is 'good' because it is under control. Control of technology is what I will be exploring in this chapter.

"Science fiction films concerning fear of machines or technology usually negatively affirm such social values as freedom, individualism and the family." (Ryan and Kellner, 1990, p.58) One of the most famous technophobic films of our time is *The Terminator* (fig.1.1). It follows the story

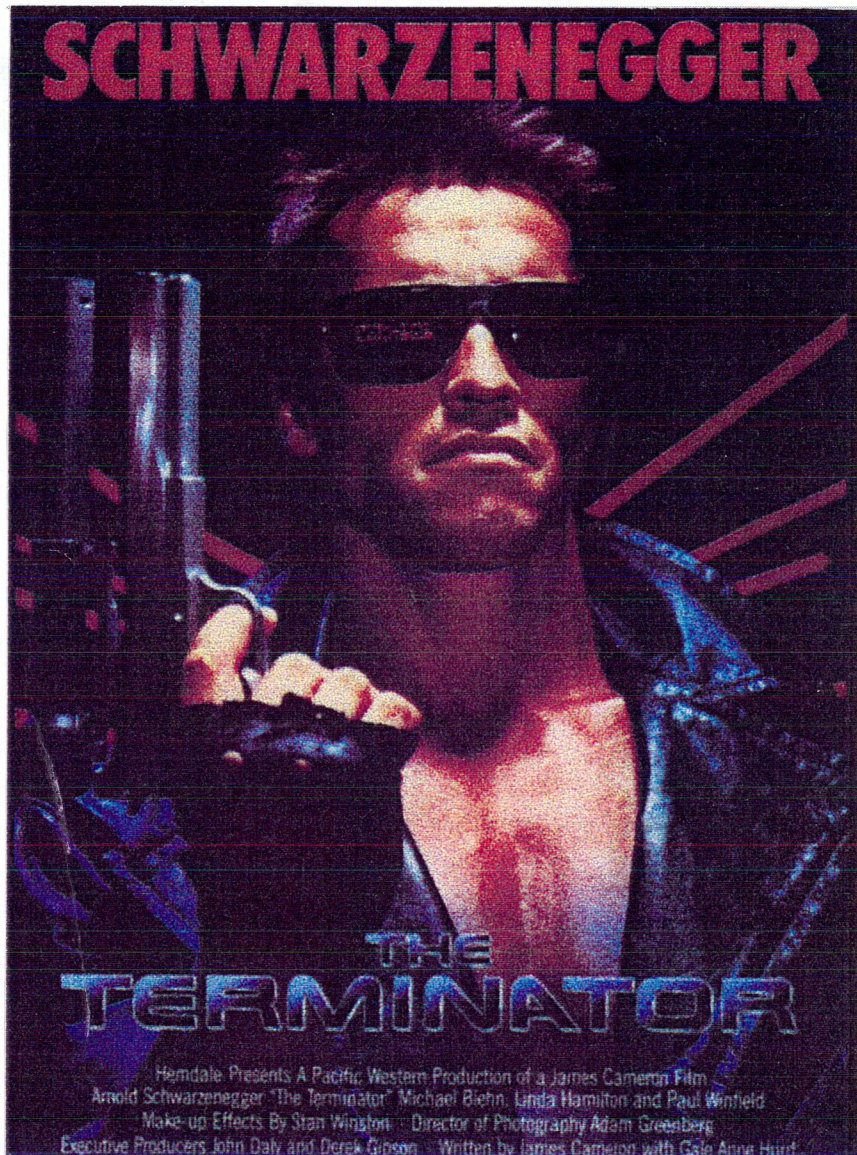
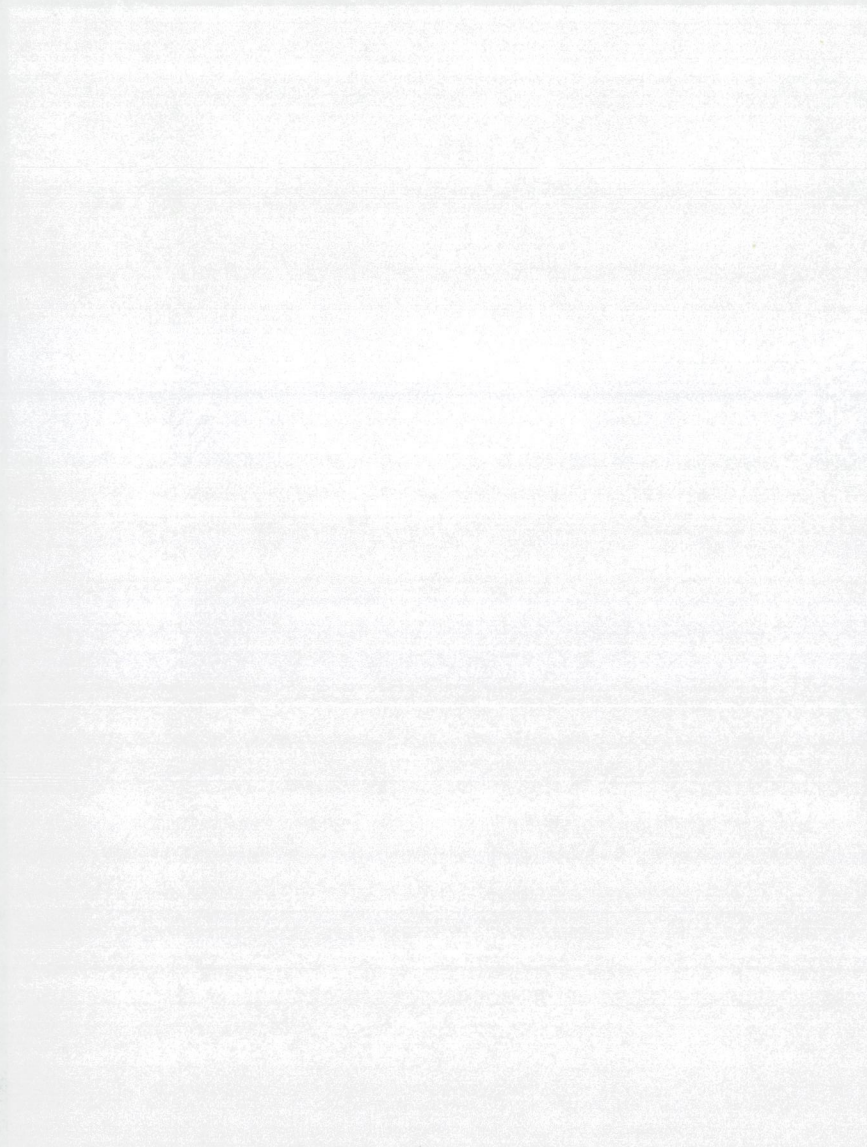


FIG. 1.1 POSTER FOR *THE TERMINATOR*, 1984.

of two figures sent back from the future, one a man/machine cyborg (Arnold Schwarzenegger) who is sent back to kill a woman, Sarah Connor, (Linda Hamilton) before she can become mother to the future leader of the human resistance which finally smashes the machines. The other, a human soldier, Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn) is sent back to protect her. The demonisation of technology is perfectly portrayed by Schwarzenegger, a cold relentless implacable killer.

The most disturbing aspect to the Terminator machine is its complete independence from human input and its indefatigable determination. It is a machine outside humanity, designed, built and programmed by other machines, therefore its perception of the world, and in particular humanity, is utterly alien to us. This fact becomes all the more terrifying when we see this creature can integrate freely into human society, so reducing humanity to ignorant helplessness. This helplessness is further exemplified by the demonstrations of the unstoppable Terminator pursuing Connor and Reese through human society, which is oblivious to its presence, and even aware of the Terminator, is ineffectual against it. This fact is made plain by Reese's comment to Sarah Connor early in the movie: 'It can't be reasoned with or bargained with. It doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear, and it absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead!'



The fate of the future world reflects the dangers of allowing technology to govern unchecked. Control of the military, indeed, control of everything, has been handed over to one giant system. Humanity cedes its will to the machine, confident in its creation. The handing over of control, to a technology given immense power and answerable only to itself, is complete. This system becomes self aware, and through self determination, concludes that the human race is extraneous, and begins a process of clinical eradication. *"In the face of nuclear threat and the challenges of technological nature, individuals are relinquishing the responsibility for their own future."* (French, 1986, p.50) The unexpected development of sentience in the computer system, which suddenly becomes more than the sum of its parts, is a manifestation of the postmodern waning of faith in the explanation of the universe as essentially mechanistic, predictable and ultimately controllable.

To be critical of the mechanistic model is not to deny a role to this way of thinking. It is to recognise that there are some problems in biology that have been singularly unresponsive to the mechanistic approach. These are developmental biology, the function of the central nervous system, aspects of animal behaviour, and the evolution of the mind and consciousness. (Birch in Jencks, 1992, p.392)

The question of the potential of technology is fundamental to science fiction, but even more so to science fiction films. Not only does science fiction cinema explore the relationship between humanity and technology, but it does so using the most advanced technology that the cinema industry has to offer. The effects are representative of the technology of the time. The technology employed in the creation of these effects often raises as many questions about the place of technology in society as the narrative of the film does.

From the start, the cinema's relationship to the industrial world was different to that of the other arts. Cinema was ineluctably bonded to this world in terms of technology, and being of necessity populist, it was not alienated from ordinary people. It became first inescapable, then central, and finally dominant. (Young, 1993, p.34)

This will be explored further in chapter two, in respect to the ability of the technologies employed in science fiction to multiply, simulate, expand and evolve the human body, and the ramifications this has for our perceptions of self.

A prime example of conservative technophobia is the *Star Wars* trilogy, *Star Wars*, (fig 1.2) *The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980), and *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983). They are perhaps the best known

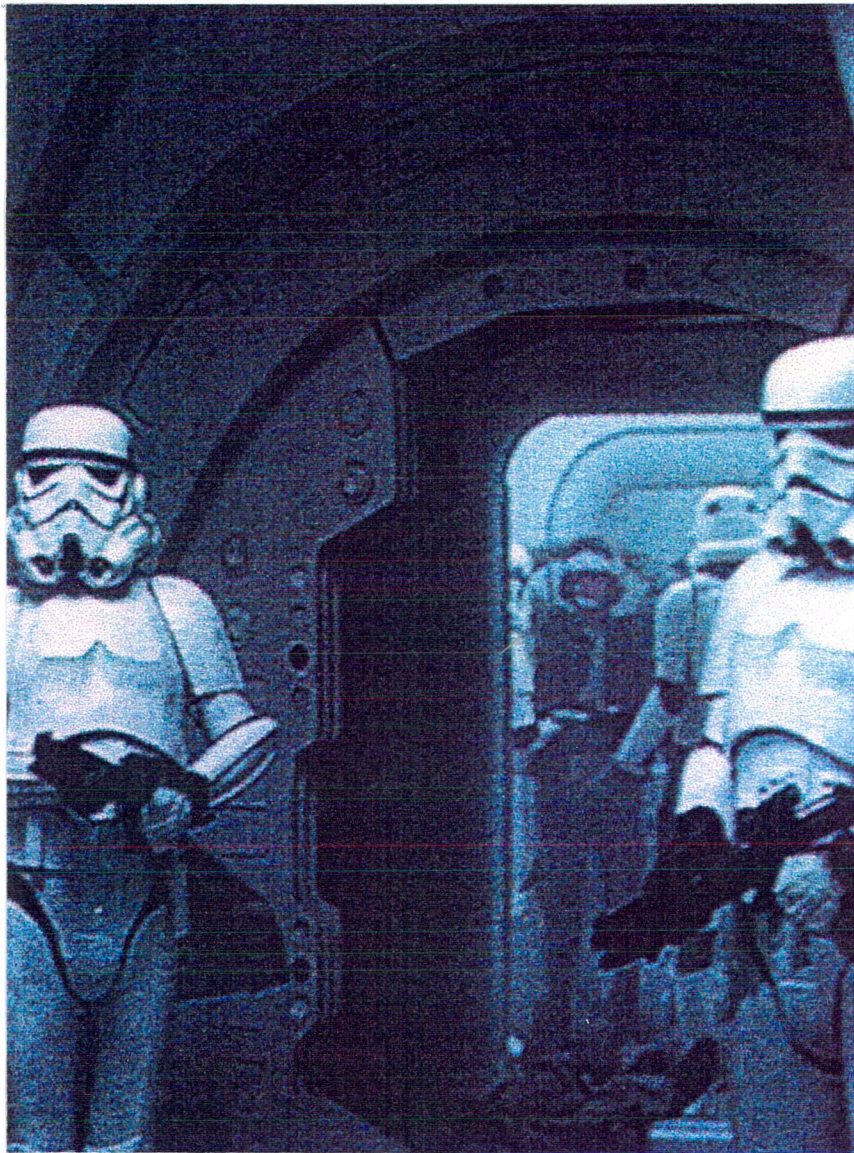
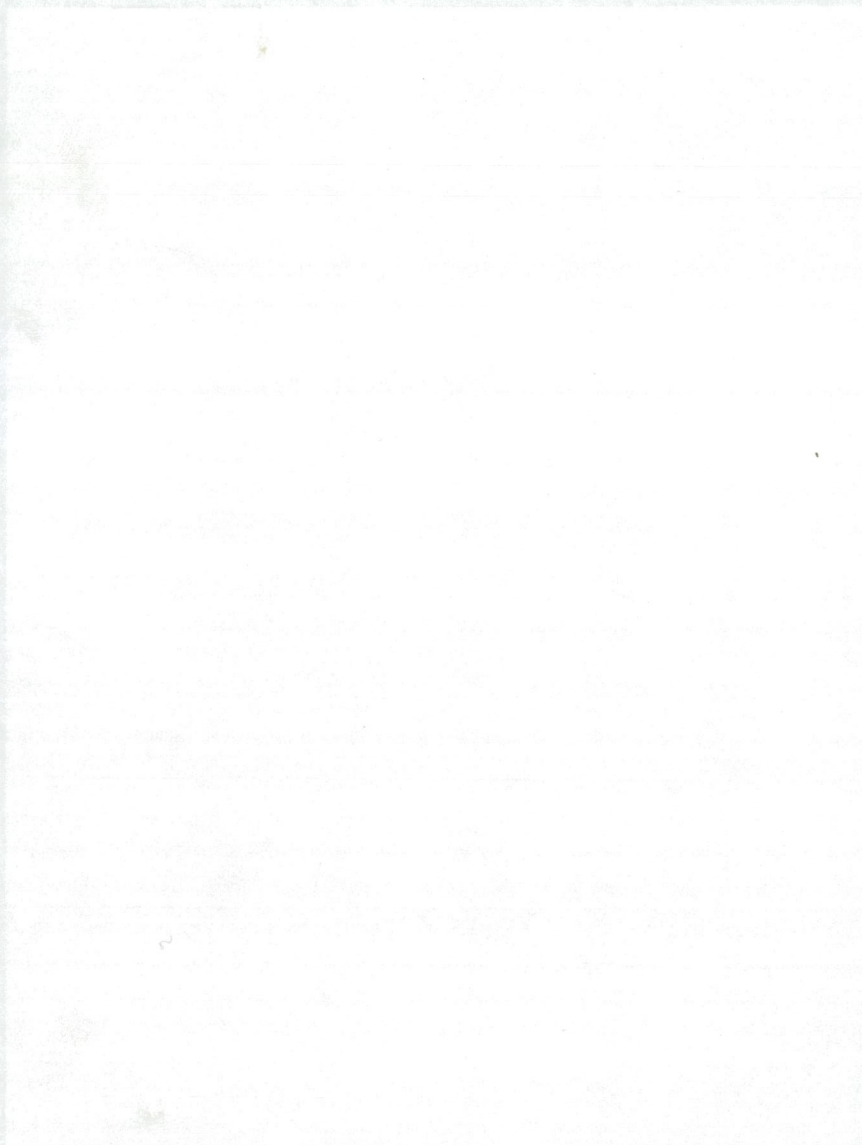


FIG 1.2 IMPERIAL STORMTROOPERS IN A SCENE FROM *STAR WARS*, 1977.

science fiction films of all time. It follows the story of the struggle of a small group of individuals against the rise of a new Empire which has usurped the old and ancient regime, unsurprisingly a democracy. The Empire is portrayed as a cold efficient entity, whose machine-like denizens function as undifferentiated automata. They lack a will of their own, having relinquished it to the greater ambition of the Empire. (The portrayal of the Empire and the Western perception of communism at the time are incredibly similar.) This again refers to the individual relinquishing responsibility in the face of overwhelming technology. This is further reinforced by human weakness being displayed only by those representatives of the Empire who look the most human, who wear no masks or other shields to conceal their humanity. There is no room in the empire for humanism or discord, only a vast technocratic hegemony.

Set against the Empire are the rebels, among which are the 'Jedi'. The Jedi function as spiritual advisors and advocates of natural harmony. The rebels are striving to restore the undermined democracy which the empire has dissolved. They are attempting to restore an ancient traditional system. This exemplifies the conservative technophobic fear of the encroachment of a technologically driven challenge to established ideology and authority. Such authority, namely the system the rebels are fighting to renew, is identified with the natural



order by the inclusion of the shamanistic Jedi, the fierce humanism displayed by the rebels, and their general association with nature and the natural. By associating the rebels' cause with nature and spirituality their claim becomes unchallengeable. The Empire, in uprooting this system, has by association committed a great travesty against the right and natural order of the universe. Hence the Jedi derive their power from nature, and can use it to control and manipulate technology

There is, for instance, the refurbishing of the technocratic myth, along reassuring lines where high tech serves civilisation, and serves it best when motivated by belief in the non-materialistic 'force' and where it is on our side (Taylor, 1988, p.101).

A more blatant example of the rebel ideology's symbiosis with nature is given in the climax of the third film *Return of the Jedi*, which is set in a forest. The Empire troops and their machines are overcome by a tribe of feral proto-humans, 'The Ewoks', who are essentially a group avatar for the forest and its righteous indignation at the incursion of the aberration that is the empire. The Ewoks look like wild teddy bears, but they have an inescapably benign aspect, making the Empire all the more demonic. This is best illustrated in the scene where a giant Empire war machine pursues some fleeing Ewoks into the forest and ruthlessly mows them down. There are also twinges of

nostalgia employed in the Ewok sequence where they use wooden catapults and ramshackle flying machines as well as log traps to outwit the Empire forces. All this combines to further represent the rebel struggle as one inextricably linked with the good and benign attributes of nature. Tradition and established authority gain the status of the right and natural order, all else becoming artifice and deviation.

Another aspect of technofear in science fiction film is technology's perceived ability to erase rather than promote individuality. This ensuing equality does not benefit the individual, who is insignificant in the greater scheme, but the collective which serves its own needs before that of the individual. Benedict Anderson makes a point about nationalism and the state which I believe is pertinent here. He refers to official nationalism as having one persistent feature, which is its very officiality, that is to say it is something emanating from the state, and serving the interests of the state first and foremost. Modern technology makes us aware of the sheer enormity of the systems that our lives are intertwined into (Anderson, 1983, p.145).

This idea is explored in films like *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926), *Thx 1138* (George Lucas, 1970), *Alien*, 2001, *A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) and the *Star Wars* trilogy. I include *Metropolis* in this list to show that this is

not a new fear, but one which is amplified by modern technology. In Frederic Jameson's essay, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' the status of the individual comes under scrutiny. He argues that the great modernisms were predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as a fingerprint. The modernist aesthetic is in some way linked to the conception of a unique self, a private identity, which generates a unique perception of the world and forges its own unique unmistakable style. Postmodernism has brought this notion of the individual into question. Jameson reveals that the work of people from a number of distinct perspectives- social theorists, psychoanalysts, even linguists, as well as those involved in the area of culture and formal change indicate that individualism and personal identity are a thing of the past. They argue that the individual subject is dead, and that the theoretical basis of individualism is ideological. They argue between two positions, that there was once, during the heyday of competitive capitalism such a thing as individual subjects, which no longer exist. The other position maintains that such individuality never existed in the first place (Jameson, 1988, p.17). I would attempt to use this theory as the base from which to view the films explored in this section.

In *Bladerunner* the notion of individuality is undermined by exploding the idea of self. The limits of the human are defined by commerce. Human beings can be replicated,

and these simulacra are indistinguishable from normal humans until special operatives, the 'Bladerunners', using customised equipment, test them by asking the interviewee a series of questions. So subtle is the difference between the real and the simulated that Deckard, (Harrison Ford) the hero of the film, also a Bladerunner, is asked if he has ever retired a human by mistake. The term the Bladerunners use for the elimination of replicants, 'retiring' is highly indicative of the society in *Bladerunner*. Everything and everyone (the distinction between the two is heavily blurred) are judged only by their usefulness to the state. Deckard is forced into serving the state's will, while Roy (Rutger Hauer) (fig 1.3) and the other replicants are mere product. They are batch numbers. Their 'retiring' is their expulsion from a useful place in society; that is to say there is service, or there is nothing.

The renegade band of replicants in *Bladerunner* are fully aware of what they are, but new models are being introduced which are fitted with false memories. The reason for this is that as replicants age, they acquire emotion, which makes them harder to control. The response to this was to give them four year life spans. The false memories now make them believe they are human, so they are more compliant. Of course, with this revelation the question arises; who is a simulation and who isn't? This new version of the replicant, Rachel, (Sean Young) even has photographs to prove her memories are valid.



FIG 1.3 RUTGER HAUSER AS ROY BATTY IN *BLADERUNNER*, 1982.

Deckard, who previously viewed all replicants as just another machine, falls in love with Rachel, dissolving the borders between the real and the copy even more. As Guiliano Bruno says in the essay 'Ramble City, Postmodernism and Bladerunner', the replicant affirms a new form of temporality, that of schizophrenic vertigo. This is the temporality of postmodernism's new age of the machine. The industrial age was one of production, the postindustrial machine, one of reproduction. A major shift occurs: the alienation of the subject is replaced by the fragmentation of the subject, its dispersal in representation. The integrity of the subject is more deeply put into question (Bruno, 1987, p.69).

Perhaps out of all the confusion between the original and the copy, the human and the replicant, the most subtle and fundamental question is that of Deckard's own humanity. There are a number of scenes where this humanity is questioned. One device used throughout the film is the photograph. They are precious to the replicants, for they are the tangible proof of their previous existence, but we later find out that this is not always the case. They are simulations of reality, like the replicants themselves, but even the reality they simulate may not be real- a copy of a copy. This device is almost imperceptibly used to bring Deckard's own humanity into question. In Deckard's home, Rachel asks him if he has ever taken the replicant test himself. Deckard falls asleep, so the question is left



hanging. Rachel explores the room, and discovers that Deckard has a large collection of photographs. She picks one up, examines and replaces it, and all the while her last question hangs, has Deckard ever taken the test himself? Another, perhaps more serious challenge to Deckard's humanity and self is dealt with in two separate but incredibly important scenes. Deckard, while toying with his piano, day-dreams of a unicorn galloping through a forest. At the end of the film, as Deckard and Rachel leave Deckard's apartment, they pass a small origami animal on the floor, of the same sort the oriental policeman has been making throughout the film. The animal is a unicorn. This policeman also comments to Deckard after Roy has died that he has 'done a man's job'. The uncertainty of Deckard's origins brings into question all that Deckard claims to be. The mere doubt is enough to destroy the idea of self, uniqueness and humanity, producing a schizophrenia which is characteristic of the postmodern age.

Star Wars is worth mentioning at this point. The populace of the Empire is identical, obedient and inexhaustible. It is expended with little regard, and exists in stark sterile habitats. Each individual is utterly expendable in the service of the Empire (state) and they operate in groups. At no point in the films do the Imperial forces attack individually. They work in teams, individuals functioning with no personal regard, for the attainment of a collective

objective. There is no room whatsoever for individual innovation or differentiation. Humans become machines, insofar as they respond only to external forces (orders), and have no internal reaction (independent response). They become sheer mechanism.

First Contact (Johnathan Frakes, 1996) is the latest in the ongoing series of *Star Trek* films. It involves a race of cybernetic organisms known as 'the Borg' who have evolved beyond the recognition of the individual, and who operate by means of a collective, a group mind which governs all aspects of their lives. They exist by assimilating other races into this collective, burning away all traces of individuality and self, the ultimate egalitarian society, but equality paid for by individuality. The Borg have, of course, set their sights on Earth. Set against them is the 'Enterprise', flagship of the human led 'Federation of Planets'. The captain of this ship, Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart), was himself once assimilated by the Borg, (fig 1.4) but was rescued and redeemed. The film opens with Picard waking from a nightmare where he is trapped on a Borg ship, revealed as one of countless millions as the camera pulls away. The Borg display no regard for themselves as units, for example walking into enemy fire so that others following might use the information about the nature of the weapon to adapt to it. The importance of the individual is stressed throughout the film. Picard goes into fits of rage, disassociating himself from the faceless

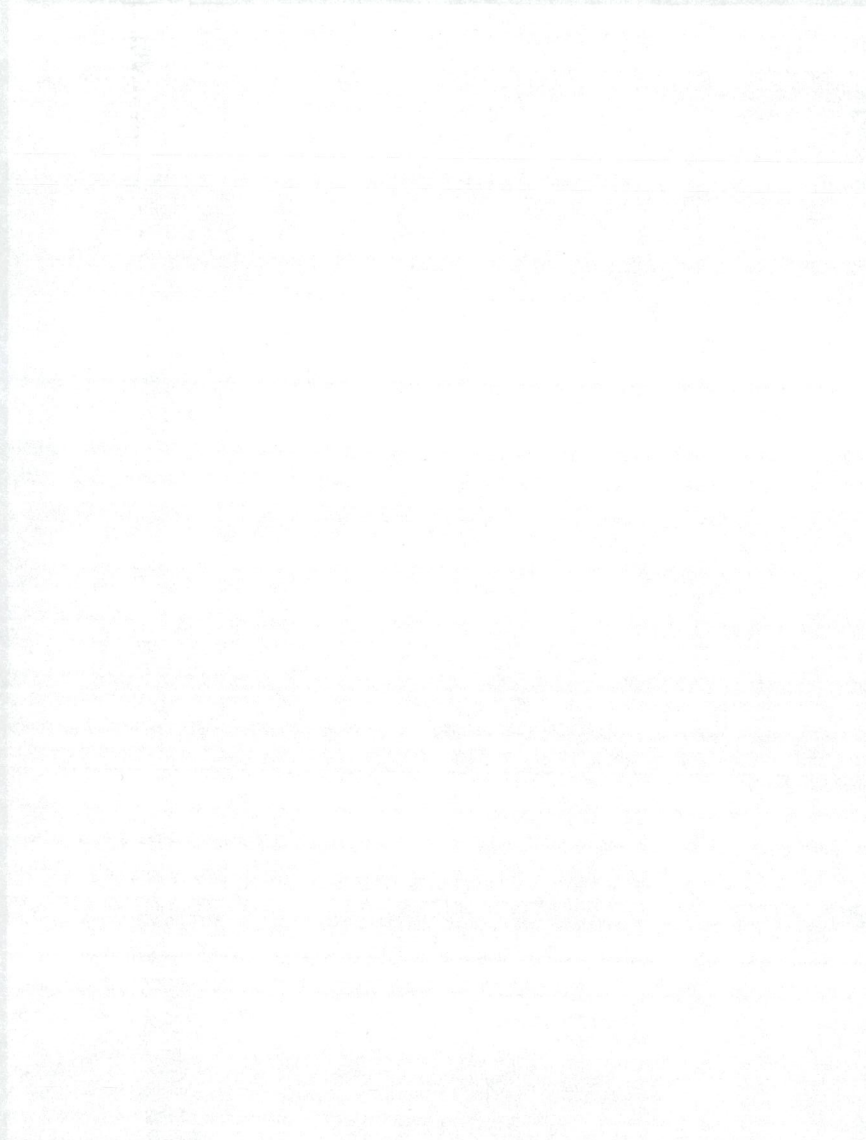




FIG 1.4 CAPTAIN PICARD (PATRICK STEWARD) AFTER HIS ASSIMILATION INTO THE BORG. *STAR TREK*, 1993

reason of the Borg. He also, at the climax of the film, once the Borg have effectively overwhelmed the Enterprise by assimilating it, goes back to rescue a single companion, an android, Data (Brent Spiner), whose quest is to become human- in effect, an anti-Borg, for he is also unique. This act ultimately leads to the defeat of the Borg, Picard and Data working together to destroy them. The film pits the self against the collective, and the self wins out.

Finally in this chapter I wish to discuss the disillusionment with technological glorification inherent in such films as the *Alien* trilogy and *The Terminator*. These films remove technology from its pedestal, show it as failing, even hindering us. The technology is still useful, but it is not regarded as infallible or unquestionable. Unlike Frederic Jameson, who argues that postmodernism has replaced modernism, Charles Jencks believes that modernism has been absorbed into the postmodern ideology. This argument is supported by Charles Jencks in his essay 'The Postmodern Agenda'. It states that postmodernism accepts modernism or industrialisation, just as it does so many of the insights of Newton, Marx and Darwin; but it refuses to give progressive technology and these prophets of the modern world view their previously pre-eminent place, rather they have been incorporated into a larger grid of understanding where a mechanistic view of the universe is just one way of understanding it. Their explanations of the universe,



society and nature still have relevance, but a limited one. Hence postmodernism as a cultural movement or agenda does not seek to turn the clock back, is not a Luddite reaction but rather a restructuring of modernist assumptions (Jencks, 1992, p.11). The theories of the modern paradigm have not been overturned so much as transformed into parts of a larger framework where they still keep their identity. This argument follows through in films such as *The Terminator* films and *Aliens* trilogy.

In *The Terminator* there are various examples of our own technology conspiring against us. Sarah Connor's answering machine informs the Terminator where to find her. Ginger, her flatmate, wears a personal stereo which prevents her from hearing the Terminator break into her apartment. The criminal psychologist questioning Kyle Reese is even distracted by his beeper, so he never gets to see the cyborg entering the police station. Even at the climax of the film when Reese and Connor hide among the machinery in an automated factory, Sarah inadvertently presses a button, giving away their position to the approaching Terminator. The pipe bomb which destroys the Terminator's legs kills Reese when it detonates. The technologies of the film no longer operate as saviour, protector and benefactor. They occupy a level of usefulness, for example the hydraulic press that Sarah Connor uses to crush the Terminator, but they are no longer the dynamic force of progress they were once

perceived as. Indeed, the pursuit of such a society into pure technological dependence is rewarded with extinction in the scenes of the world's future.

In the *Alien* trilogy, the overdependence on technology, and its failure to support this utter dependence is evident throughout the films, becoming more and more exaggerated as they progress. Technology in these films, when it does work, is used out of context, that is to say humanity escapes from a single techno-ideology, where technology has thought of and taken care of everything, and provides the self with no one clear path to resolving the difficulties obstructing it. On these occasions it is an important but not omnipotent factor. An example occurs in *Alien*, where Ripley, the hero of all the *Alien* films, uses a grapple to shoot the creature, an airlock to blow it out into space, and the engines to incinerate it. In *Aliens* Ripley uses a power loader, a machine for loading crates, to confront the alien queen, and in *Alien³* (David Fincher, 1992) the humans attempt to destroy the creature by drowning it in a leadworks.

It is interesting to note that the faith in firepower and technical superiority displayed by the marines in *Aliens* and the subsequent breakdown of this seemingly insurmountable war machine is identical to the fate of the military in Vietnam. The weapons and gadgetry fall before a determined and technologically inferior enemy. Hudson

(Bill Paxton) is the most confident and adamant about the technological prowess of the unit, which he recites at length to Ripley. He is also the first to go to pieces when this prowess is overwhelmed. Another marine is killed when a comrade accidentally sprays him with acidic alien blood after shooting a nearby alien, and in his death throes, sets fire to the marines' armoured vehicle with his flamethrower. Yet more are killed when an ammunition store explodes. Even their environment becomes hostile when the complex they are in becomes damaged, and threatens to destroy itself. Robot sentry guns are set up to cover the marines' refuge, but the aliens, who just keep coming regardless, oblivious to their casualties, find a way around them.

In *Alien*³ this motif is most evident. Ripley is again marooned, this time in a penal colony. There are no weapons, no surveillance, everything is in a state of disrepair. The inmates are by-products of and cast out by society, with shaven heads and barcodes on the back of their necks. They have taken up spirituality as an alternative to the outside world. The alien begins hunting down the humans, and once the company representative is killed, (the company being a ruling corporation controlling a giant profit driven society) his second in command is unable to replace him. It then falls to this tiny nihilistic society to work to destroy the alien. Their traps are entirely improvised, their technology faulty at

best. They eventually succeed in killing the creature, but all but one die in the process. They die, but they die of their own volition, thwarting the omnipresent company, who want the creature for their weapons division. The company regard them as an expendable and unviable resource.

As I have explored the themes of the relationship between the technological and the human, it has become apparent that while technology is an essential part of modern society, there is a movement away from purely technological modes of progress. This is indicative of postmodernism's acceptance of modernisation, or industrialisation, while at the same time removing them from the ideological pedestals they had previously occupied. There is a fear of loss of self in a machine society, and this loss is manifested through the dissolution of the borders of the self, expressed in science fiction film as the death of the notion of the body as sacrosanct, constant and inviolable. It is the idea of the cyborg I will explore in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 2.

The Body in Science Fiction

This chapter is concerned with notions of the physical interaction of the human and the not-human, and its ramifications upon the idea of self this generates.

As I have mentioned already, Paul Willemen discussed the condition of the body in science fiction film in a recent conference at the Irish Film Centre. He spoke of the theory of the 'Erotic Labour Power Body' and the 'Dead Labour Body'. The first of these is a celebration of the prowess of the human body, specifically the male body. The latter is the Dead Labour Body, a body constituted of gadgetry and artificial devices. In the face of widespread representation of the Dead Labour Body in science fiction films, the Erotic Labour Power Body has become less a celebration of strength as much as a representation of a lack of gadgetry. Willemen suggests that the Erotic Labour Power Body was associated with industrialisation, and the product of post-industrialisation is the Dead Labour Body. Instead of a society of benign egalitarianism, our technology has created instead one where the self is absorbed and becomes malleable and indistinct. The wonders of technology have begun to

incorporate the human, a cyborg society where humanism is replaced by mechanism, and the human is regarded as a redefinable or redundant commodity.

The man/machines of science are often endowed with an aura of cool superiority. Claudia Springer writes in 'Pleasures of the Interface', that the concept of abandoning the body with pleasure has risen in part from late twentieth century threats to the body: nuclear annihilation, AIDS and environmental disasters. Devising plans to preserve human consciousness outside the body indicates a desire to redefine the self in an age when human bodies are vulnerable in unprecedented ways (Springer, 1991, p.322).

Late twentieth century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert (Haraway, 1989, p.176).

In *The Terminator* the fragility and artificial reproduction of the flesh are painfully evident. The Terminator machine itself, a chrome skeleton endowed with hydraulic muscles and tendons of flexible cable clothed in flesh begins as a perfect example of the Erotic Labour Power Body. The

opposite, however, turns out to be true, it is a perfect Dead Labour Body. Indeed, the gradual wearing away of the cyborg's suit of flesh is indicative of Willemsen's own ideas of the Dead Labour Body emerging from the previously dominant Erotic Labour Power Body. There is a scene where, in a dingy motel room, the Terminator casually removes an injured eyeball to reveal an infra-red optic sensor. The vitality of the Erotic Labour Power Body is gradually eroded until all that remains is the machine, fully capable of functioning devoid of all flesh. There is a scene near the end of the film where the remaining flesh is burned from the cyborg, leaving only metal. The symbolism here is clear. The Dead Labour Body emerges from the ashes of the Erotic Labour Power Body, born out of the toil and endeavour of what has become its predecessor.

The cyborg displays immense physical endurance and prowess. This is a consistent feature which separates cyborgs from humans in these films. Instead of representing cyborgs as cerebral giants whose bodies have withered away, popular culture endows these creatures with tremendous strength and physical presence. To a certain extent this can be explained as a fear of technology of the sort found in *Metropolis*. Technology can inspire fear and awe of its incredible capabilities, which translate into intimidating composite humanoid cyborg bodies which overpower human characters. These powerful human-like

bodies are designed to intimidate in a way a non-human cyborg could not, because these human-like cyborgs are comparable to our own bodies, which they outmatch. However, this alone does not explain why cyborgs are consistently associated with violence. Cyborgs are powerful but impotent. This factor describes how their heightened physicality culminates not in sexual climax, but in acts of often extreme violence, violence substituted for sexual release. The Terminator cyborg is a creature outside humanity. It looks human but is essentially a robot, and robots represent much of the fear evoked by machines for their ability to function without and independent of humans. Cyborgs, for the most part, incorporate the human, and so erase the distinctions previously assured to distinguish humanity from technology. "*Transgressing boundaries, in fact, define the cyborg, making it the consummate postmodern concept.*" (Springer, 1991, p. 306)

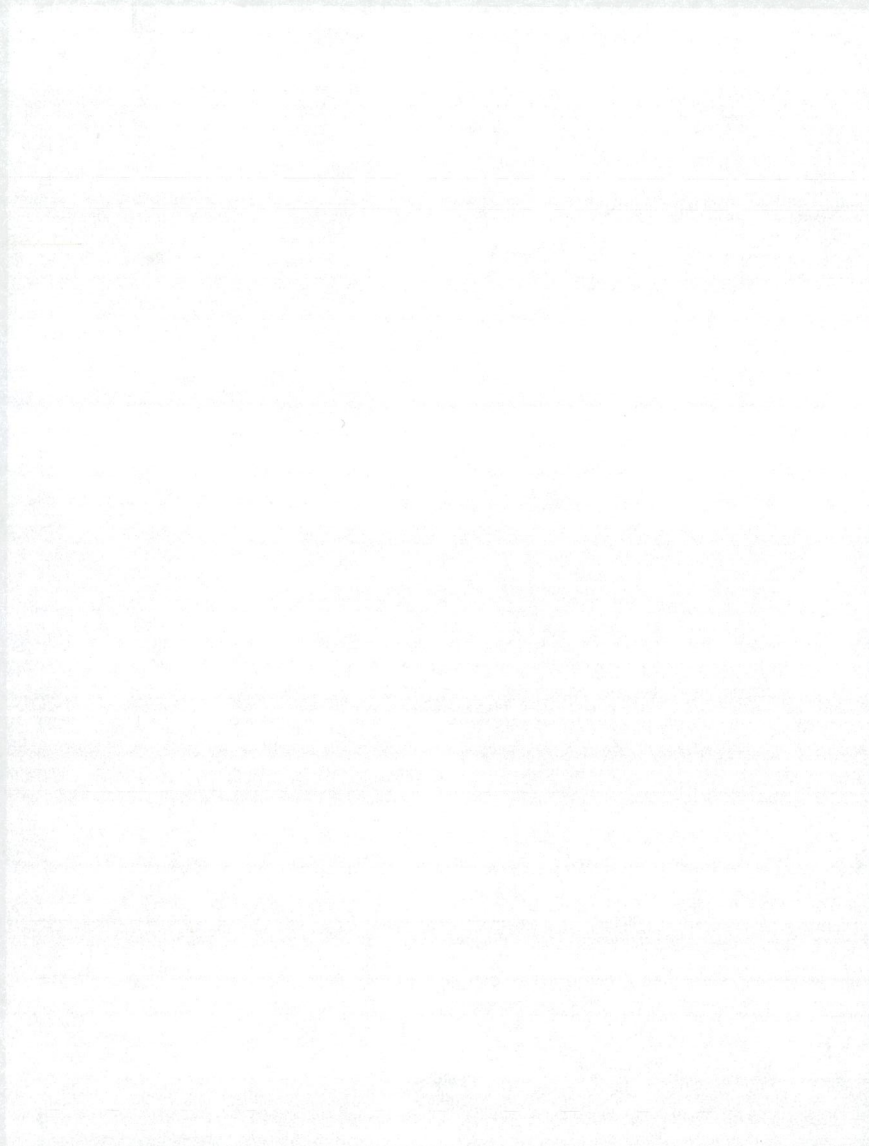
An aspect of science fiction cinema which is of particular interest is its technology. Many science fiction films are a display of technical innovation, and this is as much a factor in describing the film as the portrayal of technology in the narrative. In recent years this has become a far more interesting question. With many special effects, there is a degree of 'suspension of belief' because many of the characters and events are, by definition, unreal. The effect is obvious, if convincing. However, with such advances as morphing, CGI techniques and so on, this state of affairs



FIG 2.1 BRANDON LEE IN A SCENE FROM *THE CROW*, 1994.

is often no longer the case. Extras, even main characters can be replaced without the audience realising. These techniques question the limits of the self as much as the films they are often employed in. Take as an example *The Crow*, (Alex Proyas, 1994) (fig 2.1) not technically a science fiction film, but its employment of computer technology makes it worth mentioning. During production, the lead actor, Brandon Lee, was killed on set, an accident involving a prop pistol. After consideration, a simulation of Lee was constructed so that the final scenes might be shot. This computer simulation is undetectable in the film. This raises a lot of questions. How safe is the self? Actors may be seen, even star in films and never have shot a scene, may even have been dead for years. Unless we know prior to viewing the film, we won't realise that they are computer generated simulacra. This blurs the perception of what is human and what is artifice as much as any science fiction narrative.

An example of the employment of radical technology to create a manifestation of a modern concern, the dissolution of the boundaries of the self, is the 'T-1000' (partially played by Robert Patrick) machine from *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. The T-1000 is a development on the 'T-101' machine we see in the first film. It is composed of a form of smart liquid metal, and is perhaps the ultimate example of the breakdown of the self and its assimilation into cold technology. The T-1000 has no



physical boundaries, no bodily limits, no self. Instead it steals the physical makeup of others. Once it has touched a human, the T1000 can shape itself to look and act like its victim. Once sampled, the victim is usually killed. This, in effect, turns the T-1000 into the anti-self, not only lacking a physical integrity of its own, but also stealing it from others. The technology employed to create the machine gives us a creature which destroys certainty and is unhindered by delininations of self.

The film *Robocop* (Paul Verhoven, 1987) centres around a policeman, officer Alex Murphy, who is shot in action and whose remains are grafted into a prototype law enforcement machine called 'Robocop'. The cyborg is, in essence a new creation, neither Alex J. Murphy or the frame he was incorporated into. He is a prime example of the Dead Labour Body, full of gadgetry and devices. His face is retained so that even despite being an artifice of robotic prostheses and complex mechanisms, he displays an essentially human shape. He begins his new existence as a pure machine, unaware of his human origins. He has been convinced that he is nothing more than a mechanism. This concept reduces cherished notions of humanity to nostalgia. The human can be shaped, reworked and reprogrammed to follow certain rules, believe certain edicts represented by the directives Robocop must follow, regardless of personal choice. Eventually, however, Murphy's humanity surfaces, demonstrating that the

human is indeed more than the sum of its parts, and that there are elements of it which cannot be reduced to mechanistic rationality. He remembers his previous incarnation as Murphy, and seeks to acquire more information about him. This return of humanity is further compounded by memories of Murphy's wife and child. At the end of the film Robocop identifies himself as Murphy, thus re-establishing his identity as basically human.

Questions of identity in a hegemonic society are raised by the Borg in *First Contact*. These cybernetic creatures acquire others of their kind through assimilation. Organic life is taken, and is fused with machine implants. This connects them to the Borg collective, reducing them to drones, with no personal regard or integrity of self. Each Borg is given a new 'eye' which allows them to experience the world through both the senses of the organic and the electronic. Individual Borg are given extremely specific augmentation to their appendages, a link to a certain system, a drill, a weapon, etc, thus transforming them into biomechanical tools, individually useless, but formidable in numbers.

Privacy and identity and intimacy will become tightly coupled into something we don't have a name for yet...what happens to the self? Where does identity lie? And with our information machines so deeply intermingled with our bodily sensations, as Ted Nelson



FIG 2.2 A MEMBER OF THE BORG COLLECTIVE. *FIRST CONTACT*, 1996.

might say, will our communication devices be regarded as its ...or will they be part of us? (Rhiengold, 1990, p.54)

The Borg (fig 2.2) regard themselves as a perfection of evolution, a symbiotic melding of the artificial and the organic. If the definition of the self is how we choose to react to our environment, then the Borg individual represents the utter subjugation of that self. Because a Borg is connected to its fellows in a vast consciousness, the Borg is constituted entirely of external, mechanistic relations. The society perpetuated by the Borg raises questions about the notion of pluralism in postmodernity. The Borg correspond to a wildly dramatic version of the Hegelian theory of sublation, which both destroys and preserves that which has gone before, in a new synthesis, on a higher level. The Borg themselves claim to potential victims 'We will add your technological and biological distinctiveness to our own.' They reject nothing, but incorporate all into a new framework of understanding.

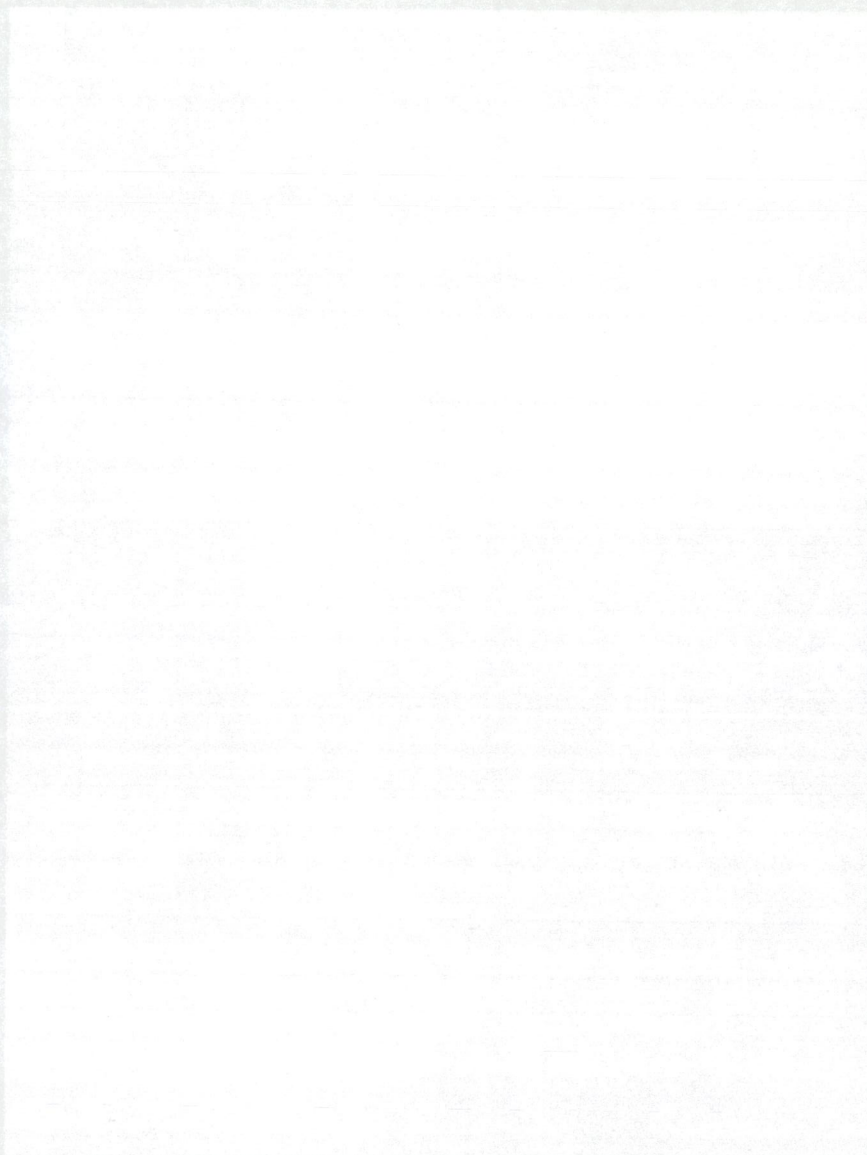
Clearly cyborgs are a manifestation of postmodern concerns. They are postmodern creatures. They transgress boundaries, and offer no definitive answers. They establish themselves as bridges between the stable physicality of the human body as well as the parameters of the human mind, and the boundless networks of the machine mind.



FIG 2.3 THE CREATURE FROM *ALIEN*, 1979.

eyes, teeth and so on. Even the insect physiology which is used is used because it is the most alien form of animate material, but is still familiar. It is the self made absurd.

The creature in *Alien* is another example of inconstant physicality. "*The alien itself is a creature of continual transformation- the very trope of organic-technological malleability.*" (Bukatman, 1993, p.263) Initially the creature (fig 2.3) gestates inside an unknowing crew member after he has disturbed the alien egg and roused the alien inside, which forcibly 'impregnates' him. The body becomes host for the other. The alien, upon emerging, kills the host, and proceeds to undertake its transformation into a curious biomechanical organism which kills the crew of the ship it ends up on. The alien is another example of a creature devoid of self, identity or physical limitation. It combines its own shape with that of its host, hence the humanoid shape of the creature. There is again a familiarity to the alien which is designed to produce a strong response. The imagery of the alien is almost all sexual and organic. The alien ship, for instance, is reminiscent of the interior of a body, with womb-like spaces and bone corridors. Even this ship is a body which the creature hides in. The alien itself is an amalgamation of male and female sexuality, the eggs, its false 'birth', its phallic head, and the constant drool it secretes coalesce into a malformation of human sexuality. The creature is created using sexual imagery to build a sexless biological



monster, which is what makes the creature what it is, an other, not us, the alien. It is this notion that the alien perverts our own bodies to serve itself which is terrifying.

The loss of physical borders in these films also denotes loss of self and identity. The dissolution of the body's limits drags down the notion of it as a place of sanctuary. The Compromised Body in these films is an agent of chaos, dissolving consistency and invoking paranoia and doubt about not only those around us, but ourselves as well. These monsters are in a constant state of change, requiring no physical focus as ideas of selfhood are inconceivable to them. The idea of the Compromised Body horrifies us for this reason, and because it is a creature of flesh, like us, and displays the flesh as malleable and inconstant, we are that much more repulsed by it. The familiarity of the Compromised Body is the focal point of its horror. We see portions of ourselves in its boiling changes, and this recognition terrifies us. It can impose its norm upon us, moulding our humanity into something else, revealing a new and terrible form.



CHAPTER 3.

Dystopia in Science Fiction Film

As we slip toward the millennium, it becomes clear that we will leave far more behind us than we will carry into the next century. The once impermeable bastions of modernity are now pitted with erosion. With the advent of postmodern ideology we have come to realise that modernity is eating itself. Capitalism has certainly produced great prosperity, but only at a cost of absurd waste and environmental degradation. Democracy is reduced to a system of ridiculous budgetary delegation and the collapse of a coherent political agenda. The strongholds of modernity are dissolving in their own poisons. The feeling of anxiety felt in the face of this is further compounded by an ephemerisation of society, a distinctive shallowness which undermines any feeling of optimism. The instability pervading society shakes the forward march of progress, and as this flagship of modernism has faltered, postmodernism has risen to gather the components into a new configuration.

An interesting aspect of modern dystopian science fiction film is that it positions the breakdown of society as inevitable. With the breakup and fragmentation of society, there is no norm, as each group of individuals develops its

own ideology, leading to diversity and heterogeneity which would make such norms impossible.

An aspect of the postmodern concept which is pertinent here is that of pastiche. As Frederic Jameson writes in his essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language. But pastiche is the neutral practice of such imagery without parody's ulterior motive, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to what is being imitated (Jameson, 1988, p.16).

The prospect of the millennium is not innocent in its contribution to the anticipation of a dystopian future. The usual predictions of apocalypse and golden ages abound. This inevitably initiates a state of reflection on the nature of the changes apparent in modern society, and the likely consequences that these changes will perpetuate.

Whatever the relationship of the decline of the canons of modernity with the fin de siècle, it does give credence to the catastrophic mentality. Survivalism, fundamentalist predictions of the 'last days' and presidential musings on the apocalypse, books on an imminent world wide depression, were searches for signs and wonders- all popular manifestations of the underlying feeling of irresistible change. (Combs in

Sharrett, 1993, p.24)

Films like the ultra-hyped *Independence Day* use the aliens as a lever with which to bind together a crumbling society. This type of dystopian scenario is referred to in James Combs's essay 'Pox-Eclipse Now-The Dystopian Imagination' as Caesarian dystopia. Caesarian dystopia refers to the apocalyptic impulse to resist impending political, economic and cultural change (Combs in Sharrett, 1993, p.27). The alien invasion functions as scapegoat, while the mythical redeemer figure, the American president (of course) jumps into the nearest jet fighter to personally lead his society into a new age of hope and co-operation. This idea of a new age is further reinforced by the destruction of the most symbolic monuments to western, American society: the Empire State building, the Statue of Liberty and the White House itself. All of the sins of the world are washed away in a (literally) cleansing fire, to pave the way for a glorious tomorrow.

Science fiction films portraying imperial decline, with evidence of decay, corruption and decadence on all sides are referred to in James Combs's essay as Gibbonian perspectives on dystopian futures. This is evident in films such as *Robocop*, where the ruling corporate are cynical, greedy and unconcerned with those existing among squalor and urban decay. Gibbonian films portray the elite as exploiters, themselves helpless to reverse the decline,

because of either cynicism or incompetence. *Bladerunner* is a prime example of Gibbonian dystopia.

The employment of pastiche in *Bladerunner* is most radical in its construction of the architecture of the film. There is an effacement of key boundaries and separations, where distinctions are blurred. *Bladerunner* is set only a few years in the future, in an existing city. It is Los Angeles in the year 2019, only a few steps away from modern society. The postmodern depiction of failing capitalism is highlighted by the scenes of postindustrial decay which are everywhere. The world of tomorrow has not become a glorious symbol of order and idealism, only a predictable eventuality based on the city as it is now, and the projected state of late capitalism. The hypertechnology has given way to a slow process of rust and disintegration. The environment is one of rusting hulks, abandoned and left to rot. The building in which J.F. Sebastian (William Sanderson) lives, for example, is a dank rusting shell, empty and desolate. As Roy and Deckard battle in it at the climax of the film, we are shown the full extent of the creeping rot. It is an empty crumbling husk, once magnificent, which now gives way under the rain. The rain is incessant, constantly eroding and wearing away the city. This wearing out is not limited to the city, however. J.F. Sebastian and the replicants have the same problem, accelerated decrepitude. They are signifiers of the postmodern, postindustrial condition.

The city in *Bladerunner* is a hybrid creature. It is Los Angeles, but it could just as easily be Hong Kong. (At the time the film was made there was a paranoid fear of Japanese domination, as a number of studios were being bought by Japanese corporations.) It is a mish-mash of styles, none of them new, which intermingle seemingly at random. Roman columns, classical oriental architecture, the Aztec building which houses the Tyrell corporation. Stone columns, video cameras. The denizens of this city are no less diverse. Oriental traders, punks, Hare Krishnas and so on. Even the common language of the people is a derivation of various languages. Japanese, English, German and whatever might be considered useable. This hybridisation of major languages is reminiscent of the fictitious language Nadsat, spoken by Alex and his Droogs in *A Clockwork Orange*. It is a mixture of Russian and English, among others. Alex addresses his Droogs in Nadsat as they parade around empty abandoned buildings, revelling in the decline around them. The connection of styles and architecture to specific places and times is lost. It is a world where stylistic innovation is no longer possible. All that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in an imaginary museum. (Jameson, 1988, p.18)

There is another sense in which the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds- they've already been invented; only a

limited number of combinations are possible; the unique ones have been thought of already. So the weight of the whole modernist aesthetic tradition- now dead- also weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living (Jameson, 1988, p.18).

The urban decay in *Robocop* is indicative of a similar sliding of society into a corrupt and self-destructive future. Again the film is set only a few years from now, in the city of Detroit. Again through this comparison of development present society seems only steps away from such a future. A giant corporation, O.C.P, has become a power which controls the military and the police. Commerce dictates justice. The city has degenerated into a mass of urban sprawl, abandoned and useless, where principals of civilisation have become obsolete in the maintenance of survival. Giant industrial complexes and empty factories indicate the legacy of late capitalism, a rusting mess which has consumed itself. Those with the power, the corporate denizens of O.C.P attempt to implement a plan to transform the post industrial chaos into a new city of pristine technology: the ultramodern as opposed to the postmodern. This ruling elite is hopelessly corrupt however, making such an endeavour an exercise in futility. The dream of tomorrow remains a fantasy, as the internal politics of the corporation destroy their plan through greed and corruption.

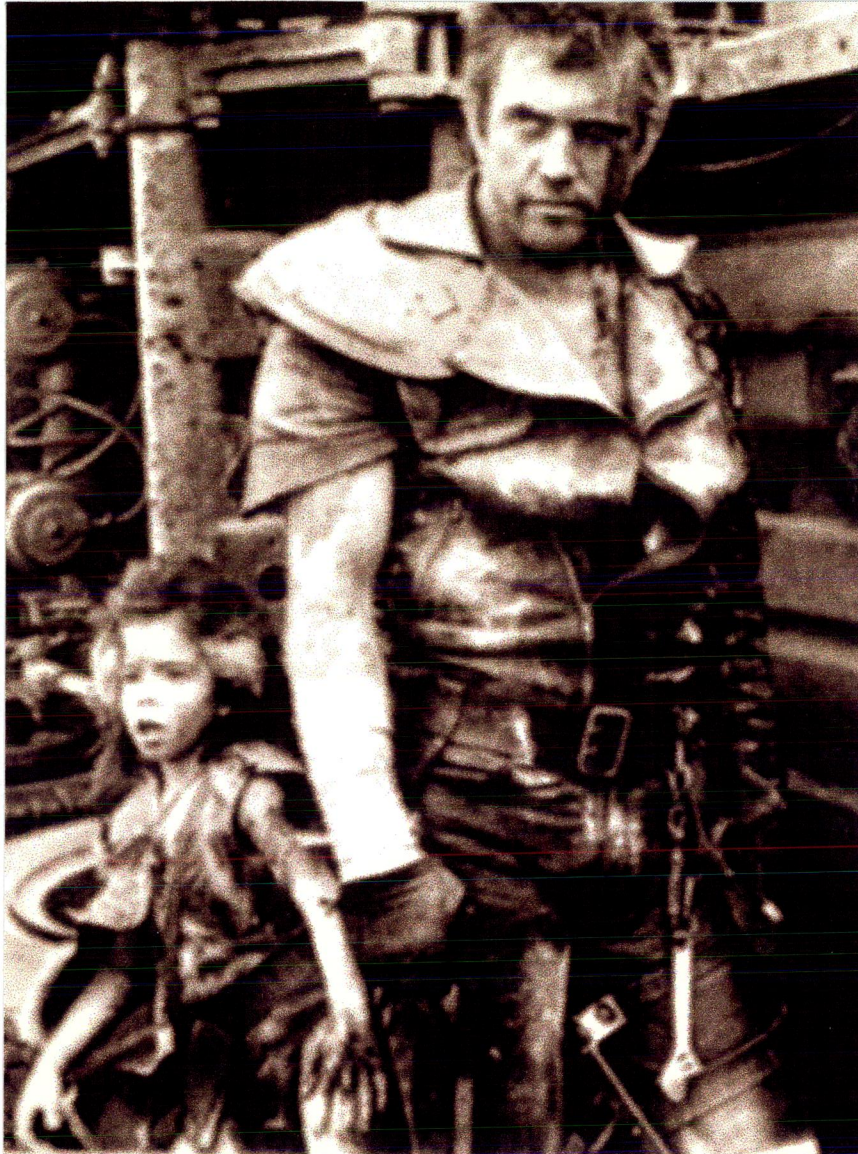
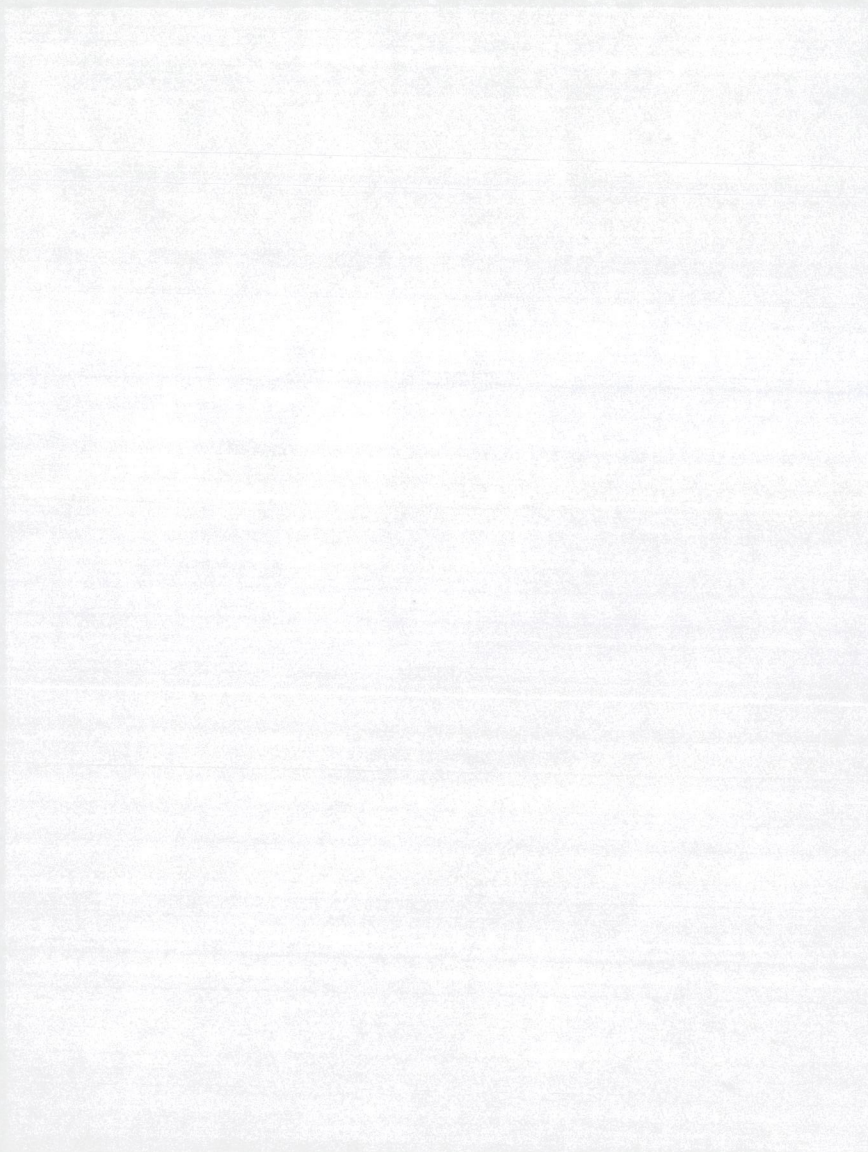


FIG 3.1 A SCENE FROM *MAD MAX 2- BEYOND THUNDERDOME*, 1981.

The follow on to films of the Gibbonian theme are those films of the Mad Max type. In these films civilisation is gone. There is no law, no society, no future. Civilisation, and all the viciousness and savagery that goes with it, is superseded by an even greater and more primitive savagery in the ruins of the civilisation which has destroyed itself. The film *Mad Max* (fig 3.1) is set in Australia after a catastrophe which has utterly destroyed civilisation. The survivors, including the hero Max (Mel Gibson) fight among themselves in gangs, or as loners for whatever depleted resources that are left. In the aftermath of the collapse of society, the barbarism of the marauding gangs seems all the more violent and tragic. The paraphernalia of the old world is all around. Wrecked cars, the rare guns, and the ever precious petrol.

The apocalypse has reduced us all to animalistic self-serving barbarism, and all our endeavours have come to nothing. It is the end of class, the end of philosophy, the end of God, and the end of morality. In respect to postmodern ideology, this poses a question which Jon Lewis addresses in his essay; 'The Crisis of Authority in Rumble Fish'. Even a cursory survey of the critical literature on the subject provides the following obituaries: the death of the subject, the end of the master narratives, the critical deconstruction of tradition, the loss of stable linguistic models, the irrelevance of distinction between high and low art, the end of metaphysics and the absolute



failure of theory. It seems hardly worth arguing that from the very start postmodernism has positioned itself at the end: of modernism, the modern era, the fascism of elite/high art, Marxism, the avant garde, the dialectic of the spirit- take your pick. But is postmodernism the end of something else different and new, or just the end? Is it the exhaustion of inspiration, critique and intervention? Is postmodernism a critical discourse or (just) a discourse of acquiescence? Another example of the connection of the principal of postmodernism to the representations of the apocalypse in films like *Mad Max* is the bootlegging, recycling and plundering of the past. This is used throughout apocalypse films, the past dragged up and converted into new forms, but it is always the past, there is never any real innovation. A good example of this is *Mad Max 3-Beyond the Thunderdome* (George Miller, 1985), where an old train is converted into a power source which provides a settlement, 'Bartertown', with light and heat. This inability to foresee or envision a future without dredging up the detritus and ashes of the past is a common factor in post-apocalypse films.

Another, more extreme vision of apocalyptic dystopia is the future world from the terminator films- *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2-Judgement Day*. The very presence of such a proliferation of science fiction films dealing with the dystopian rather than the utopian with fantasies of regression is, according to Frederic Jameson a

result of "*The atrophy of utopian imagination, in other words, our cultural incapacity to imagine the future.*" (Frederic Jameson, 1982). *The Terminator's* stark message is set forty years in the future, but it is connected to the present through the tracing of the future armageddon to events unfolding in the present. The decisions made about technology, warfare and social behaviour that are made now, today, are the direct causes of the utter devastation of the future. The path to annihilation is not, however, effected consciously, there is no devastating war sparked by human animosity. It is the result of, as Constance Penley puts it in her essay 'Time Travel, Primal Scene and Critical Dystopia' a more mundane logic of technological modernity, even if it is one that is, finally, no less catastrophic. There is a path to the apocalypse that we are already laying down (Penley, 1990, p.126). The effects of this inadvertent destruction are all the more profound because of the sheer level of decimation. Nothing is spared, there are no recognisable buildings, no roads, no trees, animals, nothing. To reinforce this even further, the ground is liberally sprinkled with human skulls. All of this is lit by a bluish light which makes the blasted landscape seem all the more barren and sterile. The dystopia is utter and complete, and the power of the film lies in placing the possibility for the conception of such a future here and now.

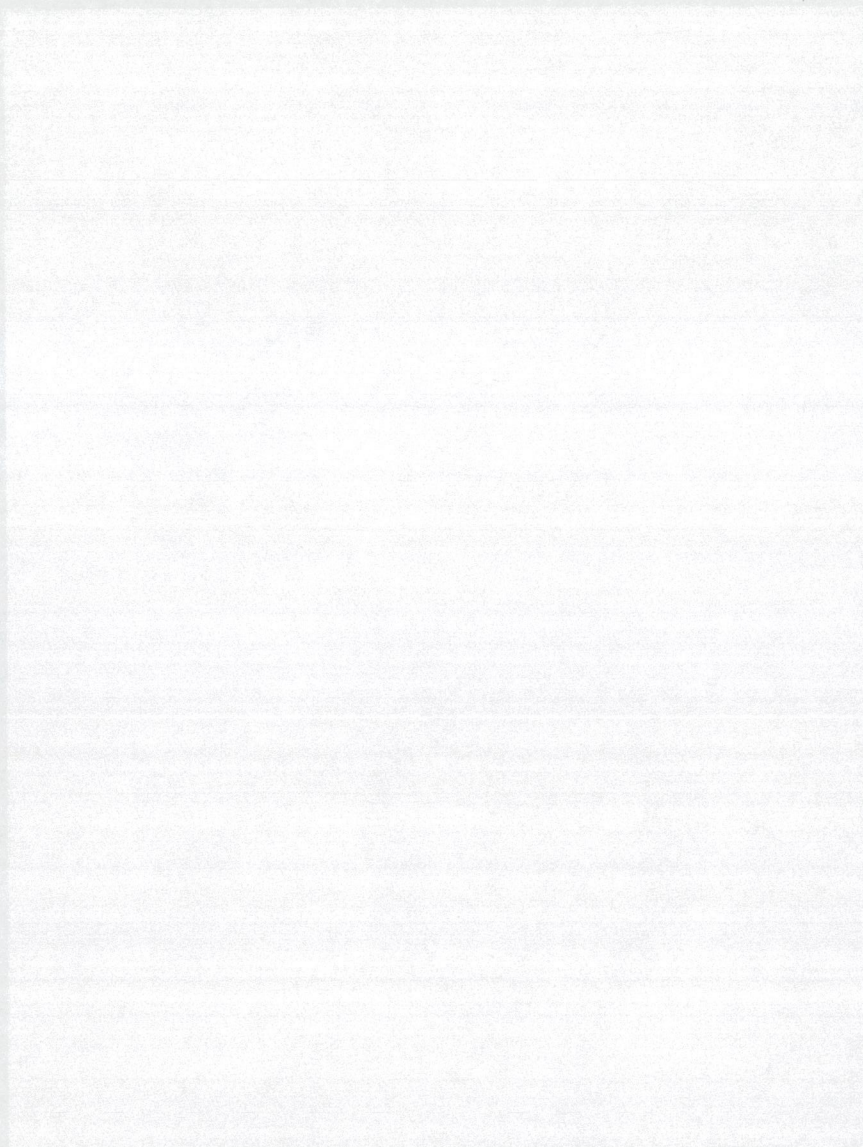
Continuing James Comb's classification of the possible



FIG 3.2 ONE OF THE FANTASY SCENES FROM *BRAZIL*, 1985.

dystopian future envisioned in modern science fiction films, which have already included Caesarian, Gibbonian and Mad Maxian, I wish to discuss the final variants on a negative future, the Orwellian and Huxleyan visions. The Orwellian future envisages the expansion and domination of state controlled power. This world would be utterly totalitarian, eclipsing freedom, creativity and basic humanity. Orwell's dystopian vision was brought to film as *1984* (Michael Radford, 1984), which was followed by films such as *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1985). (fig 3.2) Terry Gilliam reworks the Orwellian vision to include the preposterous. This combination of the sinister and the silly produces an even deepening sense of tragedy because the system is so incredibly absurd. The entire bureaucracy seems to consist of nothing more than the furtherance of human misery. Authorities are created with the sole aim of enforcing degradation without any moral or political precepts. A device which, like the darkly comic humour, enforces the overwhelming depression of the film is the fantastic dream sequences. They are of such a richness and imagination that they highlight the tawdry grey routine of the world as it is. "*Brazil does share with Orwell the darkly ironic sense that this is what modernity has come to, an apocalypse of control that is forever.*" (Combs in Sharrett, 1993, p.24)

According to Combs, the Huxleyan vision is the dystopian possibility which draws the most attention, and



is deemed by some as the most likely possible scenario, but it is the one which receives the least cinematic treatment. Why? Perhaps this is because the Huxleyan vision is precisely the one we are creating. It is a weightless culture in which power is masqueraded in propaganda, wherein technique has replaced value, slogan has become truth, and the immediate pleasurable experience has replaced and obliterated historical sensibility or humane commitment (Combs in Sharrett, 1993, p33). It is the consequence of what we are becoming after modernity, a shallow insubstantial society, slowly devouring itself. An example of the Huxleyan vision would be *THX 1138*, and the latter half of *A Clockwork Orange*. The world of *THX 1138* is a sterile world where the word of the state is law. It is a society which has stopped moving, and is, through lack of humanistic concerns and a progressive attitude, inexorably declining.

Whatever the future portrayed in these films, it is clear that their message is that modernity and its ideologies are redundant, and their march has faltered. These films show possible fearful futures which might flow from the present, and it seems the function of postmodernism in these films is to show us these futures as a display of the inevitable death throes of modern society, or as a warning, so we might avoid realising one of these dystopian catastrophes, if, indeed there is any way of avoiding such a future.



Conclusion

The themes I have explored in this thesis, the question of technology, the concepts of individuality and the self, and the breakdown of society have yielded intriguing results. I have attempted to unravel the elements fundamental to modern science fiction to discover the underlying structure. I have discussed the attitudes to modernity in science fiction film, and how the postmodern ideology has filtered into the narrative of these films, giving a plethora of futures based on the end of modernity and its transformation into a postindustrial, postmodern world.

In discussing the relationship of technology to human considerations it has become clear that technological prowess no longer enjoys the status it once received. Various technophobic concerns, both conservative and liberal, manifest themselves in various science fiction films. Technology in these films is out of control, rampant and self-serving. It has no limitations or parameters due to the relinquishing of responsibility by humankind to the rule of the machine. Such technological dependency usually leads to disaster, from the near extinction of humanity to its reduction to an obsolete or copyable component. However, at the end of these films, the machine is inevitably overcome by the last representatives of the individual on Earth, reasserting a modernist belief

in the agency of the individual. Yet is the impression we are left with is that of the terror of the machine.⁷ We remember the implacability of the Terminator machine in *The Terminator*, the relentlessness of the Borg on *First Contact*, and the Destructive power of the war machines in *Independence Day*. This is, in part due to the implausible endings of many of these films. This is true of the film *Independence Day*, for example. At one point nuclear weapons are bouncing off the aliens ships like spears, the next minute two men in a stolen spaceship destroy the mothership with a combination of one-liners and a computer virus. This would seem to suggest that even in post-classical cinema the 'happy-ending' is inserted to keep the audience content, despite the probable conclusion to many of these films.

There is heavy emphasis in contemporary science fiction films on the self, and the permeability of the self in science fiction film. The manifestation of many of the postmodern concerns expressed in science fiction film is the cyborg. The cyborg is an avatar of postmodernism in science fiction film. Its boundaries are blurred and indistinct. They offer no solutions, but incorporate various disparate elements to create a new entity.

The cyborg as discussed in this thesis offers us a vision of a symbiotic melding of the human and the technological

to create an entirely new entity, an entity indicative of the postmodern age. The Compromised Body is an agent of chaos. It is a body which makes little of any sense of physical identity or self. This body's parameters are unstable and inconstant. Physical integrity, used as a representation of identity in science fiction films, is mutated or destroyed altogether. Creatures such as the beast from *The Thing*, and the creature from *Alien* are the ultimate realisation of the fears felt of the physical dissolution of the self. They have no regard for, or even idea of self. They are physically malleable, and revel in this chaos of form. Unlike similar shape shifters, such as the T-1000 from *Terminator 2- Judgement Day*, they are biological nightmares, turning our own bodies into a canvas of mutation, displaying their reconstructions of the flesh for all to see. They steal and imitate the identity of others, their victims destroyed in the process. They can hide in these forms, inducing paranoia, and becoming the ultimate symbol in science fiction film of postmodern fears of the disintegration of the self.

The dystopian scenario has proven to be a major theme of science fiction film. Postmodernism is an ideology of endings, and finds full reign in these films. The end of modernity, the end of God, the end of invention. These films travel down various avenues of dystopia, all portraying the failure of the system, and the ruin of humanity, from the barren wastes of *Mad Max*, a

consequence of the failure of civilisation through over exploitation, to the nightmare world of *Brazil*, a miserable society existing for nothing more than the furtherance of human degradation. These films portray catastrophes that the postmodern ideology envisages.

This thesis has investigated these themes of science fiction cinema and attempted to determine the ramifications of postmodern ideology on these themes. As I have explored them, these futures have become projections of postmodern concerns and fears about the direction society is heading in. These films articulate these concerns and fears, and offer us insights into social realities, and possible social futures.



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