Exploding Spaces

Present and Future Urban Spaces Cinematically Considered

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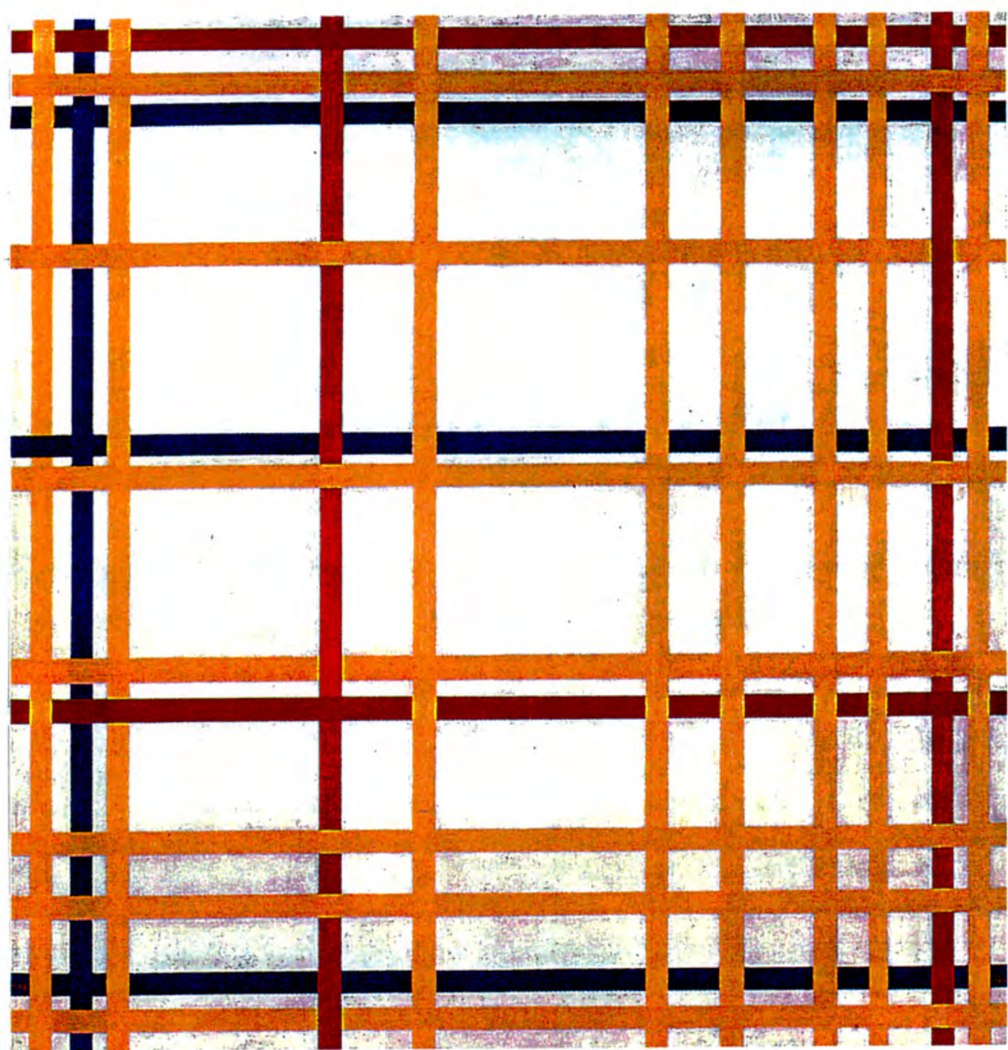

[**Abstract**]

Urban visions in contemporary film considered to be science fiction are, in fundamental ways, not extrapolations from (or even analogies with) the present, but rather derive their extrapolative impetus from the confluence of urban utopianism and the development of the film medium in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

This study seeks to understand the visual dynamics of contemporary science fiction cities in film by exploring a number of diverse architectural and cinematic influences. The argument is initiated through a consideration of utopianism and science fiction, before moving onto specific architectural analysis focused on utopian plans from the modernist period, and the growth of New York during the 1920s. Through a brief reading of German Expressionist Cinema in Chapter 3, the spatial and architectural groundwork is laid for the analysis of several films in Chapters 4 - 6: *Disclosure*, *Blade Runner*, *Se7en*, *The Devil's Advocate*, *12 Monkeys* and *The Fifth Element*. (While not all the films would be considered as science fiction, those non-science fiction films offer provocative readings of the city as a whole). Within the discussion of these films, the paradigmatic nature of New York and Los Angeles is also analyzed.

The author finds that the central thesis holds, though discussion of other contemporary films not dealt with here could produce an alternative interpretation. Specifically, the work of Edward Soja and Michel Foucault provide fruitful lines of examination through an engagement with the spatiality of postmodernism, though postmodernism is not analyzed in itself.

The dissertation aims to have current application, in terms of the recent release of some of the films, but is also written with the aim of future expansion, stressing the design aspect of contemporary film.

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[**Acknowledgements**]

I would like to thank the following for their assistance financially, emotionally and intellectually through the writing of this dissertation, and through my MLitt. Degree as a whole.

To the *Centre for Science Development* and *The University of Cape Town* for their financial assistance during both years of this degree.

To the *Cape Town College of Education* for the generous use of their facilities.

To Chris, Gabeba and Herman for organizing *Inter Action*, a wonderful, and exciting forum for postgraduates.

To all my friends who kept me positive in dire times, and particularly Tony, William, Brendan, Mary, Nicola, Heather, Jyoti, Colette and Alex (for letting me ramble).

To Lesley, who got me moving on this road a few years ago now, and for whose intelligence, patience, optimism, and humour I cannot thank her enough.

And to Mom, Dad (and Granny, to whom I dedicate this) - Thanks, and it doesn't end here.

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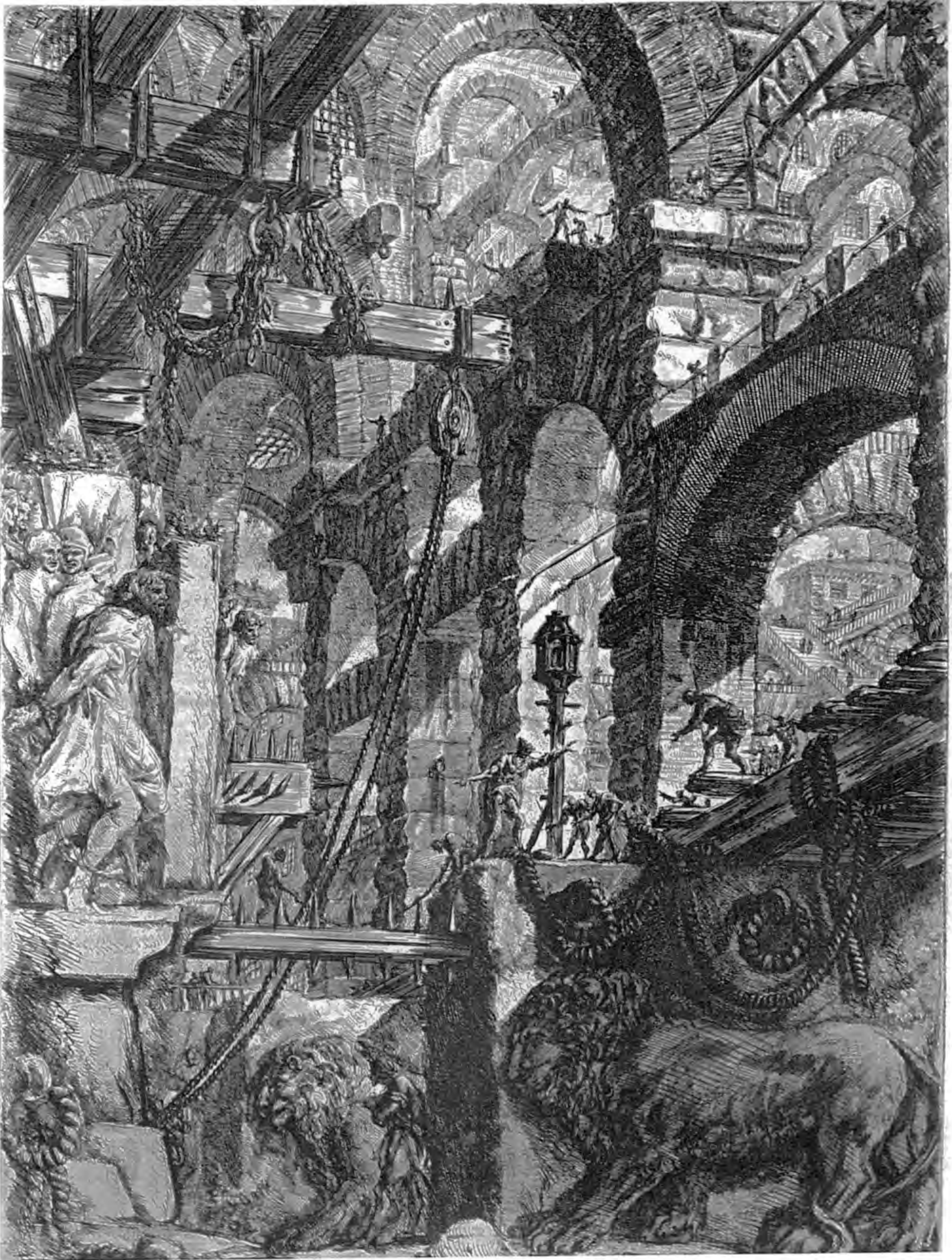
Cover Plate - Piet Mondrian *New York City I*
Introductory Plate - Giovanni Battista Piranesi *Carceri, Plate V*



Intro[duction]

> Simple shapes are inhuman. They fail to resonate with the way nature organizes itself or with the way human perception sees the world....
> A geometrical shape has a *scale*, a characteristic size. To Mandelbrot, art that satisfies lacks scale, in the sense that it contains important elements at all sizes. Against the Seagram Building, he offers the architecture of the Beaux-Arts...A Beaux Arts paragon like the Paris Opera has no scale because it has every scale. An observer seeing the building from any distance finds some detail that draws the eye. The composition changes as one approaches and new elements of the structure come into play.
>
> James Gleick [1]

It might seem odd to introduce a dissertation on urban visions in film via an eighteenth-century etching, a twentieth-century abstract painting and an explanation of the relationship between fractal geometry and art. However, I wish to demonstrate how the contradictions that abound in modern urban thought have played out across the peculiar visual canvas of film, and in doing so attempt to construct a slightly different historical foundation for what we currently see in the cinema. Thus, this dissertation is primarily concerned with film, mainly science fiction film. I say mainly, because as Manfredo Tafuri writes: "How often, when probing what is on the fringes of a given problem, do we discover the most useful keys for dealing with the problem itself ..." [2] And so there is constantly material, in whatever form built, written, painted or filmed, that offers more to an argument than one might think from first appearances: it isn't only science fiction films that can deliver pertinent visual evidence of the way filmmakers are currently constructing the future.

The two visual introductions, by Piet Mondrian and Giovanni Battista Piranesi, are two entrances into the city, not main arteries or short cuts, but merely other roads into a place accessible by any number of means. Piranesi's etching both enthralls and terrifies us; it amazes us through its massive scale, and yet, as Mandelbrot would

admire, it reveals an increasing number of scales the more you look at it. But perhaps more acutely, it disrupts our attempts to organize its perspective in our minds by collapsing and expanding distances, by making things closer or further away than we feel they should be. It provides us with recognizable forms - stairways, arches and pillars - but then 'organizes' them in disarray.

Mondrian's painting, one of his last, is part of a series of New York paintings where he experimented with his famous geometric abstraction in new mediums (coloured tape) and new contexts. Here we are confronted with the recognizable proportions of straight lines in right-angled relation to one another, and yet a not entirely balanced arrangement of these lines on the canvas. Stripped of all detail we face the abstraction of the city, the grid where we might be both liberated and made anonymous. These tensions partly constitute the turbulent relationship between the city and the city dweller; a mixture of awe and fear at the continued lateral and vertical expansion visible in urban environments across the world.

How, then, can one move from Piranesi and Mondrian on the fringes, to the 'problem' itself - an examination of our futures in the frames of today's films? As is often the case, these problems, or to use a more positive term - engagements - arise from a single connection, and a resultant 'what if' type of question. For this dissertation, such a connection came when looking at *Blade Runner* again with the more recent knowledge of Piranesi's etchings, and immediately wondering at some essential yet hard-to-place similarity between the urban vision of Scott's film and the terribly beautiful complexity of the fifth plate of the *Carceri* in particular. It started me thinking on the nature of modern cities; not only what they are now, but how they have come to be what they are. Perhaps most importantly, my thoughts centered on how we are constantly

involved in countless contradictory struggles in the city, some of those struggles being the ways we attempt to represent our relationship with the city artistically. It is such artistic representation of the city that I am concerned with; and, as I stated above, the art of film in particular.

A second 'moment' that manifests itself in the title of this dissertation concerns Luc Besson's depiction of 23rd-century Manhattan in *The Fifth Element*, and wondering whether similar impulses that drove Fritz Lang to make *Metropolis* after his visit to New York in 1924, were involved in Besson's creation of the future. The route back to a central 'problem' here actually led to two problems: firstly, how such meditations on urbanism and art impacted on the unavoidable comparisons between *Blade Runner* and *The Fifth Element*; and secondly, how Besson's film, no matter how cursorily, dealt with the idea of urban growth.

And so these two 'what if' meditations stated more rigorously as a proposal take shape as follows: *that urban visions of the future in contemporary film considered to be science fiction are, in fundamental ways, not extrapolations from (or even analogies with) the present, but rather derive their extrapolative impetus from the confluence of urban utopianism and the development of the film medium in the first three decades of the twentieth century.* Within this there are more specific explorations: the explosive growth and unique shape of New York at the beginning of this century; the influence of utopian ideas not only during this period, but also how we see utopia today; and the various possible threads of the development of science fiction film that one must weave into the argument.

In the end, it is my hope that this time-travelling journey through the gridded canyon of the futuristic city is not only provocative - by examining a variety of 'histories'

that operate within the urban visions in contemporary film; but also enjoyable - by celebrating a uniquely cinematic visual fascination with the city.

Chapter[One]

I would like to start by leaving the architectural aspect of this dissertation aside for a while and discussing the utopian and science fiction components of the central argument. Utopia and science fiction are so closely related as to be virtually inseparable, and there is an enormous corpus of work dedicated to this relationship, from influential works such as Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, to articles dedicated to specific books and films in publications like *Science Fiction Studies* and *Extrapolations*. Given this wide coverage, my intention here is to pick out only certain relevant threads, rather than a survey of critical views.

Part I - Science Fiction Film: A Primer

> The field of SF criticism is SF, and this truism becomes significant when we pause to consider how little agreement there is about the basic parameters of SF.
>
> Darko Suvin [1]

The analysis I intend to produce in this dissertation regarding the nature of contemporary and futuristic cities in film is not intended as science-fiction criticism, although it will deal with films considered to be science fiction and will examine at length certain discourses associated with, or existing as components of, science fiction. However, SF criticism is often too prescribed by generic parameters governing not only such criticism but also the writing (or filming) of SF. Lengthy debates have involved protracted battles for SF's 'recognition' by the councils of 'serious literature' (and, conversely, whether such recognition is relevant) as well as the perceived incongruencies between SF literature and SF film. The former has resulted in the urge to exclude (and hold up as specific a definition of 'proper' science fiction as possible), or to include as wide a variety of ideas as possible (thereby presenting a more integrated view of SF), while the latter has produced arguments over whether SF films are, in the end, "not about science, [but] about disaster, which is one of the oldest subjects of art", [2] and whether their futuristic conceptions are, in fact, prefabricated reconstructions of our past attempting to historicize our present.

Perhaps the most important issue to deal with at this early stage is the relating of a large corpus of SF criticism that deals, in the main, with literature to the specific focus of this dissertation - SF films, and specifically contemporary SF films. There is space for an extensive, provocative and beneficial application of theories of SF literature to SF cinema, and yet one needs to handle such criticism carefully so as not, on the one hand, quickly to impose literary readings on film, or, one the other, to ignore

or neglect influences specific to film in general, and to SF film in particular.

One of the most common projects in generic analysis is locating the moment of inception, that text or event which (always seen retrospectively) signals a new mode of writing. In detective fiction we can go back to Poe, or Shakespeare or to Oedipus Rex to find our 'first' detective, and first narrative of detection; so in science fiction, we can go back to Jules Verne, Mary Shelley, or Jonathan Swift. But, continuing with the parallel case of detective fiction, genealogies can be very different depending on what artistic medium, and which literary tradition, one is dealing with. For example, if one is discussing *film noir*, the influences both direct and more historical would include the *Black Mask* school of writing in America during the 1930s, and the history of German Expressionist film (from whence many of *noir*'s greatest directors started out); whereas a discussion on British detective fiction would consider, rather, Wilkie Collins, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and so on. So too SF where, I believe, we should be looking at the growth of pulp fiction in the 1920s and '30s and, once again, the influence of German Expressionism in our attempts to understand the way SF film *looks* today. This is not to say that the likes of Swift, Verne and others should be ignored; on the contrary, they are touchstones in the genre of science fiction in whatever artistic medium it might manifest itself.

Somehow, though, we have to acknowledge and understand why, for instance, *The Fifth Element* is great to look at but a terrible read; why *Dune* was such a colossal failure on film; [3] and why, besides Kubrick's *2001*, no film has approached the epic scope of, say, Olaf Stapeldon or Isaac Asimov's books (no matter what Lucas and Roddenberry fans might claim). In fact, in looking at SF film, one has to confront the following observation:

> Film, in so far as it can make visible what is invisible, seems a natural medium for this kind of narrative. However, science fiction films have been more erratic in their appearances on screen than most other genres. [4]

There were few notable pre-World War II SF films (though the influence of *Metropolis* in particular is enormous); and from the 1950s on, while SF films had their moments, they were always nervously approached by major studios, and were often mixed with elements from other genres (horror and fantasy, for example) to coat the pill, one might say. But while Ballard and Dick were writing revolutions in SF, SF films after *2001* experienced a precarious existence until Lucas projected Luke Skywalker et al. at the world in 1977. Part of the reason for this might be the problem of following up *2001*, a film that "ended with the human race on the verge of cosmic transcendence - the next stage of an evolution engineered all along by the mysterious god-like aliens." [5] Indeed, the early-1970s SF films nobly intended to be serious and socially aware, and produced interesting, if dark and dystopian films which (unfortunately) are virtually unremembered today - *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970) and *Silent Running* (1972) for example. Some films did make an impression and are still influential, namely Robert Wise's adaption of Michael Crichton's book, *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), and Charlton Heston's films, *The Omega Man* (1971) and *Soylent Green* (1973), which were guaranteed a degree of interest after his role in another '60s classic *The Planet of the Apes* (1968). [6] Whatever the reasons, SF film languished in the twilight of mainstream cinema until 1977, though there were bright sparks from independent films like *Dark Star* (1974), and *A Boy and his Dog* (1976).

Today, things seem very different in terms of narrative, design and characterization. Technological advances both on and off screen enable filmmakers to dazzle their audiences like never before, and through an Internet-driven, information-

obsessed popular culture, directors are able to extract liberally from the resources of SF film and literature (including, very importantly, comics and graphic novels).

These are issues I will discuss later. For the moment, I will look at science fiction by drawing it closer to the notion of utopia - the utopian impulse being an integral part of the architectural discussion in subsequent chapters.

Part II - Utopia with a Vengeance

Part of the game of constructing and criticizing utopias since Sir Thomas More's 'invention' of the word has centred on the ambiguities opened up by its etymology. As Lewis Mumford says, "More was a punster, in an age when the keenest minds delighted to play tricks with language, and when it was not always wise to speak too plainly," [7] and so the 'trick' that More created lay in Utopia possibly referring either to 'eutopia', meaning 'the good place', or 'outopia' meaning 'no place'. Good place and no place; the possibilities stemming from this simple ambiguity are enormous.

Far from the simple wordgame of Utopia, however, are Mumford's sombre thoughts on twentieth-century utopias after the two wars, and particularly, the A-bomb.

> The leaders of science, technology and military affairs who have most despised the function of ideals have actually turned the expansion of their equipment for destruction and extermination into an ultimate ideal. This is utopianism with a vengeance: the nihilistic perfection of nothingness. [8]

Mumford's sentiments here are taken from the 1962 Preface to his book, *The Story of Utopias* (originally published in 1922), and they are an example of how any discussion on utopian speculations this century, either literary or cinematic, must take this extraordinary event into account. In saying this, I should add that the entire process of developing the bomb - its theoretical beginnings, its scientific development coupled with military interest which came to a head at Los Alamos, and finally its detonation - is represented by the historical sign of one single event (the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), and the visual sign of the mushroom cloud.

It is at this point, however, that science fiction and Utopia can easily be sidetracked into a perversely gleeful celebration of disaster, as Sontag points out - a reiterated statement about humanity's inhumanity and the baleful prospects for our future. More recently, with the Cold War over, filmmakers (and audiences) are still

producing, and lapping up scenarios of global destruction, though now this occurs via asteroids, comets, volcanoes, the worldwide spread of Ebola-type viruses, global warming and floods. Indeed,

> The scientific imagination, in providing a new mythology of catastrophe, has to overturn the old mythologies provided by the religious imagination. It has no option but to reflect them even as it transfigures them. [9]

Without indulging wholly in matters of catastrophe and disaster, it is necessary to show how science fiction has been infused with a mainly dystopian streak this century, as this is even more evident in SF film than in SF literature.

In 1945, with J. Robert Oppenheimer supposedly reciting lines from the Bhagavadgita ("I am became death...") in the afterglow of the first A-bomb detonation, we learnt how to destroy ourselves, not by degrees but, for the first time, at a stroke. However, it is easy to forget that there were earlier intimations of global destruction through 'technological progress' than Little Boy and Fatman: for example the discovery and development of certain key scientific concepts during a short period at the end of the nineteenth century - Röntgen's discovery of X-rays, Becquerel's description of 'radioactivity' in uranium, and Marconi's development of 'wireless' communications.

> By 1900 it was a great deal easier to imagine that the power to annihilate mankind might one day rest in human hands than it had been in 1894, and it was this expansion of imaginative power which made the year 1900 a genuine *fin de siècle*. [10]

While the potential terrors of radioactivity and X-rays loomed ominously on the edge of the 20th-century, a metaphoric precedent for man's self-inflicted destruction had been established eighty years earlier by Mary Shelley. With Dr. Victor Frankenstein, Shelley had created a catastrophe wrought upon Frankenstein by the beast of his own making, and while the doctor may have been the modern Prometheus, his punishment was not mythically eternal and sanctioned by deities, but rather grim and fatally momentary, and

inflicted firmly within the ambit of mortal human action.

This fate, stated eloquently as a metaphor by Shelley, but enacted altogether more viscerally by the American military, leads one to a better understanding of this current age that has been and, to a large extent still is, strongly dystopian. Once again, though, it is not a specific technological development or 'event' that causes such a shift; rather one needs to reassess key developments much further back in the history of utopias as they relate to the past fifty years.

Between More's *Utopia* and the Industrial Revolution, utopian texts began to compete with flights of fancy (mostly to the moon) as metaphoric commentaries on contemporary moral and political problems. In 1638, John Wilkins published *The Discovery of a New World*, the same year as Francis Godwin produced *The Man in the Moone, or a Discourse of a Voyage Thither by Domingo Gonsales, The Speedy Messenger*, and even the scientist Kepler contributed his creative abilities with the altogether more strange *Somnium* (published in 1634, four years after his death). [11] The legendary Cyrano de Bergerac produced a pair of fantastical journeys; *The Comical History of the States and Empires of the World of the Moon* (1656); and *The Comical History of the States and Empires of the World of the Sun* (1662) which, though containing some truly bizarre concepts, also produced astute scientific ideas. [12]

Whether fantastical or scientifically sound, these works point to the increased role of science in the utopian society in the first half of the seventeenth century, represented most significantly by Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), and Tomasso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1637). However, the role science played in these societies was different in important ways: in Campanella, technological advancement was anticipated; for example in the boats that were powered by

"marvellous contrivance"; [13] while, on the other hand, Bacon, a vigorous advocator of empirical scientific methods, created a utopia dedicated to observation, collection and experiment. For Mumford, Campanella and Bacon represent an "entrance to the utopia of means," [14] and in this manner act as precursors to later utopian thinking situated within the realm of the Industrial Revolution's early zeal (though Mumford dismisses them almost entirely outside of this context as mostly second-rate reworkings of earlier utopian tracts).

Within the context of this dissertation, the forms of technology introduced by these two writers is not as important as the implications that they had on the way utopia could be achieved. After Bacon, progress became identified with scientific - and concomitantly, technological - advancement: hence humanity was to take a more assertive hand in changing nature. For Raymond Williams, More and Bacon represent two significant loci within utopian thought:

> More's island is a cooperative subsistence economy; Bacon's a specialized industrial economy. These can be seen as permanent alternative images, and the swing towards one or the other, in socialist ideology as in progressive utopianism, is historically very significant. (One might indeed write a history of modern socialist thought in terms of the swing between Morean cooperative simplicity and a Baconian mastery of nature, except that the most revealing trend has been their unconscious fusion). [15]

Williams situates these two visions within a structure of four categories of utopian writing: paradise and hell, the externally altered world, the willed transformation, and the technological transformation. He is particularly interested in the last two, and shows how the utopia of technological transformation takes on a heuristic aspect towards the end of the nineteenth century, thus creating a tension between a willed transformative utopia - a place where people have forced a societal change, and a heuristic utopia where society has changed after the development of new science and technology. [16]

For Darko Suvin, utopias have a more specific character:

> As different from religious ideas about other worlds such as Paradise and Hell, utopia is an historically alternative wishful contract. Its islands, valleys, communities or worlds are constructed by natural intelligent beings - human or humanoid - by their own forces, without transcendental support or intervention. [17]

While Suvin's position perfectly describes the acutely dystopian quality of an 'event' such as the atom bomb - a country or a planet made an island by the hands of its own inhabitants - Williams's fourth category, the technological transformation, is a necessarily distinctive refinement of Suvin's human agency.

The shift indicated from the 'scientific' utopia motivated by Bacon's belief in new empirical, rational thought, to a heuristic late nineteenth-century utopia is enormously significant. While Bacon's New Atlantis is undoubtedly utopian - Bacon sees his scientific method as the way forward in all spheres of life - the heuristic idea of new societies following in the path of scientific and technological invention teeters on the brink of the fear of 'machinery out of control.' [18] There is a move here from utopia to (anti)utopia. It is not dystopia yet, since there is still faith in the usefulness and positive influence that rapid, and massive, developments of 'the machine' can effect: not entirely a 'no good place' dominated by catastrophe, it is certainly a place whose ambiguous nature is represented by the parenthetical prefix.

If one returns to Stableford's observation at this point regarding key inventions in the 1890s, one can appreciate just how tenuous that ambiguity is, and just how easily (anti)utopia becomes dystopia. Of course, this emergent dystopian sensibility is not entirely motivated by scientific development: while not separating the two realms, such change is clearly political as well, and Williams cautions against such a hasty and easily delineated understanding of the dystopian discourse:

> It is within this complex of tendencies - of efficient and affluent capitalism set against an earlier capitalist poverty and disorder; of socialism against capitalism in either phase; and of the deep divisions, within socialism itself, between the reformist free-riders with capitalism, the recentralizing engineers, and the revolutionary democrats - that we have to consider the mode of dystopia, which is both written and read within this extreme theoretical and practical complexity. [19]

Such complexity finds excellent visual example in the utopian urban dynamics from the 1890s into the twentieth century: the specifically capitalist impulse leading to the growth of skyscrapers and their use in many socialist utopian plans; and the simultaneous desire in both socialist and capitalist environments for decentralization and regionalism. However, amidst all this complexity, one also sees the degree of fusion that Williams expresses elsewhere in the article [cf. Endnote 15].

It is with this 'fusion' in mind that one should re-read Mumford's quote, because it produces a better understanding of his play with More's original ambiguity. The essential tension in More's term is between the perceptually real and the imaginary in terms of, broadly speaking, both geography and morality. A geographical 'no place' and a moral 'good place', Utopia is presented as a desirable alternative to the morality of the all-too-real world in which More finds himself. The step Mumford takes is to turn this geographical 'no place' into a 'someplace', and more specifically, a 'this place'.

Thus Mumford's nihilistic "perfection of nothingness" is exactly that - a perfection. It is a process of abstraction that has brought the 'ideal' of utopia to an extremity where it is both 'good place' and 'no place'; 'good' in its successful devotion to the concept of an ideal, and yet as 'no place', a chilling cypher for the manifestation of that ideal. One could say that the atomic bomb, the apotheosis of our ability to destroy ourselves, is also the fusion of our will to change society, and the process of allowing technology to change our society for us. It draws to a point, previously unimagined even in 'the war

to end all wars', our belief in the progress guaranteed by scientific invention and technological advancement, and our ideal of wanting to change the world not by degrees but at a stroke. For this is a crucial facet of utopias; they exist anew beyond the scope of cartography or time. And whether they adopt apocalyptic premises, or propose spatio-temporal obscurity for their creation, they exist in a dislocated place where their contrary ideals might be established. Or as Williams states succinctly: "to live otherwise, commonly, is to be other and elsewhere." [20]

Part III - Utopia and Time

The present... is inaccessible directly.

Fredric Jameson [21]

I stated above that a fundamental aspect of utopias is their dislocation from the contemporary world, be it sixteenth-century England, early twentieth-century New York, or late twentieth-century Los Angeles. However, as crucial to an understanding of utopias is their roots in the present: they exist as a paradigm of preferable conditions to those experienced by the writer in his or her world. And this is one of the further contradictions inherent in utopias: that no matter how far away in space and time they might be, they are always representative of the contemporary - chronologically and spatially fixed - time of the writer. As a result, when one reads or watches a utopian vision unfold, one is involved in a type of historical process whereby the writer's society is open to interpretation. Importantly, though, this view is always retrospective, and as obvious as that may sound, it is vital in understanding the dilemma we face when attempting to express the conditions of the present. Discussing Proust, Jameson writes:

> ...the present - in this society, and in the physical and psychic dissociation of the human subjects who inhabit it - is inaccessible directly, is numb, habituated, empty of affect. Elaborate strategies of indirection are therefore necessary if we are somehow to break through our monadic insulation and to 'experience', for some first and real time, this present, which is after all all we have. [22]

Relating this more specifically to SF, Jameson describes how our ideas of a technologically progressive utopia are dated; how "that particular Utopian future has... turned out to have been merely the future of one moment of what is now our own past." [23] And so we reach a stage where the present becomes the past of an imagined future; a stage where we create alternative future visions so that we might read them

retrospectively, as it were, as history - as a history of now. Crucially, though; "the present is in fact no less a past if its destination prove to be the technological marvels of Verne or, on the contrary, the shabby and maimed automata of P.K. Dick's near future." [24]

Another way of examining this dynamic is to say that, as a result of utopias being expressed essentially in the terms of the present, the utopian visions we create are unavoidably constrained by those terms, so that "what is indeed authentic about [SF] as a mode of narrative and form of knowledge, is not at all its capacity to keep the future alive, even in imagination. On the contrary, its deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future." [25] It is in this manner that one can see most clearly the close relationship between SF and utopias, and yet as many critics have pointed out, one should not see mere prognostication in SF's forward-looking nature.

> Laying no claims to prophecies except for its statistically probable share, SF should not be treated as a prophet: it should neither be enthroned when apparently successful nor beheaded when apparently unsuccessful. [26]

However, Suvin does add a little further on that, "as a minimum, we must demand from SF that it be wiser than the world it speaks of," [27] and this calls up two pronounced problems, or debates, in SF as a whole. Firstly, one could interrogate the word 'wise', because SF is not just about technology or scientific wizardry, a fault that manifests itself in both literature and film. Distant galaxies, bizarre beings and curious gadgets cannot hide the fact that some SF films are just reworkings of established literary or cinematic genres: they lack any kind of social vision. Suvin describes this need for both scientific and social imagination thus:

> Even more importantly, [SF] demands from author and reader, teacher and critic, not merely specialized, quantified positivistic knowledge (*scientia*) but

> a social imagination whose quality of wisdom (*sapientia*) testifies to the maturity of his critical and creative thought. [28]

The second distinction Suvin makes - that between extrapolation and analogy - relates more to the specifically utopian aspect of SF, but, of course, this necessarily involves the idea of social as well as scientific imagination.

> ...already in Wells's *Time Machine* and Stapeldon, this extrapolating transcended the sociological spectrum (from everyday practice through economics to erotics) and spilled into 'billion-year' biology and cosmology. The ensuing radical estrangements can, no doubt, be *anticipated* in a chronological future, but they cannot, scientifically speaking, be *extrapolated*. By this token, futuristic anticipation reveals that extrapolating is a fictional device and ideological horizon rather than the basis for a cognitive model. [author's italics] [29]

In contemporary SF film, there is a tendency to stay within a 'safe' chronological future (there are very few films that look much further forward than a few centuries), and, as a result, to extrapolate from present conditions instead of anticipating change. Coupled to this, the futuristic societies we see are signalled mainly by the appearance of their technology, and, again, not by any significant societal change. This reluctance to take forward leaps of epic proportions might be one of the reasons why the structural and ideological facets of utopias that operate within SF are not actively explored by mainstream filmmakers, but rather occur in the films incidentally, almost unconsciously. In subsequent chapters, I will show how the design of these films establishes such tendencies, as well as the foundations on which these attitudes towards design are based.

Ultimately, there always exists in the notion of Utopia a tension between a collective sense, and the individual author's assessment of the social environment at any time as reflected in the utopian text of that individual.

> The *utopian longing* which arose from the people's collective imagination throughout history was thus enclosed in a fictive *utopian locus* which arose

> from the individual imagination of the author, who presented it to her or his audience in a finished, unchanging form. What the utopographer did was to verbalize and enclose the *utopian horizon* of an age, which was in itself non-discursive, infinite and open-ended. [author's italics] [30]

Thus, in an examination of the utopian 'longings' of an era, a place or an artistic sphere (such as architecture or film), one has to be aware of the individual nature of utopian visions. It is true that one vision might influence others, and so when looking at films between the world wars, one could say that many filmmakers were attracted to the utopian 'locus' of *Metropolis*. Likewise, the 1980s, where Ridley Scott's dystopian locus, *Blade Runner* has influenced, mainly visually, many other films. In both cases, the value of Somay's notion of the 'utopian locus' is significant, for the elements under discussion in subsequent chapters are not all-encompassing utopian evaluations, but rather loci that *suggest* a utopian or dystopian condition.

Part IV - Utopia and Science Fiction Film Today

How, then, can we set about understanding utopia and science fiction now, in film, in the late 1990s? In a recent magazine article, Lawrence Schubert writes that the term 'utopia' has been "orphaned", detached from its ancestry and the origins of its identity,[31] and Suvin anticipates as much when he writes some twenty years earlier:

> I propose that an acknowledgement that utopias are verbal artifacts before they are anything else, and that the source of this concept is a literary genre and its parameters, might be, if not the first and the last, nonetheless a central point in today's debate on utopias. [32]

Too often, the notion of utopia is lost to historical discourses beneath a welter of futuristic afflictions and fantastical imaginings. Perhaps more significantly it is a rarity to find truly utopian or dystopian visions on the big screen - the combatant genre of alien invasion being generally more common of late. Admittedly, we have seen the 'utopian' side of this coin - aliens integrated into global society in *Men in Black* (1997) - as well as the dystopian - humans staving off the spectre of intergalactic colonialism in *Independence Day* (1996). But, humour aside, these films display the kind of tongue-in-cheek postmodernism that produces a cinema relentlessly referencing entry after entry in a variety of genres, finally constructing a frame about it that displays its genealogy - its direct descent and its more distant relatives. Despite all appearances though - its exhausted self gathering around it glimmering artifacts hastily collected and put together in those two dark hours in the theatre - it might not be about the future, about utopias, or about science fiction. Jonathan Benison describes perhaps the strongest manifestation of SF in contemporary culture as

> ... a repertoire of props and characters, themes and topoi in the cultural encyclopædias we carry around in our heads... Steven Spielberg and John Carpenter have given their films a sort of knowing sophistication and wit by cueing in our memories of such items from SF's 'imaginary universe'. [33]

It could be argued that for many SF film viewers today, their encyclopædias only go back as far as *Star Wars*, and maybe some of the 1960s TV shows that are either being remade or rerun (*The Outer Limits*, and non-SF shows like *Mission: Impossible*). However, I would tend to agree with Benison when he locates in this referential mode a much stronger, and more significant process: "that the SF that is peddled through the media is the wrong SF, or even a wilful manipulation that merely makes use of the SF repertoire as a code for keying into 'the collective yearning of an era.'" [34]

Though it is a short (and very creaky) step from here to problems of genuine vs. masquerading SF, Benison's argument goes a long way towards explaining not only the appearance of contemporary SF film, but also the diverse origins of SF film that, in turn, explain the persistent differences between SF literature and film.

> The well-known attributes of classical genre-SF, its high-tech fetishism and galaxy-jumping quest for the weird and wonderful, are not inherent in the textual procedures organising it as a mode, but are features closely linked to the expansionistic mindset shared by its producers and consumers in the early and so-called 'golden' periods in which it achieved its identity. [35]

I propose that this 'golden age' of SF coincides with a number of other emergent identities to produce a unique confluence of genres and related ideas (in literature, architecture and film) that is still strongly evident in today's SF films. For example, one might ask why directors of science fiction films, when planning their cities of the future, make use of cityscapes unchanged since the 1920s and '30s instead of going to today's visionary architects and seeing what their futures would look like. The argument could be that for films set in the near future, the skyline so boldly and incisively erected in that short period of time at the beginning of this century would still be present. However, I feel that the reasons for the reliance on the shapes from the past is far more complex.

Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, there are very few SF films that venture far into the

future - millennia into the future. There are no real equivalents to Stapeldon or Asimov in terms of chronological scope, as most films settle into a frame that is hardly ever 500 years advanced. However, cinema, with all its visual possibilities would seem the perfect medium to portray the epic scope of space and humanity's development. Not so. *Star Wars*, for all its weird aliens, giant spaceships and intergalactic conflict, is merely a fantasy played out in space and poses no serious questions about our future technological, social and physical development. Perhaps only *2001*, in its own ponderous, frequently enigmatic way, is the one film that has attempted to examine some of the more serious questions posed by science fiction literature. However, despite the film's status as one cinema's greatest achievements, it remains unrepeatable and is not considered great entertainment, not now or at the time of its release. *Star Wars* in either its original or digitally remastered versions remains one of the biggest grossing films ever; *Star Trek* has a following unparalleled by any artistic undertaking in any medium; and even second-rate reworkings of these two science fiction landmarks put more people in the cinema than Kubrick and Clarke's classic.

Consequently, I would argue that mainstream film is, to this day, still based on the entertainment precepts of its growth at the beginning of the century. My focus does not lie with the experimental exponents of the cinematic art; but rather with the multi-billion dollar-a-year industry that places 5 new films a week in our multiplexes and 10 new titles a week on the shelves of our video stores.

There is so much that does not change about mainstream cinema despite surface appearances to the contrary: we are still dazzled by special effects, even if those effects become more spectacular by the year; the film industry still faces constant moral censure from outside organizations, and still promises self-regulation, even if the

violence of William Wellman's *Public Enemy* (1931) pales beside most of today's actioners, and the advent of TV has made self-regulation so much more complex. And we are still mesmerized by star power over acting, even if the salaries of so many more fair-to-average actors are proportionally so much higher.

But what of design? Any contemporary analysis of urban design in film will have an enormous amount of ground to cover. Investigations into postmodernism and science fiction have ventured far into the upper reaches of many discourses; at once shrinking the ground between seemingly disparate subjects and yet expanding that space, like a megalopolis that stretches out for as far as one can see. And of course, it's not the horizon that is extending, but merely the elevation of the viewer - from the Chrysler Building to the World Trade Centre, and now to the Millennium Towers in the East. Perhaps this is too literal a conception of space for today, as Scott Bukatman explains:

> Now the inertial shell of the personal computer replaces the thrusting power of the Saturn V as the emblem of technological culture. Invisible spaces now dominate, as the *city* of the modernist era is replaced by the *non-place urban realm*, and *outer space* is superseded by *cyberspace*. [author's italics] [36]

Isn't it ironic then, that *Blade Runner*, viewed today as the seminal modern SF film, strives so hard to create a tangible, physical urban reality (even if that construction is effected by digital artifice as well as actual edifice)? Similarly *The Fifth Element* - which in places borders on space-opera or space-fantasy - and which is heralded by many as the film that will supersede *Blade Runner*'s vision of the future. Only in films like *Tron* (notably unsuccessful) which tried to interrogate the notions of contemporary space within the realm of cinema, and the SF output of directors like Terry Gilliam - which dwell on the more surreal or absurdist aspects of spatiality - does one see ways of visualizing postmodern space in the genre of SF. Otherwise SF film seems to be as

rooted in its pulp origins as it ever was, almost more determinedly so as SF literature continues to test the bounds of subjectivity and discourse diffusion. It might seem that the films are contemporary in spirit, but if one strips away the in-jokes and references, and disconnects the narrative from the long passages of special effects, then we are still watching Buck Rogers. True, the effects and design are, in many cases, as important conveyors of 'meaning' as the narrative or dialogue; but even here - perhaps most significantly here - contemporary SF films continue to display their architectural and cinematic heritage, as well as their reluctance to challenge the spatial or interpretative bounds of the cinema.

However, my interest in film design in this dissertation does not include the realms of cyberspace. On the contrary, I would argue that film, despite its reliance on increasingly complex digital effects, is essentially a medium that is heavily nostalgic in not only its narrative content, but also in its relationship with its audience. Hence, my analysis of the city in science fiction film will take a deliberately material shape in the ensuing chapters, looking at the forms and ideas that influence our design of cities in contemporary film.

Chapter[Two]

> Whoever knows how to design a park will have no difficulty in tracing a plan for the building of a city according to its given area and situation. There must be squares, crossroads, and streets. There must be regularity and fantasy, relationships and oppositions, and casual, unexpected elements that vary the scene; great order in details, confusion, uproar, and tumult in the whole.
>
> M.A. Laugier, 1753 [1]

> Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.
>
> Daniel Burnham, 1907 [2]

Daniel Burnham's declaration - 'make no little plans' - can be seen as a dictum of sorts for the first three decades of the twentieth century. Whether it was Tony Garnier's *Cité Industrielle* (published in 1917), and Le Corbusier's various utopian plans of the 1920s and '30s, Burnham's own Chicago Plan of 1909, or Speer's model for the monumental new Berlin in the 1930s (extending into the war), this period produced not only 'logical diagrams', indelible marks on the canvas of the city, but also a significant degree of built structures, from individual landmark buildings to large-scale projects (like Hendrik Berlage's design for the 'New South' area of Amsterdam, 1902-1920). Perhaps most importantly, however, is the influence the ideas from this period have exerted on architecture and urban planning into the present, and no doubt will exert in the future. If Burnham offers one essential 'truth' about urban planning and architecture at this time, then contained within Laugier's quote is another, more generally applicable 'truth'; an innate, and inexorable, dichotomy of urban discourses, between the order of design, and the tumult of life in the city.

> Laugier's call to naturalism is an appeal to the original purity of the act of designing the environment, and at the same time it shows an understanding of the preeminently *antiorganic* quality of the city. [my italics] [3]

This tension exists in whatever urban discourse one becomes involved in; from the abstracted notions of 'new' utopias, or the socio-economic considerations of low-cost housing, to the artistic representation of the city. And while debates around the physical and spiritual life of the city are obviously as old as cities themselves, it is vital to examine the city not only in terms of its contemporary economic, social and political environment, but also its identity within a diachronic historical context. In an area of study as vast and imposing as this, it is necessary to focus on specific areas; to look at only a few streets in the labyrinthine city, as it were. Of specific interest is the utopian impulse in urban planning and design during the first three decades of this century; and the relationships between architecture and film in this period.

Louis Sullivan, a seminal architect in the development of the skyscraper, (and hence in the shape of American cities) said of New York in the 1920s:

> These buildings, as they increase in number, make the city poorer morally and spiritually: they drag it down and down into the mire. This is not American civilization; it is the rottenness of Gomorrah. This is not democracy - it is savagery... So truly does this architecture reflect the causes that have brought it into being. [4]

Though Sullivan's complaint concerned largely the undisciplined eclecticism that he saw sprouting ruinously throughout America's big cities (but particularly in New York), his choice of words offers a way into some of our deeply rooted philosophies of the city. The following, admittedly narrow entrances into this cavernous discourse concern the tension between the spiritual and the physical facets of the city and pre-Morean utopian imprinting on urban thought, and relate these to developments and visions in the modern city.

Part I - Bold Plans: Moral Imperatives

In his book, *The Conscience of the Eye*, Richard Sennett locates many interesting roots in our understanding of cities. Of particular interest is an etymological root, found in the written work of Saint Isidore of Seville, and a symbolic root, found in historical analyses of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Saint Isidore, who in the sixth and early seventh centuries sought to strengthen the Church in Spain by building Christian cities, published, as part of his endeavour, a book - *Etymologies* - concerning the origin of words:

> In this book he traced the word *city* back to different sources. One is *urbs*, the stones of a city. The stones of a city were laid for practical reasons of shelter, commerce, and warfare. The other root of *city* is *civitas*, and this word is about the emotions, rituals, and convictions that take form in a city.[5]

This fundamental separation of the city's nature into physical and spiritual components is crucial not only in understanding the attitudes towards cities in antiquity, but also in relating such attitudes to contemporary criticisms of the city. In other words, it is from here that we can begin to understand Sullivan's melancholy degrading of American civilization (as seen in the architectural appearance of its cities) to the "rottenness of Gomorrah". Because Sullivan saw this rottenness represented in the architecture of the city, the 'decay' he witnessed existed physically in the *urbs*, but his invocation of Gomorrah implies a decay in the *civitas* of the city as well. [6]

On the relating of Isidore's terms to the actual construction of the city, Sennett goes on to say:

> Christianity, Isidore thought, cannot be practised in a pagan *urbs*. In this conviction the conqueror of the Visigoths took a step beyond Augustine and the other early Church fathers, who saw no need to tear down the temples of Diana, the baths, the gardens, and markets of unbelievers. Isidore believed a proper design for the *urbs*, on the contrary, was necessary for the Christian in the difficult struggles of spiritual life. The *Etymologies* did not say how to draw it, only that the Christian must make a city to subdue the flux of the soul. [7]

With this move from the 'construction' of the word, to the construction of the physical representation of that word, from signifier to sign, one can produce some provocative readings of the modern industrial city. It was Le Corbusier who wanted to tear down most of the old parts of Paris and erect the tower blocks of his various plans; who wanted to 'kill the street' in which he saw many of the ills of nineteenth-century industrial cities; and who saw in America's vast gridded cities, and especially in New York - which he described as "the first truly abstract city" [8] - the "liberating" effect of the right-angle.[9] Furthermore, like Isidore conquering the Visigoths and erasing their barbaric influence even from the city's design, Sennett sees in Le Corbusier's admiration of these aspects of New York, "the design of an *urbs* cut free from the claims of a dead European *civitas*." [10] In his desire to erect the new upon the ruins of the old, there is a synthesis of a new *urbs* and *civitas*. Sennett relates *civitas* to a definite strain of European morality and recognizes in the avant-garde movements a desire to sever ties with the past. In this respect, Sennett also implies a strong sense of utopianism in the desire to create an alternative society, separate and shorn off from the inadequacies of the present (and the nostalgic pull of history), although as Jameson (and others) have argued, utopias are necessarily bound to, and inescapable from, the present.

In Le Corbusier's plans (*Ville Contemporaine*, *Ville Voisin* and *Ville Radieuse*) there was a strong sense of the structures functioning with a definite social purpose, and so they are as much about a new *civitas* as they are about a new *urbs*, and are utterly dependent upon one another. It is this that makes the efforts of Le Corbusier, Garnier and others (like Ebenezer Howard and Frank Lloyd Wright, despite the utterly different nature of their plans) so important, in that they saw urban reconstruction as necessary for solving the social problems that had grown more acute as the nineteenth

century had worn on. The 'new city' was utopian in its desire to present an alternative situation to the unsatisfactory present; it was not only new buildings and new planning, but the positive impact this would have on the city's inhabitants.

> They were deeply fearful of the consequences for civilization if the old cities, with all the social conflicts and miseries they embodied, were allowed to persist. They were also inspired by the prospect that a radical reconstruction of the cities would solve not only the urban crisis of their time but the social crisis as well. [11]

Despite the radical differences between, for example, Frank Lloyd Wright's individualism and Le Corbusier's centralization and mechanization, the utopian desire to bring about change in society was at the centre of these plans. Thus, the motivations in, and practical implications of design aside, in their most abstract and fundamental respect, the utopian impulse in all these plans for 'new' cities implied an inexorable bond between the buildings of the city - *urbs*, and the social wellbeing of its inhabitants within this new environment - *civitas*. Admittedly, such a reading is a secularized relocation of Saint Isidore's originally wholly Christian philosophy, as well as a utopian application of Sennett's argument, but I feel that this way of investigating the nature of the city (and not just its symptoms) is not only useful, but necessary in understanding the way we represent our cities in art. While in both Saint Isidore and Le Corbusier, one can see that the interdependent relationship of these terms exists as an ideal, as a utopian basis for the design of the city, in Sullivan's words, one can see how this relationship is related to the space of the built city.

While Le Corbusier may have felt the 'liberation of the mind' in the city grid, arguments against such central tenets of modernism would say that, in terms of Isidore's desire to 'subdue the flux of the soul', the modernist project as a whole was certainly successful. [12] Indeed, for many critics - and perhaps more importantly, many

more residents in urban areas around the world - an analysis of Le Corbusier in terms of Saint Isidore's etymological definition of 'city' could be seen as deeply ironic. The influence of Le Corbusier and some of his fellow modernists, both in terms of unrealized design and realized construction, is still sure to produce heated discussion today amongst critics from a wide spectrum of intellectual disciplines. Whether it is the impulse to erase and rebuild that manifested itself in numerous unsuccessful 'urban renewal' projects after World War II in both Europe and the US [13] (finding its apotheosis in the rise, and inglorious fall of St Louis's Pruitt-Igoe housing project); or whether it is disapproval of Mies van der Rohe's 'glass towers', right down to bewilderment at the discomfort offered by Gerrit Rietfeld's chairs, there is still space for punch and counterpunch regarding good and evil in the modernist project. [14] This is not a scrap that I want to join. However, a reading of any number of books on the 'failings' of modernism in practice, whether one agrees with them or not, would illuminate further the potential fracture between *urbs* and *civitas*, between the ideal and the built.

Part II - Bold Plans: The Grid

The second historical locus that I find useful in Sennett is his analysis of the development of the city 'grid'. Arising from historian Joseph Rykwert's belief that the Egyptian hieroglyph for city was a circle and a cross within it (transcribed as 'nywt') Sennett writes:

> The circle is a single, unbroken closed line: it suggests enclosure, a wall or a space like a town square; within this enclosure life unfolds. The cross is the simplest form of distinct compound lines: it is perhaps the most ancient object of environmental *process*, as opposed to the circle, which represents the boundary defining environmental *size*. [my italics] [15]

'Size', or space, and 'process' can be read usefully alongside *urbs* and *civitas*, especially when one considers the following:

> Hippodemus of Miletus is conventionally thought the first city builder to conceive of these grids as expressions of culture; the grid expressed, he believed, the *rationality* of civilized life. [my italics] [16]

Here, the behaviour of the city's inhabitants is supposed to be guided by the patterns in which their surrounding space is expressed. Once again, there are echoes of Le Corbusier's feeling of 'liberation' within the city grid. However, as Sennett traces this development of the grid through the ages, from Roman encampments to modern cities, one fundamental component of the symbol 'nywt' falls away - the circle. Importantly, this negation of the idea of 'space' produces enormous changes in the idea of 'process', changes that are fundamental in understanding modern cities, and the cycles of ideal plans that have sought (and still seek) to deal with such change. The significant result of the boundless grid is 'neutralization', a process that Sennett identifies as deliberate in early American cities where planners "aggressed against the environment" by imposing the grid upon it. [17] Of course, neo-classical European landscaping achieved similar victories in shaping Nature to a specific point - "But treat the Goddess like a

modest fair, / Nor over-dress, nor leave her wholly bare;" [18] - but the imposed 'neutralizing' grid trod Nature wholly underfoot.

> The conviction that people can infinitely expand the spaces of human settlement is the first way, geographically, of neutralizing the value of any particular space. [19]

Crucially, this infinite expansion of space operates ambiguously, a tension to which the introductory plates of Piranesi and Mondrian allude. The grid can expand infinitely because it is imposed, its intentionally alien relationship with the environment negating natural obstacles (to a large extent). However, this principle in theory is not necessarily impregnable in practice, for an unavoidable trend in all cities is socio-economic inequality which impresses itself upon the city visually in a breakdown of discreet sectors according to the grid. In other words, the chaotic process of living, the unpredictable ebb and flow of populations in and beyond the city represent the other form of limitless expansion.

Tafuri sees in the process of neutralization, the groundwork for diversity of expression, and an anticipation of the nature of modern cities. Probably more important than 'diversity of expression' is his belief that the grid is flexible in the face of indeterminable expansion.

> The use of a regular network of arteries as a simple, flexible support for an urban structure to be safeguarded in its continual transformation, realizes an objective never arrived at in Europe... The urban system assumes only the task of stating the degree to which figurative liberty may be exploited or, better, of guaranteeing, with its own formal rigidity, a stable reference of dimension. [20]

Thus the flexibility of the grid allows for liberty of expression in architecture. And this is why Le Corbusier's delight at New York's abstraction, and Sullivan's declaration that New York had slipped into the mire can coexist: individual expression (or tastelessness) is tolerated within the controlling matrix of the city grid.

If the endless expansion of the grid is one way to neutralize space, a symptom of that neutralization is, Sennett argues, the loss of a central point. It is the sprawling expansion of modern industrial cities at the end of their first century that led people like Le Corbusier to propose a return of sorts to Saint Isidore of Seville and Hippodemus of Miletus. While not deliberately referring to either of these two figures, one realizes nonetheless that behind the Modernist desire to create anew, free from the hindrances of the past lay certain fundamental aspects of city design. Thus in Le Corbusier's first urban plan, the *Ville Contemporaine* of 1922, he sought to abolish the street - a place of fumes, dirt and disease, and typically of the preceding centuries - and, in its place, create layered transport routes, separating the pedestrian (raised on *pilotis*) from vehicular transportation. In place of the old city's winding streets and unruly agglomerations of dingy houses, he planned tall skyscrapers housing the administrative centre of the city, and high-density apartment blocks placed within natural settings. Indeed, in the variety of drawings he presented with the plan at the Salon d'Automne - some ink on paper, others using colour in paint and pencil - one can see both the mechanized, gridded design and the greener, more relaxing aspects of the *Ville Contemporaine*.

However, in his presentation of a benign administrative class, Le Corbusier looked back a century to Saint-Simon; in his obsession with geometrical order he went back even further to the Renaissance where "'ideal order' was expressed through symmetry and symbolic geometry"; [21] and in his desire for open spaces, he reflected Baron Haussman's boulevard initiative in Paris in the 1850s. This was the case with other revolutionary plans as well, a tendency Curtis locates in that inescapable quality of utopias:

> Utopias are historically bound; they have ideological roots and formal precedents; and if one scratches beneath the rhetoric of the 'brave new world', one often finds a vein of nostalgia running through the futurism. [22]

Another inescapable aspect of utopias is that they are always rooted in the present. Their future worlds, or dislocated contemporary worlds, develop as extrapolations of, or analogies to, present problems and ideas; moreover, this means that they are dated by the specific historical moment in which they are created. And so in Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine*, as well as in his other utopian plans, the contemporary influences of Antonio Sant'Elia's *La Città Nuova* and particularly the exhilaratingly tangible New York City of the 1920s, are more visible than the past ideas cited above which lie entrenched in the most fundamental level of his plans. This dynamic scope of influence resonates in Tafuri who, in his analysis of Piranesi's *Carceri*, develops a more penetrating and creatively positive argument concerning utopias and their links to the present, than the postmodern spectre of nostalgia.

> The invention, fixed and circulated by means of the etching, renders concrete the role of utopia, which is to present an alternative that departs from the actual historical conditions, one that pretends to be in a metahistorical dimension - but only in order to project into the future the bursting forth of present contradictions. [23]

One can view this as an abstract variation of Burnham's 'make no little plans' advice, "remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency." However, I find Tafuri's phrasing of the contemporary state not as undesirable, but as a 'bursting forth of present contradictions' not only refreshing, but insightful when one considers the momentum created by Le Corbusier, Howard or Wright's plans. Thus, utopian plans are both constrained by their reaction to present circumstances (or contradictions), but are potentially dynamic in their construction of a possible

'alternative' place by retrieving a variety of influences from other places and other times (despite what the architects of Utopia might say). This desire to seek separation (and dislocation from the past) is crucially utopian; whether isolated by nature - as an island, a valley, a plateau (or, in science fiction, as another cosmic body, and in fantasy as a parallel world) - or physically isolated through the construction of a wall or a trench, utopias are always concerned with specifically limited space. [24]

Constrained by time, yet outside of it; inexorably bound to contemporary society yet reacting directly against it, these utopian contradictions are reflected frequently in the urban visions and revisions of the early decades of this century. However, they are not contradictions unique to the modern industrialized city; they were as crucial in the stones and spirit of Isidore's Christian city, and the circle and cross of the ancient Egyptians.

Part III - 'From Blueprints to Ruins'

While situating the city at a point where its etymological history and modernist revisions intersect is one way of locating the theoretical progenitors of its artistic representations, another set of coordinates produces equally interesting and significant results. Nineteenth-century French writer and critic, Anatole France said, "it was Utopians who traced the lines of the first city", [25] and in removing the utopian from the literary realm, and More's in particular, France at once opens up wider cultural resonances for the term, and relates it more closely to the concept of the city. John Dean, in his essay, 'The Science Fiction City', writes:

> The city is first of all located in the presence of utopias and dystopias. The utopia and the city are distinguishable literary entities. Utopias are sometimes-realized-dreams of different cultures, individuals, and ideologies which eventually pass away. The city remains. The city is the constant base on which utopian attempts are founded. The city extends from blueprints to ruins. It is in the flesh and in the skeleton, the material realization and the intellectual abstraction of utopias. [26]

While Dean forcefully argues the place of cities in utopian thought, he fails to bring to light a telling ambiguity that lies beneath the surface of not only his words, but the entire notion of the utopian city. Part of our lexicon of SF images, especially in the post-Hiroshima years, is that of the desert, the dystopian wasteland where people wander and scavenge; in short, exist within a devolved social environment. However, the city is always there, either as a non-presence, or as an historical artefact connoted by archaeological evidence or oral remembrance. [27] So while Dean is correct in focusing on the importance of the city, one needs to realize the negative reading that the city utopia can produce. Otherwise the Ozymandian irony of 'the city remains' is lost, and with it one loses the complexity of ideas relating the urban to the wasteland that are constantly explored in a great number of SF films: the rumoured or imagined new world

always just beyond the horizon; and the reconstituted, or newly constituted urban space. [28]

Dean goes on to present an interesting and useful idea that moves away from the physical / spiritual binary of Isidore's etymology, and the 'nywt', and towards a more religious understanding of the city:

> Possibly at the root of this utopian, dystopian distinction is the dichotomous tradition of the city itself in western literature: on the one hand, as the Hellenic city, and on the other as the Biblical, Hebraic city. The Hellenic vision sees man as being in perfect harmony with urban ways and rhythms, with the civic pressures, the economic concerns, even the darker temptations and threats which encroach upon man in the city... The Biblical, Hebraic vision sees man as degraded by the city. The Bible's first city, Enoch, was founded by Cain. The city opposes the ways of God and severely limits man's ability to perfect himself. The city generates the likes of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah... [29]

Here Dean provides literary 'precedents' for contemporary interpretations of urban discourses, and where Isidore and Hippodemus sought to encourage a certain spirituality through the physical design of urban space, Dean describes in the Biblical vision a negative disposition towards the very idea of the city. However, in his readiness to offer parallels between utopia / dystopia, and Hellenic / Hebraic urban visions, a subtle ambiguity has been lost again. For distinguishing the one from the other, the question of how 'ideal' some of the ideal social environments presented in utopias are, is undermined. It is one of the most productive tensions in science fiction to locate the dystopian *within* the utopian (and sometimes vice versa); and while Dean's genealogy is useful, the inescapable ambiguities in the utopian construction should also be acknowledged.

Returning to the specifically architectural aspect of the city, the notion of the city as 'Babel' is perhaps the most relevant to examinations of the early twentieth-century city, and particularly New York. In 1923, Harvey Wiley Corbett described the

possibilities for buildings using the parameters of the 1916 zoning laws, and ended off by proclaiming that these new buildings that "touched the sky" would be "an authentic tower of Babel." [30]

> The setback skyscrapers, determined by zoning law, come to be read as carriers of two complementary symbolic meanings. The confusion of tongues resulting from the undertaking of Babel merges with the reference to the city as 'New Babylon': the project for the system of roof gardens and bridges suspended over the streets in Rockefeller Center is only a belated result of this widespread identification. But, meanwhile, it becomes necessary to compensate for such a disquieting reading with a cathartic interpretation. Babel is the prelude to new knowledge, to the division of language, the triumph of 'difference' - but only as a premise of a new globality. [31]

The ambiguity of Babel that Tafuri describes - a 'confusion of tongues' or a 'triumph of difference' - is a volatile contradiction in the modern urban environment. It allows a confusion of styles to erupt as new structural and financial capabilities are suddenly made possible. The zoning laws, instead of being restrictive, rather guide the buildings towards a certain kind of shape that demonstrate visually what Tafuri calls "the unexpressed ideology of self-planning." [32] However, this confusion is also a liberation, the physical representation of a new kind of grand cosmopolitanism in the city that, up until this time, was not possible.

In all of these dually constructed nodes - *urbs/civitas*, space/process, Hellenic and Hebraic - it is the tensions that exist within them that produce those 'bursts of contradiction' that take shape in utopian plans. Whether it is Le Corbusier's desire to raze the old quarter of Paris, and his exaltations in New York; or Frank Lloyd Wright's individualist, dispersed utopia, and his ultimate Babel - the Mile-high Skyscraper plan of 1956 - they exist as explosive proposals that 'make concrete' those tensions.

Chapter[Three]

While the turn of the 20th century brought with it an ominous sense of humanity's destructive capability (and, to wit, a capability that was developing at a frightening pace), it was also a period where, as I have noted, crucial developments in the planning and building of cities were taking place. In America, massive urban migration to cities had occurred in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and though rural populations still exceeded the urban in 1910, on a global scale the process had been established that would lead to a 250% increase in world urban populations during the first half of the twentieth century. [1]

Industrial cities were under two centuries old, and in America even younger, but it was here that some of the most significant developments were made which, in turn, have shaped our cities today. As in any historical analysis, different critics will venture different events, individuals or 'movements' that have changed course to the present; however two facets of the city environment that I would like to pick up on here (as they relate to film) are the skyscraper and the style known as Art Deco, and both as they developed in New York in the 1920s. In addition, I will comment on the development of the film industry in America during this period which, while still in its infancy, was developing technically in leaps and bounds, as well as drawing on the creative input and technical expertise of various artists (sculptors, painters and architects) from European countries.

Part I - The Skyscraper

> A thousand feet of height, in stone, steel and glass, standing up in the magnificently blue sky of New York, is a new event in human history which up to now had only a legend on that theme: that of the Tower of Babel. [2]

The skyscraper is, as a building form, quintessentially American. As Michael Sorkin writes: "Where else concatenate avarice, ambition, bureaucracy, speculation, underdevelopment, technology and the waiting grid?" [3] the latter point demonstrating clearly the importance of this urban pattern as described by Sennett and Tafuri in the previous chapter. The tall building is central to modern urban design, and its influences are numerous and varied: its symbolic power as corporate emblem; its place in utopian urban planning; its development through, and of, engineering and building technologies; and its mutually beneficial relationship with art (and particularly film).

> There were things to be seen - spaces with a geometry, and fabric with representational and abstract ornament facing both inwards and outwards. The surfaces were articulated by openings, pilasters and ribs into subdivisions which were repeated rhythmically. [4]

In this quote, Markus literally gives rhythm to the neutralizing spread of Sennett's grid and the liberating reproductive growth of Le Corbusier's grid, though the grids he talks of are the vertical designs of the skyscrapers. This construction of urban space as not only horizontally, but also vertically compartmentalized is brilliantly expressed in the poetry of one of America's most significant twentieth century poets, Hart Crane:

> Let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us -
> Alike suspend us from atrocious sums
> Built floor by floor on shafts of steel that grant
> The plummet heart, like Absalom, no stream.
>
> The highest tower, - let her ribs palisade
> Wrenched Gold of Nineveh; - yet leave the tower.
> The bridge swings over salvage, beyond wharves;
> A wind abides the ensign of your will... [5]

In this extract, Crane illuminates two of the most fundamental aspects of tall buildings;

the steel frame and the elevator. The steel frame enabled buildings to become taller because it took away the reliance on heavy, masonry load-bearing walls and thus facilitated more height for the same weight, more interior space, and less ground area.

Montgomery Schuyler wrote of the elevator in New York's five-storey Haughwout building that its "humble office [was simply] to equalize the desirableness of rooms on the fifth floor with... rooms on the second." [6] Out of this functional - and one might say, naïve - beginning, grew the entirely opposite desirability of upper as opposed to lower floors. By 1870, the Equitable Building rose to seven stories and soon buildings were surpassing each other in height on a regular basis. This upward expansion was made possible to an extent by Elisha Graves Otis's development in 1857 of an automatic braking system that stopped a cab's fall in the case of a loss of energy. [7] Certainly, as skyscrapers grew taller, the prospect of a falling elevator must have grown more terrifying, and Crane explores this fear ambiguously with the 'plummet heart' referring possibly to both the heart of the passenger, and the plummeting heart of the building, the lift at its core. The 'atrocious sums / Built floor by floor', preceding the 'plummet heart' accentuates the height and terror of this downward plunge.

A second, and final, interpretation that I want to draw out of this extract concerns the word 'palisade'. As a verb, it means to enclose or offer protection in the form of a palisade, a fence of iron railings. The noun form of the word echoes the 'shafts of steel' in the previous stanza, and shows a corporate need to protect the forcefully acquired wealth contained within the tower. However, two other meanings widen the potential for this word, both within the poem and beyond into a broader urban lexicon. An American usage of the word defines it as 'a line of high cliffs' [8] an image that recurs throughout urban discourses. Indeed, Bender and Taylor describe a distinct shift

around the late 1920s in the artistic representation of the New York skyline, from a 'mountain range' depiction, "arraying the city's tall buildings along a horizontal axis," to a 'series of peaks' depiction, where the tall buildings appear more individually, accentuating the vertical rather than the horizontal aspect of the skyline. [9]

A last, and admittedly more obscure botanical definition, describes a palisade as a "layer of elongated cells below the epidermis." [10] One of the aesthetic possibilities explored in the development of the skyscraper was that the structural core of the building (its steel frame) should be displayed in its surface appearance. Thus, the skeleton became the outside - the 'ribs' became the 'skin', as it were, of the building, leading to a philosophy of integration underlying the building's construction. It was influential modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe who wrote in his 'Working Thesis' of 1923:

> Reinforced concrete buildings are by nature skeletons... A construction of girders that carry the weight, and walls that carry no weight. That is to say, buildings consisting of skin and bones. [11]

Le Corbusier took this structural language one step further in his outline of 'the Cartesian Skyscraper,' introducing its features by saying:

> The skyscraper is an instrument. A magnificent instrument for the concentration of population, for getting rid of land congestion, for classification, for internal efficiency. [12]

Tangled amongst his functional rhetoric run some of the curiously coloured strands of his utopianism, his 'classification' and 'internal efficiency' being at the core of totalitarian, bureaucratic dystopian visions. The root of this is, as mentioned earlier, a belief in a benign ruling class whose place in society is physically realized in the rigorous classification of his Cartesian buildings. In terms of design - height, abstract simplicity, glass walls and so on - Le Corbusier appreciates the scope of the Rockefeller

Centre, and, as a more recent example, would no doubt appreciate Henry N. Cobb's extraordinary Hancock Tower (1969-73) - an almost surreal blue sliver rising up above Boston. Aesthetics aside, Le Corbusier expressed the culminating principle of the Cartesian skyscraper as follows:

> [It] is a *function of capacity* (the offices) *and of the area of free ground at its base.* A skyscraper which does not fulfil this function harmoniously is a disease. That is the disease of New York. [author's italics] [13]

While this explains his ambivalent attitude towards New York, the most relevant aspect of these principles in areas of dense skyscraper development is the way these buildings are, in a sense, determined by their own development.

> A skyscraper is only as high as the rents it can command, and that its domain will always remain limited - growing and contracting in close relationships to the density of skyscraper construction itself: if property becomes too valuable, the central business district will spread out, eventually springing up again in subsidiary clusters of mid-rise buildings, and when the economy turns down for too long, they stop growing. [14]

However, Le Corbusier also writes that the skyscraper "is not a plume," [15] and in this respect, he strikes a chord with Sullivan's complaint about the spiritual poverty induced by New York's skyline of the 1920s. If Le Corbusier was a European obsessed by the importance of tall buildings to the city, and to the very notion of a physically realizable utopia, then Sullivan remains one of the founding figures in the birth and development of the tall building. In his seminal 1896 text, 'The Tall Building Artistically Considered,' Sullivan wrote that the skyscraper "must be tall... it must be every inch a proud and soaring thing, rising in sheer exultation that from bottom to top it is a unit without a single dissenting line...." [16]

The advent of the tall building not only changed the shape of cities, and advanced new building technologies, but also influenced the symbolic expression of power in the city.

> [Urban planners] seem to recognize that in the history of urban form in New York horizontal monumentalism implies civic or public purposes, while the tower represents the power of corporate capitalism. [17]

By horizontal, Bender and Taylor mean a building 'wall' of five stories creating a 'low-rise corridor', as opposed to skyscrapers that are aligned with the edge of city blocks on the grid. The move towards thinner towers that abandoned the large five, or six-storey block at the base signalled a significant move towards corporate expansion that marked the 1920s (and was abruptly deflated at the decade's end). But if one part of corporate architecture was a vertiginous prospect over the city (and one's competitors), an equal part was the mark made by one's tower in the *mélange* of the city skyline. And if there is a proliferation of eclectic styles anywhere, it is in New York. From the lighted peak of William Van Alen's legendary Chrysler Building, to the spiky gothic crown of the RCA Victor Building, or of course, the Empire State Building, erected with the Astor fortune, the crown of the tripartite tall building structure has given architects the opportunity to produce the 'individual statements' of their corporate clients. [18] Such sights in American cities - ornamental frippery appropriated from numerous cultural sources under the guise of eclecticism - were the 'plumes' that Le Corbusier felt skyscrapers should not be, and prompted Sullivan's complaint about the lack of artistic taste in New York's architecture.

It should be noted that vertical monumentalism was to be found in environments other than New York, and American cities in general - in Le Corbusier's residential tower block, and in totalitarian and fascist designs of the 1920s and '30s. The former has already been discussed at length: concerning the latter, a different set of ideological and aesthetic processes need to be understood when confronting designs such as Boris Iofan's colossal Palace of the Soviets (1934, topped with a statue of Lenin even

bigger than the Statue of Liberty), or Speer (and Hitler's) Berlin of the 1930s.

Perhaps the boldest skyscraper plan in America remains Wright's Mile-high skyscraper of 1956 which concentrated Le Corbusier's tall building city into one simple structure. Wright's dream, in Burnham's words, 'asserts itself' again as the millennium draws closer, with the utopian gambit of building an all-inclusive, Babel-like structure becoming big business again. Cesar Pelli's Twin Towers in Malaysia will surpass the Sears Tower as the world's tallest building, but two Millennium Towers, both designed by Norman Foster, are also planned. The first, of over 400m (and taller than Pelli's Malaysian building) is planned for London, while the second, 840m tall, is planned to rise out of the sea in Tokyo. [19]

Ultimately, the tall building's continued power lies in corporate identity and competition, and perhaps today one would look east to find the most explosive evidence of this. Whether it's the political one-upmanship expressed through architecture of Norman Foster's Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (1979-85), and Ieoh Ming Pei's razor-edged Bank of China building (1982-89), or Cesar Pelli's twin towers in Malaysia (currently under construction), it is interesting to note that the most talked about building in America at the moment is Richard Meier's sprawling Getty Centre in Los Angeles. This massively horizontal design expresses an antithetical blend of civic monumentalism (it contains education centres and a museum) and the capitalist signature (it has been built and filled with a $4 billion endowment from the late J. Paul Getty). [20]

However, it is not Meier's 'white palaces', or Gehry's bizarre designs that appear predominantly in our cities of the future, but rather Art Deco structures. The reason may be that they represent the first significant trend in tall buildings, but is it only this

that explains why we look back to them from our vantage point on the brink of not only a new century, but a new millennium?

Part II - Art Deco in New York [21]

> With the trees of Madison Square covered with fresh snow, the Flat Iron impressed me as never before. It appeared to be moving toward me like the bow of a monster ocean steamer - a picture of a new America still in the making. [22]

Alfred Stieglitz wrote this when commenting on a photo of the Flatiron Building taken just after its completion in 1903. However, a further insight into the significance of this building, and those that followed it lies in his response to his father's opinion that the building is hideous: "'Why Pa... it is not hideous, but the new America. The Flat Iron is to the United States what the Parthenon was to Greece.' My father looked horrified..." [23]

By the end of the Art Deco boom in the 1920s, the Flatiron (while still impressive) had been surpassed in height numerous times. However, in this New York - where the 'new America in the making' had, to a large degree, been made - Le Corbusier echoed Stieglitz's comments when he said that;

> In New York, then, I learned to appreciate the Italian Renaissance. It is so well done that you could believe it to be genuine. It even has a strange, new firmness which is not Italian but American. [24]

What is valuable is that both saw not only a certain classical architectural style, but that this style was peculiarly American, and that this American style had a particular commercial force. Indeed, Stieglitz later recanted his admiration after the Flatiron's potency had been sapped by its successors, an ominous example being Cass Gilbert's Woolworth Building of 1913, named 'The Cathedral of Commerce' during its opening. Its height and Gothic appearance make it one of the most significant skyscrapers in New York if one takes into account the increasingly vertical aspect, and Gothic influence apparent in the Art Deco structures of the 1920s.

So what exactly is Art Deco? The term itself has only come into common usage

over the past three decades or so, and is derived from the Paris *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in 1925 (hence one of Deco's other names, Moderne), an event that America was unrepresented at because, as Herbert Hoover said, America possessed no modern design. However, it is best to consider this event as a representative moment, as Art Deco is too diverse in its manifestations and influences to have any one point, or organized event exercising more influence than another. Egypt, the Middle East, Persia, and Renaissance and Medieval Europe are all represented in both the structural and decorative aspects of Art Deco as a whole; while in the Americas the influence of Mayan, Aztec and Native American cultural production is strongly evident as well. Pyramids, totem poles, cathedrals and reliefs - the grandest silhouettes and the most delicate of inlays all show stylized revisions of this diverse range of cultural influences. Various European 'movements' contributed to parts of the Art Deco style: the Vienna Secession, the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain, in Art Nouveau designs from Scotland's Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and in Italian Futurism (where one can see in Antonio Sant'Elia's extraordinary drawings the strong accent on vertical design that is so prominent in Art Deco skyscrapers).

Thus, elements of the style that is broadly considered Art Deco appear earlier than 1925 in buildings and interior design in America. Joseph Urban, an architect in New York of Austrian origin, was selling work from Josef Hoffman's Wiener Werkstätte already in 1919, and then there was the Chicago Tribune competition of 1922 whose runner-up, as will be explained shortly, was to be perhaps more influential than its winner. Frank Lloyd Wright, one of America's most studied and individual architects, had utilized Pre-Columbian shapes and patterns as early as 1915 , but articulated them to enormous effect in a series of houses in the early '20s: Aline Barnsdall's 'Hollyhock

House' (1917-1920), and houses for Charles Ennis and John Storer (1923, both in Los Angeles).[25]

During his inspirational visit of 1924, Fritz Lang, a trained architect, had taken photographs of New York whose citizens had recently watched the first Art Deco building rise up and make its mark on New York's skyline - The Barclay Vesey building. An earlier, and subsequently more significant design, was Eliel Saarinen's Chicago Tribune Competition entry, though it was never built (having lost out to Raymond Hood's design): however, its distinctive appearance - imposingly vertical and elegantly styled along lines that were neither Gothic, nor classical, and yet hinted at both - was enormously influential in the skyscraper boom in American cities, and specifically New York.[26]

As influential in the emergence of Art Deco skyscraper too, were the zoning laws of 1916 in New York that produced distinctive 'ziggurat' and 'telescoping' shapes in many of the Art Deco skyscrapers - notable examples being the Panhellenic Tower, and the Master Building. These laws required setbacks in tall buildings, a move that can be seen either as a response to buildings like the monstrous Equitable building, completed in 1915, that plunged all around it either into darkness or obscurity; or, as Sorkin says, a move by architects to "enter into a pact of the phallus, to save the thin tower from the risk of premature economic obsolescence."[27] In 1922, architect Hugh Ferriss made some breathtaking illustrations demonstrating visually a study by Hemle & Corbett on the effect that the zoning laws of 1916 would have on the shape of tall buildings. Ferriss showed to striking effect - in shifting degrees from a crystalline shape through to a stepped shape - how the zoning laws would alter the design of tall buildings. This is not to say that all skyscrapers of the 1920s were either Art Deco, or ziggurat-shaped

or both - Raymond Hood's bold News Building, while considered Art Deco, displayed the simpler, more monolithic appearance of International Style skyscrapers - but by the end of the Deco era, New York's literally mountainous skyline had both a distinctly stepped shape, as well as numerous individual 'peaks' like the Chrysler, RCA Victor, Paramount and Empire State buildings.

By the time Le Corbusier stood looking out over New York in 1935, the Art Deco boom in that city was ostensibly over, the Empire State being completed in the dark days of the early Depression. However, the interest of people like Le Corbusier, Lang and many other architects and filmmakers represents a curious relationship between architecture and urbanism in Europe and America at this time. Despite enormous intellectual differences between European and American urban thought, the resonances between them were exciting and, in many cases, formative.

> It was a curious situation: on the one side American architects and clients clamouring for the instant sanction of European culture; on the other a European avant-garde looking romantically to America as the promised land of all things modern. [28]

Indeed, the situation appears even more perverse when one balances Le Corbusier's delight in New York's grid with his disgust at its outrageous ornamental design, and Sullivan's exhortation to tall skyscrapers with his denouncing of their degradation of the city's morality. As Curtis says of Raymond Hood's famous black-and-gold American Radiator Building:

> There was little sense of a quest for type-forms in Hood's one-off designs; quite the contrary, the architect took a certain delight in posing as dilettante, for whom consistency of style and a search for the authentic were tedious and grim burdens for those unlucky enough not to have the exuberant capitalist city as their playground. [29]

Going back to Sennett and Tafuri, there is a sense that this freedom offered by the grid was exactly what excited the likes of Le Corbusier, and that in America it could almost

be possible to build some of those utopian plans that still suffered beneath "the claims of a dead European *civitas.*" Perhaps this ambiguous architectural relationship is most succinctly expressed in these words by Le Corbusier from *Vers une architecture*: "Let us listen to the counsels of American engineers. But let us beware of American architects." [30] If one considers this alongside New York's influence on Lang, it contextualizes the extremely fruitful relationship between film and architecture by illustrating the similarly fruitful, yet ambivalent relationship between European and American architecture. More importantly, there is an implication that the European emigrés in America brought with them more concentrated theoretical ideas, whether into the spheres of architecture, art or film.

Perhaps the best example of the potential for this exchange can be seen in Lang's *Metropolis* (itself inspired by the city of New York) that seemed to be strongly at work in Hugh Ferriss's extraordinary 1929 publication, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* - especially his evocative illustrations in crayon; and it was only two years later that Ferriss worked with Raymond Hood (and other architects) on the design of the Rockefeller Centre, one of New York's skyscraper landmarks.

These strong, yet sometimes curiously constructed ties between Europe and America (in terms of art) are part of a history of such relationships in film as well: French critics telling Americans that there was something deeply meaningful behind the Western and film *noir*, traditionally B-genres that the Americans had always considered to be low-brow entertainment; or American critics damning Luc Besson as "his nation's worst nightmare" for his deliberately commercial and entertaining films. [31]

In the years after World War I, European cinema made a profound impact on Hollywood in terms technical developments, special effects, production design and

editing (the latter absorbed selectively through Soviet film from the likes of Vertov and Eisenstein). However, the influence of German Expressionism is perhaps the most pronounced.

Part III - German Expressionism

In 1924, Fritz Lang visited New York and said: "I looked into the streets - the glaring lights and the tall buildings - and there I conceived *Metropolis*." [32] Other German directors, notably F.W. Murnau, were similarly enamoured by the incredible artistic potential that the American city offered, and when Murnau was invited by mogul William Fox to Hollywood in 1926, he made *Sunrise*, not only arguably his best film, but also one of the finest cinematic renderings of the urban environment in film. The Expressionist style Murnau and others brought with them was deep and lasting. Emigrés like Edward Dmytryk, Robert Siodmak and Billy Wilder, made their mark in many films, but most notably in the genre of *film noir* (as did Lang himself) - a volatile blending of chiaroscuro lighting, sinister set design and Expressionist cinematic techniques, with the cynical, morally ambiguous characters, and labyrinthine plots of the 1930s hard-boiled fiction of Chandler, Hammett, Woolrich and Cain, and after the war, Thompson.

What was it about German Expressionism that initially made such an impact, and then subsequently exercised such a permeating influence? Lotte Eisner writes that "the Germans... have an eerie gift for animating objects," and uses Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920) as an example:

> In *Golem*, the houses in the Prague ghetto, which have sprouted like weeds, seem to have an insidious life of their own... In some mysterious way these streets contrive to abjure their life and feelings during the daytime, and lend themselves instead to their inhabitants, those enigmatic creatures who wander aimlessly around, feebly animated by an invisible magnetic current. [33]

If Eisner saw a psychologically rooted malevolence that distinguished the cinema of German Expressionism, Herman G. Scheffauer saw in the same film a vital difference in the thinking behind film set design:

> Professor Poelzig conceives of space in plastic terms, in solid concretions congealing under the artist's hand to expressive and organic forms. He works, therefore, in the solid masses of the sculptor and not with the planes of the painter. [34]

In my mind, this crucial difference in cinematic urban design still operates today, for in considering a film like *Alien* (1979), H.R. Giger's 'biomechanical' sets created a dynamic, organic and yet wholly modern look that was both terrifying and beautiful, and in some way alive. [35] In this organic effect, it is in stark contrast to many urban-based SF films where the city is a backdrop, painted or digitally generated - merely an identity play for viewers to recognize futuristically altered familiars of contemporary life. In those films where an organic dynamism is created, it seems to be a reflection of the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Weimar cinema.

> Not only might a designer be required to invent cities, individual buildings, and spaces but also to provide them with a history, with patterns and traces of use, in order to connect them with the film's narrative and endow them with meaning. [36]

This constant drive for wholeness and an integration of the different components of film-making necessarily involved lighting, sound and special effects as well. The chiaroscuro effect of stark light contrasts, and the use of heavy patterned shadows (from staircases or window-grilles, for example) which became visual staples of film *noir* found their way into American film from German theatre at the turn of the century via German Expressionist cinema. However, in all these visual tricks and techniques lay an intention to create and manipulate space, and in this constant engagement with the nature of space and the filming of space, one can understand some of the most important aspects of urban film.

Two of the earlier, and most influential Expressionist films, were Robert Weine's startling *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1919) and *Der Golem*. *Dr. Caligari* in particular

caused a stir when it opened in America, as designs of its like had never been seen before: sets that produced a sinister and terrifying environment that seemed to communicate emotions with the actors, instead of merely presenting backdrops to their acting. American cinematographers in particular, quickly picked up on the camera movements and lighting of German films, leading one observer to say that Hollywood "was no longer terrified by shadows." [37] Along with Murnau's *Der letze Mann* (1924), they set the stage for Lang's *Metropolis* and reinforced American interest in European, and specifically German film in the mid- to late-20s.

At a level beyond popular entertainment, the visual inventiveness of these films boldly articulated new theories in cinema, particularly Elie Faure's notion of 'cineplastics.'

> The cinema is first of all plastic. It represents, in some way, an architecture in movement which should be in constant accord, in dynamically pursued equilibrium, with the setting and the landscapes within which it rises and falls. [38]

Thus in *Dr. Caligari*, the psychological states of the asylum's inmates were not only connoted by the sets but, through the dislocating tendencies of these sets, troubled the viewer's sense of place in relation to the action up on the screen. Before *Metropolis*, Lang had utilized lighting and cinematography to disrupt space in his films, but it is perhaps these words by Eisner which describe, in his early films, a sense of what made *Metropolis* so powerful: "[In *Die Niebelungen*] Lang places his actors in these landscapes with a precise feeling for space, transforming them into points of reference in the design." [39]

During the late '20s, there was a critical movement in Germany against such abstraction in set design, against the Expressionist tendency to build its own world. Now there was a push towards real sets, outdoor locations where the 'real' city could

contextualize the characters as opposed to a city of artifice, of psychological insinuation. Drawing from Baudelaire's notion (and Benjamin's critique) of the *flaneur*, Karl Grune's *Die Straße* (1923) can be seen as an early example of this movement towards the street, and the motion of the actual city.

However, in *Metropolis*, Lang created something quite special: he managed to produce a city of enormous size and volume - it is full, not just composed of tall buildings - that actually suggested the growing size of cities at the time. His was not a microcosmic city of tortuous streets and malevolent structures, and yet it was terrifying in its size and alienating power. He had also expanded the choreography of his earlier films, so that the crowds in *Metropolis* moved in such a way that accentuated their surrounding environment: the worker moving the levers of the machine, and the workers' quarters filling up with water are examples of this.

Metropolis has become canonized in film entirely through the power of Lang and Eric Kettelhut's sublime designs and images; its weak story of class struggle and revolution has been overshadowed by individual images such as the robot Maria and the Tower of Babel. In a curious way, it is both an exception to the German Expressionism of the time, as well as a confluence of many ideas in both contemporary film and architecture.

> Wolfgang Pehnt recalls Josef Ponten's novella, *Der Babylonische Turm*, published in 1918, in which the protagonist plans to unite in a single building every possible cultural and religious function, from a library and a Trappist monastery to a hermit's cell at the top of the tower... [This] Babylonian metaphor runs through both the German plans for skyscrapers (also Lang's film *Metropolis*) and the actual American buildings. [40]

Metropolis also directly influenced filmmakers in Britain and America, and two films in particular, David Butler's *Just Imagine* (1929) and William Cameron Menzies's H.G. Wells adaption, *Things to Come* (1936), while not as memorable as Lang's film, are

nonetheless significant early entries in terms of both cinematic science fiction and design. While *Metropolis* may be the first significant futuristic vision in film (and hence a literally towering influence in today's SF films), Neumann points out that,

> Instead of attempting to accurately predict the future or design a pleasant utopia, as architects would usually do, *Metropolis* illustrated very real *contemporary* fears and ambiguous attitudes about cities. [author's italics][41]

Considering the discussion in Chapter One concerning utopias and time, Neumann's observation would seem to confirm the strong utopianism (or dystopianism) in Lang's film.

As in any artistic form, the force of influence of a single work, or even a single artist is always hard to quantify. In a sense, *Metropolis* demonstrates the use of contextualizing both the film and its director within a more potentially complex series of relationships that can take into account the influence of other artists from other countries (for example, Eisner examines closely the influence of Swedish film on German Expressionism in *The Haunted Screen*). Thus, before embarking on an investigation of the cinematic city in particular, it is necessary to acknowledge not merely the films that point towards our construction of the city in film today, but to have some understanding of the circumstances out of which these constructions might emerge.

Chapter[Four]

Luis Buñuel, one of cinema's greatest artists, once said: "Now and forever the architect is going to replace the set designer; the movies will be the faithful translator of the architect's boldest dreams." [1] While this might seem a curious statement within the current climate of film production, it would be shortsighted to discount the influence of architects and their craft in film even today. Endless crews of digital animators, special digital f/x creators and photographers may produce the sets we see in such visually arresting films like *The Fifth Element*, but often behind the effects, the basis from which they are working is fundamentally architectural, not only in the replication of styles, but also in the expressions of spatiality.

Perhaps the comments of Robert Mallet-Stevens - French architect and director - are more applicable than Buñuel's in today's film environment: "A film set in order to be a good set must 'act.'" [2] Elements of the previous chapters have touched on urban and cinematic spatiality, but in this section I will deal with spatiality more fully as a preparation for subsequent film analyses. More specifically, I will deal with space and subjectivity, relating the concepts of spatiality in the modern city at the turn of the century, to spatiality in the 'postmodern' city before discussing how film design can 'act' in representing these spatial realms, in *Disclosure* (1994).

Part I - Spatiality: Piranesi and Foucault

> The madness consists only in the piling up, in the juxtapositions that explode the very foundation of the objects' customary 'possibility,' a madness that groups objects into a system of arches that 'go out of themselves' in sequence, ejecting new arches from their bowels; a system of staircases exploding in a flight of new passages of staircases; a system of vaults that continue their leaps from each other into eternity.
>
> Sergei Eisenstein [3]

Michel Foucault makes the observation in 'Of Other Spaces' that the significance and shock of Galileo's proof that the earth revolved around the sun was the opening up of boundless space, the realization that "a thing's place was no longer anything but a point in its movement." [4] For a similar, though less cosmic reason than the notion of infinite space and constant movement that frightened people in Galileo's age, Piranesi's *Carceri* have disturbed and affected viewers from Coleridge to Eisenstein. Piranesi offers one a starting point in all the etchings in this series, but very shortly, this object, or point, dissolves as one's eye travels further 'into' the work. The way a viewer's depth of perception is supposed to work - two lines progressing in a linear fashion to a point - is made problematic by subtle disruptions of scale as openings and arches and whole cavernous spaces appear where they should not.

The importance of these etchings in the light of Foucault's observation is that they take the terror of dislocation and alienation that arises in cosmic infinitude, and turn it inward. As Tafuri writes; "... in the *Carceri*, the constriction comes not from the absence of space, but from an opening toward the infinite." [5] This innate paradox, that operates more playfully in M.C. Escher's work, for example, is intriguing. On the one hand, there is a claustrophobia created by the apparent restriction of space - walls, arches, stairs, vaulted ceilings, and no open air; and yet the complex arrangement of these stairs, pillars and the different levels create a dizzying sense of disorientation

because of the constant disintegration of 'central' locating spaces.

In Escher's more obvious optical illusions, the observer always tries to identify the trick, looking for the one pillar that joins at the wrong place so that the sense of perspective, disrupted by the trick, may be returned to stability again. Piranesi's etchings operate in a slightly different manner in that their geometric contents, proportioned and stable as single entities, are then thrown into disarray from the perspective of the observer.

> The *Carceri* compel the spectator to undergo an optical journey of frenetic motion by means of a succession of stairs, ramps, bridges, balconies, catwalks and galleries - a nervous continuum with no point of stability or rest throughout. If this were not sufficiently disorientating, Piranesi also contrives a system of conflicting illusions preventing one from adjusting to the environment at any one moment in that progression from its beginning in the foreground - often without the reassuring scenic frame - to the far distance where the journey continues out of sight. [6]

The observer is inside looking through a maze of shapes that should, in themselves, have recognizable form but that, in relation to the other shapes, remain unsolvable. When looking at an Escher for the second time, the viewer knows what's wrong; but with Piranesi's etchings, subsequent engagements do not bring one any closer to realignment and a calming of one's sense of perspective.

For Eisenstein, the real power of the *Carceri* lies in their movement, which one can see in his vocabulary - 'explode,' 'eject,' 'leap' - and rather like Foucault's observation on Galileo, the stability of any point is only momentary. The forms in Piranesi are constantly exploding outward and are caught at an almost arbitrary moment of interrelationships. This acknowledgement of perspective consisting not only of motion, but also of the interrelationship of components, is crucial in understanding the structure and design of modern cities. Foucault states that spatiality today is best described in terms of the 'site.'

> The site is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements; formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees or grids. [7]

Foucault lists several examples of these relations - data storage, traffic flow, for example - mundane processes of urban life. However, in these processes there is a constant tension, an anxiety about the margins between order and disorder, and it is here that Piranesi's visions are so valuable in analyses of contemporary urban spatiality. In both history and spatiality, Piranesi conflates elements so that it becomes almost impossible to disentangle any one element: one cannot take out an arch, or a pillar because its perspective depends on those forms around it.

> Piranesi's complex organisms are seen to have their origins in planimetries whose dominating element is the *randomness of the episodes*, the lawless intertwining of superstructures, the undermining of the laws of perspective, so as to make nonexistent sequences of structures seem real. All of which clearly contrasts with the constant allusion, present in Piranesi's imaginary structures, to the austerity and organicity of Etruscan and Roman architecture. Thus, on one hand, we find disarticulation of the organisms; on the other, references to highly structured historical precedents. [my italics] [8]

In these contradictions, or tensions, one can locate some of our contrasting views of the city - cities of order and chaos, cities of reason and madness. Perhaps the most central of all urban structural debates revolves around how to deal with the past, how to 'regulate' the dynamism of the city. Le Corbusier and others saw much that not just needed to be changed, but erased in the nineteenth-century industrial city; consigned to a history of pictures or memory and replaced by a new, less historically determined architecture (in other words, architecture that was truly utopian in existing outside of time).

In German Expressionist film of the 1920s and particularly in the 'street films,' this clash of trajectories, of space and time occurs in provocative ways. In Murnau's, *Der letze Mann*,

> [The 30-storey high rises] did not purport to present a Berlin of the future - after all, everything else, the cars, and elevated trains, kept their contemporary look. Instead, they served as icons of the metropolis in general, presented as a fast-paced, heartless place. [9]

Here, as in the openly more fantastical *Metropolis*, the space of the city was both extraordinary and yet also familiar, filled with resonances of contemporary life. Spatially, *Metropolis* was also highly stylized and metaphorical in its treatment of crowds, having them move in choreographed chevrons and phalanxes, as if motivated by Lang and Kettelhut's towering architectural designs. In contrast to this, and more in the vein of the literary heritage of the *flaneur*, was Grune's *Die Straße*, of which Siegfried Kracauer wrote:

> The individuals of the big city have no sense of transcendence, they are only outer appearance, like the street itself, where so much is going on without anything really happening. The swirl of the characters resembles the whirl of atoms: they do not meet, but rather bump against each other, they drift apart without separating. Instead of living connected with things, they sink down to the level of inanimate objects: of automobiles, walls, neon lights, irrespective of time, flashing on and off... [10]

Here the city is reflected in a myriad personal incidents as seen in the subjective experience of the observer. In other words, as random as the movements of crowds, made up atomically of individuals, is the essential arbitrariness of any one experience as opposed to others. If this seems too extreme a formulation, then in placing it beside the potential uniqueness of the individual's experience - the random and the specific - one can comprehend the tension between life on and off the street. [11]

In the bold abstraction of *Metropolis*, and the deliberate confusion of *Die Straße*, one can see the contradictory expressions of urban spatiality and the individual's place in that urban environment. Related to these are the volatile clashes of the abstract grid embedded in the city structure (as expressed by Le Corbusier's plans and Mondrian's paintings), and the disruption of space from the individual at street level (as expressed

in the spatial distortions of Piranesi and the Weimar street films).

If in the poetry of Baudelaire and Eliot, the utopian designs of Le Corbusier, and the films of Lang and Murnau one can imagine a multi-faceted vision of the modern city, what of the city today? Foucault offers one of the most influential critiques of the contemporary city in the posthumously published paper, 'Of Other Spaces' where he presents the notion of 'heterotopia.' In a series of perceptual flik-flaks, Foucault relates 'utopia' to 'heterotopia' using the visual possibilities of a mirror.

> The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there... The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. [12]

Foucault relates this construction to his idea of 'site' being a new way of looking at space in the city - no longer composed of strict geographical, historical or chronological boundaries but everywhere motion and change. My interest in Foucault's heterotopias in the context of this dissertation is its relation to two potentially heterotopic spaces - cyberspace and Hollywood as they relate to urban design: the wider applications of Foucault's theories are explored in considerably more detail in a number of works by Edward Soja, amongst others. [13]

At the outset, I stated that I would not deal with the spatiality of cyberspace: however, in Barry Levinson's *Disclosure*, cyberspace is interwoven with the physical architecture and human geography of corporate structures. The production design,

screenplay, cinematography and casting combine to produce a multi-layered film that insightfully examines the corporate world in terms of urban design and the information age.

Part II - *Disclosure* and Enclosure

Information but no truth - it's the legacy of the modern age. [14]

In *Disclosure* (adapted from Michael Crichton's novel), Michael Douglas plays Tom Sanders, an ageing corporate man seeking significant promotion at DigiCom, an information technology firm. In his way stands Meredith Johnson (Demi Moore), an aggressive 'ex' now conquering her way up the corporate ladder, and an untrustworthy corporate superstructure whose support fluctuates, depending on who seems to be winning the fight. The battleground is sexual harassment, with the tables being turned as the man accuses the woman of unwanted sexual advances. Surrounding this, however, are architecturally and technologically constructed spaces that engage provocatively with the exterior and interior symbols of corporate architecture. The most fundamental shift away from conventional corporate symbolism, and towards a more integrated environment, is a shift away from the identifying structural figure of the skyscraper.

> Skyscrapers are alien beings, home to large corporations run by aloof dictators or foreign corporations that create interiors completely at odds with the verticality of the building, as depicted in *Rising Sun* and *Die Hard*. The skyscraper is an image of evil, not of hope... [It is] the final image of dystopia. [15]

Disclosure avoids the entrenched associations viewers have about corporations and skyscrapers that Betsky alludes to here. Skyscrapers stratify naturally into spaces of privilege, their loftier floors admitting fewer and fewer company employees (and employers). However, the spaces in *Disclosure* are mainly horizontal or diagonal, and while DigiCom's chairman is aloof and enigmatic, he can see the company's human operations physically inside his own building. This is the corporate environment of a new decade that Michael Douglas moves into .

In *Wall Street* (1987), Douglas played Gordon Gekko, the epitome of the cold, cynical and manipulative corporate carnivore of the '80s, devouring his prey daily in the architectural epitome of that age - the tall glass-walled skyscraper. However, in *Disclosure* five years later his character is older and trying for the top in a world of men and woman, both younger and equally predatory. No longer in a world of corporate finance and tall glass boxes, he finds himself in the world of computer technology and open, glass and facebrick buildings. No longer prowling the financial epicentre of New York, he is now located in the fashionable high-tech '90s city of Seattle.

The DigiCom office is, in many ways, very open. The atrium filled with natural light seems cool and tranquil, while interior staircases break up any sense of overwhelming space by interrupting clear perceptions of distance within the exterior walls. The facebrick interior is softer and more natural than white walls, and the skylights and glass doors create an illusion of space. However, there is an intense feeling of confinement: the view from some of the offices is through balustrades or bars and they all look down onto the atrium which buzzes with activity.

This architecture functions strongly in promoting the themes of corporate mistrust, scheming, confusion and paranoia that, ultimately, are far more significant than the surface interest of the sexual harassment suit. The glass interiors, far from providing openness, conspire with the secretiveness of the Internet, enabling employees to see everyone in the act of communicating but not the nature of their communications. Thus in one scene, Sanders receives another cryptic e-mail, and the camera races around as he looks all over, watching everyone typing, not knowing who's sending it (if, indeed, the sender is in the building at all). The interior stairwells allude to a snakes-and-ladders environment of promotion and demotion, fostering a paranoid,

deceitful and brutally competitive environment within the tranquil shell of the building.

The entire film promotes an intense feeling of claustrophobia - the action takes place entirely in two spaces: DigiCom and the high-rise building where the initial deliberations take place being essentially part of the same corporate space, and Tom's home environment. As such, the company becomes an entire world of its own, encouraged by an organic language of wholeness that appears frequently in the chairman's speeches. In one scene, Meredith plans her final stab at Tom late at night while working out on a step-machine in the company gym: she is the voracious corporate animal who is never tired and never sleeps, and the company is home to all that energy and ferocity. Contrarily, we see quite a lot of Tom's home life, its Edenic tranquillity outside the city invaded one night as Tom comes home and takes the evidence of his physical engagement with Meredith hurriedly to bed: so begins the deceit that upsets the marital, and family bond. Significantly, his family are utterly dislocated from his working life: the Sanders home is displaced well beyond the city limits in a wooded setting, a road trip and ferry-ride away. Other than Tom's journey to and from work, the only other link between the country and the city is electronic: the e-mail we see his daughter playing with in the film's opening sequences.

This world of electronic communication is a third space in the film: not just one that mediates between home and work, but a space that shifts - contracts and expands fluidly. It is hyper-real, and yet unreal, the apotheosis of democratic space (in itself, access to it is privileged) and yet also the place of 'information and no truth.' In a sense, it is a utopia - existing outside of known spaces: but it is also a heterotopia - some-here that in the physical form of the computer, focuses that hyper-real space before the user. Foucault's heterotopian space is one way of exploring the tensions

between the 'real' space of DigiCom and the home, and the 'unreal' space of the Internet.

On the Internet, users encode their identity and produce copies of themselves that travel freely about the space 'behind the surface' of the computer screen: the individual is both him- or herself, and a non-corporeal shadow. Where, it could be argued, this differs strongly with Foucault's formulation is that the mirror reflects the individual, gives one an awareness of the spatial relationship of one's reflection to oneself: whereas the Internet makes possible the concept of alter-ego, where one's identity in cyberspace is utterly different from one's physical self - there is no reflection that connects one's image 'with all the space that surrounds it.' However, at the moment of logging on, that interaction of real and unreal space places the individual at once in the perceptually real world, and simultaneously where he, or she, is not.

In *Disclosure*, cyberspace is coded and anonymous, where the damage done is indecipherable and non-confrontational, but this 'non-place place' is constantly related to the physical 'real' space of DigiCom as both potential victims and perpetrators glance nervously back and forth from their screens to people in other glass offices. The ambiguous play of cyber-identities is well represented by the mysterious A Friend who mails Tom, but whose location he cannot trace, and whose communications themselves are cryptic. As the film progresses, A Friend's support becomes more certain, and Tom realizes he has an ally who is both located within the world of the company, but is also 'watching' out for him in cyberspace. Finally Tom, and the viewer, discover that A Friend is a real person, though not an employee at DigiCom, but whose identity is used by a DigiCom employee so as to secure anonymity.

The most obvious example, however, of the heterotopianism of cyberspace

occurs when Tom, 'breaks in' to DigiCom's new creation, a virtual databank where one sees oneself walking through buildings, guided by an angel to the information sites one requires. The breaking in occurs, once again in both real and unreal space. Tom has to physically break in to the hotel room where the unit is located, and then, once inside the virtual world, break into the files that have the information he requires. Meredith intrudes on his cyber-snooping and starts deleting the files he needs, while in the real world, he sneaks out just as the company executives arrive in the hotel room to test the unit. It is a visually arresting scene: the architecture of the virtual world is Renaissance with a cherub that guides the user about, and it is well edited as the tension mounts both within the virtual world - will Tom retrieve the information he wants before Meredith deletes it, and in the real world - will Tom escape from the hotel room before the executives walk in. Amidst all this technological wizardry then, it is ironic that Sanders, upstages his enemy with the relatively outdated mediums of fax, answering machine, and DAT.

Though the sets and architecture brilliantly stage the action, producing a 'total environment' within which the corporate battle is fought, and the heterotopic cyberspace further complicates issues of identity and personality, the casting of Douglas, in addition, is very shrewd. His acting career revolves around two films in 1987 - *Wall Street* and *Fatal Attraction* - where he was a ruthless corporate scalper, and yet also vulnerable with a particular weakness when it came to infidelity. His ability to be both vulnerable and yet aggressive, professionally strong and yet domestically weak, make him perfect for the role of Tom Sanders, but he also modifies his character to suit a '90s technology-driven business.[16] In *Disclosure*, Sanders's potential weaknesses are exacerbated not only by the paranoia-inducing design of DigiCom but also by the

dislocated spatial relationship between his family and his work.

Thus, in *Disclosure*, the '90s preference for home life away from the city (as opposed to the '80s ideal of a city apartment with as few emotional attachments as possible) is turned against Tom Sanders, while his office, also a '90s epitome of employee-friendly space (and yet not without considerable style) is a prison of invisible communications. And so surrounding a narrative whose statements on sexual harassment may seem clumsy and sensationalist, is a design that perpetuates issues of insecurity and corporate paranoia throughout the film.

Disclosure forms part of a genre, one could say, of 'cities-as-microchips,' where the city is either visually metaphorized as a part of the information super-highway, or becomes the physical space for battles of identity and information. *Hackers* (1995) jacked rave culture and 'subversive teens' into a romantic thriller about information and the Internet, while *The Net* (1995) had a hacker as the central character in an otherwise fairly conventional thriller where the hero(ine) is falsely accused and has to run from both the villains and the authorities. The latter's main interest lay in the erasure of the hacker's identity as represented by physical signifiers (credit cards, driver's licence etc) and her subsequent battle on both real and unreal fronts to reclaim her identity. However, *Disclosure* most successfully expresses the interaction between spaces on both sides of Foucault's mirror, while simultaneously presenting the disorientation of the individual in this interactive process.

Chapter[Five]

If *Disclosure* offers some insight into spatiality and the technological city, how has film presented the challenges posed to the physical city, the *fin de siècle* metropolis? In this chapter I will look at Los Angeles and its heterotopic relation, Hollywood. As a locus of not only the film industry, but also the span of film history, Hollywood's curiously utopian nature makes it a volatile space and a productive one for 'projecting into the future the bursting forth of present contradictions' (to repeat Tafuri).

I will use this brief survey of Los Angeles as an introduction to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, surely one of the most influential SF films of all time, but one that is rich in ways beyond its configuration of new SF urban tropes. It is, at once, an anticipation of the future born of the shadow of its historical moment, the stirrings beneath the boosterism and economic expansion of the Reagan years, and yet it is also a bridge back to the origins of SF film, to German Expressionism and architectural utopianism.

Part I - Tar Pits and Sunsets: Histories of Los Angeles

> In 1792, a certain Jose Longines Martinez, while travelling through the Pueblo de los Angeles, about three leagues to the west, found a great lake of pitch, with many pools in which blisters were continually rising and falling. In hot weather, animals looking for water could be seen sinking into the tar. Their cries would attract predators. We've pulled nearly a million specimens from a couple of holes in the ground: animal after animal literally dying to eat another dying animal. The greatest record of life on earth is what it is; all caught in the little seeps from the greatest lake of oil on earth there is. 22 miles long; 46 miles wide. The entire Los Angeles basin where we work and live today. [1]

The story of Los Angeles as told by Hollywood. Whether true or not, this extract from *The Two Jakes* (a belated sequel to Polanski's classic *Chinatown*) is rich in possibilities when it comes to looking at, not only Los Angeles, but also Hollywood. It establishes apocalyptic ground for investigations into LA's history and its essence: the paradigm of disaster, both natural and human, that defines the city.

To an extent, LA's history is written by the films of its parallel, 'unreal' town, Hollywood, [2] and nowhere else is a city's record so mythically constructed as in Los Angeles, whose dynamic space has become a favourite site for discussions of postmodernism (like Jameson's famous critique of the Bonaventure Hotel, and replies by Davis, Soja and Homi K. Bhabha among others). In seeking to understand the particular urbanism of Los Angeles and hence its relation to film, Soja provides a useful introduction:

> Is what we construct now only a false representation of history, a simulation that accrues to itself only its own immediate contemporary meaning? Can we ever recapture and preserve an historical site when its set of relations to other real sites has been erased by time? [3]

Edward Soja asks these questions in the context of contemporary Los Angeles, and it should be added, edge-of-the-millennium Los Angeles. Crucially, in raising concerns over relations between an historical site and other sites, Soja attempts to break down

the urban historical discourses that determine a structure's historical 'value.' In a sense the city's growth as represented by structures from all the moments of its existence, is an explosion, a movement outward where elements' relation to one another is constantly changing.

For critics writing on the cusp of a new century, this growing spatial complexity demands more flexible analyses, and so Soja (working from Foucault, Lefebvre and others) introduces into structural space, the space of continual, changing human action, the way we respond to our environment and how our responses change over time. He relates his concern with this human action in history to Foucault's notion of the heterotopia in a provocative attempt to understand the nature of postmodern cities.

> These curious sites [heterotopias] are socially constructed but they simultaneously recreate and reveal the meaning of social being. Conventional formal descriptions of them, as empirical geometries or as sites for the storage, circulation, marking, classification and encoding or areally differentiated human elements... tend to miss their meaning. [4]

For Soja, the most beneficial critical path into the postmodern city is through a disruption of clear geographical, spatial and historical lines, processes that determine parts of the city (even individual structures) as discreet categories. In any city (which is inexorably dynamic), but particularly in the volatile spaces of Los Angeles, such disciplinarily distinct examinations either fail to assess the sheer scope of experience of the city, or are rapidly made obsolete by the perpetual motion of the city. So as to understand the relationship between the city of Los Angeles, and the utopian space of Hollywood within LA's postmodern spatiality, let me repeat the conclusion to Foucault's model of the mirror:

> The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which

is over there. [5]

Though it could be said that the mirror between Hollywood and life at times seems one way, this non-place within the place of Los Angeles produces endless possibilities not only in examining the megalopolis of Los Angeles, but also its illusory world that tricks us with motion at twenty-four frames to the second. Out of that chasm between utopia and the real spew tales of our experience so prolific that eventually there is no time: the present being defined in terms of the most recent referent to the city's past, present or future.

Ultimately, LA is perhaps the most relevant of cities when it comes to discussions of the spatial dynamics of utopias and apocalypses. In a city of parallel dimensions, of the real and unreal, Hollywood constructs, tears down and reconstructs city after city, in a continual replay of alternative presents and potential futures.

> Hollywood's pop apocalypses and pulp science fiction have been more realistic, and politically perceptive, in representing the programmed hardening of the urban space in the wake of the social polarizations of the Reagan era. Images of carceral inner cities (*Escape from New York*, *Running Man*), high-tech police death-squads (*Blade Runner*), sentient buildings (*Die Hard*), urban bantustans (*They Live!*), Vietnam-like street wars (*Colors*), and so on, only extrapolate from actually existing trends. [6]

For Davis, the mere act of representing society, current or future, is about extrapolation and analogy (and is not particular to the SF genre). Geopocalyptically, Hollywood has disturbed the sprawl of LA with volcanic eruptions (in *Volcano*, 1997), and, in the future, has even severed its morally repugnant whole from the body of America in Snake Plissken's 1996 return, *Escape from LA.* Historically, Hollywood has returned not to LA's past as such, but to the signifiers of its past in the iconography of *film noir.* Even in *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) which seeks, for the first time, to portray the neglected African American facet of that genre; and *LA Confidential* (1997) which colours in some of the

darker shades of that era from the perspective of the present, utilize the conventions of the genre to contextualize their historical revisionism. [7]

In a pop socio-political vein, Kathryn Bigelow - through an MTV lens brightly - produced one of the most energetic and threatening urban crowd scenes ever as a mob teetered on the brink of massive civil insurrection on New Year's Eve, 1999 (*Strange Days*, 1995). Violently expanding the crowded chaos of *Blade Runner*, Bigelow exploded the city's component of human motion as the characters' uncontrolled emotions and actions reflected the uncontrollable partying mob at the end. If, in *Blade Runner*, Los Angeles is "a fusion of individual cultures into a demonic polyglotism ominous with unresolved hostilities," [8] then *Strange Days* brought those hostilities to the boil. For many moviegoers, these were not strange days, but very familiar ones as Bigelow scratched the raw surface of the 'live' Rodney King beating and the subsequent 'Justice' riots, as well as looking back referentially to the assassination of civil rights leaders and the Watts riots of the 1960s.

What all these films illuminate is the geographical, demographic and temporal sprawl of Los Angeles: a city of serious social upheaval and the dream factory of Hollywood (with its related residential areas); of literally earth-shattering instability and sun-and-sea boosterism; of fluctuating chronological sensibility where the future could be the present, and the past appears mythically as a simulacral tunnel of momentary influences; and a city that apparently tolerates an outrageous range of artistic forms and styles, but hovers "on the bad edge of postmodernity, [where] one observes an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single, comprehensive security effort." [9]

Architecturally it is hard to define. Nathanael West wrote in his brutally

perceptive novel, *The Day of the Locust*:

> But not even the soft wash of dusk could help the houses. Only dynamite would be of any use against the Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages, and every possible combination of these styles that lined the slopes of the canyon. [10]

It is also a place of great public and private signatures: from San Simeon - William Randolph Hearst's astonishing creation that Welles parallelled in Kane and Xanadu in the legendary *Citizen Kane*, to LA's latest architectural epic, the Getty Centre. While the former represents one of those crucial cinematic moments - the intertwining of Welles's unique talent with Hearst's unique life; the latter represents LA's continuing attempts to construct its own artistic integrity, the move out from under the giant cultural stigma attached to the art and business of Hollywood.

Structured around no real central point, LA falls into the category of unpredictable urban growth: it is not chaotic - on the contrary, the fundamental idea Mike Davis propounds in *City of Quartz* is that the city is divided up subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) along cultural and economic lines.

> To facilitate ground air synchronization, thousands of residential rooftops have been painted with identifying street numbers, transforming the aerial view of the city into a huge police grid. [11]

It is true that Davis interprets police strategies in a particular way but interpretations aside, this 'aerial grid' is interesting within the context of urban 'legibility.' And if Los Angeles is structured according to an invisible grid, imposed after the fact, then its expansion is also defined in contradictory modes by the canyons and the desert. On the one hand, the canyons have become hideaways to those wealthy enough to build there, while the desert has become the space for new satellite grids:

> The *eutopic* (literally no-place) logic of their subdivisions, in sterilized sites stripped bare of nature and history, masterplanned only for privatized family

> consumption, evokes much of the past evolution of tract-home Southern California. But the developers are not just repackaging myth (the good life in the suburbs) for the next generation; they are also pandering to a new, burgeoning fear of the city. [12]

One could extract a certain irony from the fact that in escaping the dystopia of the city, developers (and residents) are moving into the wilderness of the desert, one of the most prominent dystopian visions. True, the wilderness is dually constructed in this regard, but it is a duality that is not favourable to people: it is "nature's utopia - the perfect, unchanging world," and yet "unlike the city... the wilderness is not a rational construction: it destabilizes man, forcing him out beyond his civilized barriers." [13]

It is in these inescapable contradictions, and the continual explosion of urban space, that *Blade Runner* takes its place as one of the most important SF as well as urban films ever.

Part II - Perpetual Night: *Blade Runner*

> In *Blade Runner* I would go so far to say that the design is the statement... the design of the film is the script.
>
> Ridley Scott [14]

> *Blade Runner* was not one of my favourite films. There was nothing for me to do but stand around and make some vain attempt to give some focus to Ridley's sets.
>
> Harrison Ford [15]

Blade Runner has to be one of the most analysed films of all time; however in a discussion concerning urban design and film, it is a necessary component. It is not enough to take its influence as read, as a stock set of symbols and scenes that operate in many subsequent films, and are still visible today; and yet there are numerous tours through Scott's dystopia.

I do not intend this as a complete analysis of *Blade Runner*, a grand synthesis of arguments: rather I want to make a few comments so as relate it fluidly to the trajectory of this dissertation. It is not a fixed point in the history of film or even SF film: it exerts ongoing influence and yet it also opens up channels backward in time as production designers and conceptualists engage with moments in art and literature across a wide spectrum. As with *Metropolis*, *Blade Runner* expresses 'very real contemporary fears,' but in doing this so perceptively, it has become a dystopian locus, a tonic against Reaganism and the 'other' Star Wars. This concentration of many dark futuristic visions in one film - in the year when E.T.'s finger lit up cinema screens - did not result in great reviews or box-office earnings for *Blade Runner*. In fact it failed fairly comprehensively at first (though not as noticeably as the unholy three of *Heaven's Gate*, *Dune* and *The Cotton Club*) and, inconceivably today, was panned by many critics: surely the controversial Pauline Kael must have doubts about the day she wrote that: "*Blade Runner* has nothing to offer the audience... If anybody comes around with

a test to detect humanoids, maybe Ridley Scott and his associates should hide." [16]

On the contrary *Blade Runner* has much to offer the audience, from its discussions of racism to its inventive treatment of genre, and ultimately the sheer entertainment of the piece. It is probably most influential, however, in its design, for as Brosnan says, "with *Blade Runner* you feel you are seeing for the first time a real city of the future." [17] In a single, extraordinary opening sequence, Scott produced a visual definition of the dystopian future city that revolutionized not only the way filmmakers went about constructing sets and cityscapes, but also the visual appearance of 21st century urban dystopias. [18]

In the light of Davis and Dean's comments on fear of the city and wilderness at the end of Part I, it is interesting to note that Scott was forced to jettison an original opening sequence where Deckard is seen returning by monorail into the city from a vacation in the desert. [19] While the absent scene takes with it the stark contrast between wilderness and city, the film itself more than compensates by entrenching a dark and fearful atmosphere at every turn: as it exists, the only scene outside the city occurs during the closing titles, an Edenic escape from the perpetual darkness of Los Angeles.

What makes *Blade Runner* so visually dense is not only Scott's immensely detailed vision, but also the resonances the film has in literature and art. In the Mayan enormity of the Tyrell Corporation, Scott looks back to Art Deco influences and extrapolates them ten-fold (and, as I noted earlier, uses Wright's Ennis Brown house for Deckard's apartment). In his opening aerial shots of the city, he alludes to a history of artistic depictions and literary descriptions of hell, a metaphor that is not uncommon in the visual lexicon of Los Angeles - "There is nothing to match flying over Los Angeles

by night. Only Hieronymous Bosch's Hell can match the inferno effect." [20] Los Angeles 2019, is a city of industry where zoning has broken down and towers belch fire into the sky, fuelling the darkness that hangs over the city and incarcerates the inhabitants under a perversely polluted form of the geodesic dome. The smog cancels out natural light, and in the sheer confusion of forms and artificial lights assembled in the street scenes, the image of the Piranesian prison comes readily to mind: decentred spaces, dimly lit shapes, clear lines of sight obscured by rain, and everything multiplying unevenly off into the distance, a distance that possesses depth and not just an allusion to space and size.

As in *Soylent Green* (1973), the dystopian city is one of privilege with the wealthy living in secure high-rises, but whereas Thorn in *Soylent Green* lives in a squalid apartment, stealing luxuries like fresh meat and jam from crime scenes, Deckard does not dwell on the city floor in *Blade Runner*. His ambiguous character is reflected in this: he is a specialized employee of the city powers (though a man who dislike what he does, and whose own genetic identity is doubted) and so his elevated status in the city (represented literally by the elevation, and style, of his apartment) is based on the exploitative force exerted over the city by corporations like Tyrell. [21] Both detectives, however, grow to a point of relative enlightenment: Deckard's epiphany comes at the hands of Batty who, with the energy of his last programmed moments, saves his life, while Thorn, who is a cynical, uncaring and morally dubious character at the outset, grows to a realization that ends with his passionate attempt at insurrection as he is carried away to an uncertain fate by the authorities.

The added power of Deckard's experience is ultimately connoted by the city in which he works (captured rather acerbically by Harrison Ford's quote at the head of this

section). *Blade Runner* is the first film to give serious impetus to the urban vision of Lang's *Metropolis*. In a period of over fifty years there have been notable SF films and notable city films, but few that have so wholly galvanized the film industry into reassessing their design formulas. Of course *Blade Runner* draws on some SF (and *film noir*) staples, but it's in the synthesis of these ideas with Scott's visions (not forgetting 'futurist' Syd Mead) that the film is unique.

Architecturally it looks back to Deco in both built forms and drawn inventions, but it builds these shapes into a contemporary context of cultural pluralism, extrapolating LA's 'cultural melting-pot' to the point of disorientation. Scott's directorial origins in advertising are apparent in the clutter of signs and print in general that draws the viewer into a futile attempt to take it all in. This 'clutter,' assembled over months by his design team is one of the most incisive tools in examining *Blade Runner* not just as a film, but as an artefact with wider implications than those of genre or film. The trash aesthetic on display in the film's scenographic excess introduces the idea of bricolage in interesting ways.

> Bricolage is... among the most corrosive forms of antihistoricism. In this sphere, everything is now permitted and everything is recoverable. The subjective experience, which *refounds* history by its research, is forced to travel once more over that history which is like a labyrinth without exits: the heterotopia and the 'voyage' are locked in a desperate embrace. [author's italics] [22]

The 'refounded history' of *Blade Runner* conflates the history of Los Angeles, with the history of all cities, and executes at a designated time (2019) a synthesis of many times; but as a film, it also produces a bricolage of film itself. Thus, in its generic cross-over, it does not just relocate the *noir* detective in a future setting: as *film noir* is one strain of a mythic-historic record of Los Angeles - a metahistory of the city - *Blade Runner* explodes the historical space of the city as well. The familiar shapes of the Bradbury

Building and Wright's Mayan-influenced house are an architectural element in this disruption of linear historical time. Ruppert observes how "in several points in the film, the streets and hallways are lined with multiple discarded generations of computers" [23] - the unrestrained rush of the information age is palpable not only in the immensity of detail in the film, but also the actual components of that detail.

Within film history itself, an almost arbitrarily constructed eclecticism is at work as set designers "cannibalized neon signs from other productions like... Coppola's *One from the Heart* (1982)," scavenged broken sets and a spaceship from another production, and even lifted some of the infernal factory imagery in the opening from Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970). [24] *Blade Runner* becomes a definitive postmodern film, and a definitive depiction of the postmodern city: it both represents, and is a representation of, the information age as nightmarish overload.

However, *Blade Runner* never loses its unity of vision, it holds its exploding, yet contracting self together, much like Piranesi's *Carceri* are able to frighten us with both the immensity of their scope and the immensity of their details. This control is not as evident in most films that set out to reference their various artistic sources: instead of unity of vision, the viewer is presented with episodes and images skewered like a variety of meats, fruits and vegetables in one long kebab. Scott's unity of vision and meticulous realization of that vision - which necessarily includes his art, design and effects crews - is part of the reason that *Alien* was so effective three years earlier (and is so powerful still today). It is this ability to see and create wholly that makes films like *Metropolis*, *2001* and *Blade Runner* so inspirational, and also so open to frequent viewings - but in the latter's density and breadth of vision there is always something more to be seen, something else that at once reminds us about the cities we live in, and

troubles us about the cities we might live in in times to come.

Thus it is both about Los Angeles and about all cities; about the world in film and the world of film; about today and tomorrow, but also about the past - how our geographic and historical spaces are in constant fluid relation with our experience as individuals and communities.

Chapter[Six]

Though SF makes fertile ground for future imaginings, perceptive examinations of contemporary urban life occur in other less fantastically staged films as well. By this, I do not mean 'realistic' or quasi-documentary expositions on day-to-day street life, but rather films that present possible urban scenarios, and where commentary on the city is expressed not directly, but in the *space* of the film. A very simple example would be the cinematography of establishing shots; how the city, or a specific building is introduced to the viewer. Thus the commercial and social space of the lawyers in Steven Bochco's TV series *LA Law* and *Murder One* are automatically placed near the top of the legal ladder by the title sequence of the former, and the frequent establishing shots of Ted Hoffman's firm in the latter - looking upward at the angular glass skyscraper toward the top where we *presume* they work.

Luc Besson, before stretching New York vertically in *The Fifth Element*, went the other way in his opening sequences to *The Professional* (1994, aka *Leon*). Instead of presenting the viewer with the usual New York establishing shot - either coming in over the Statue of Liberty or approaching Manhattan's awesome skyline head-on - Besson sought "locations with a horizontality uncharacteristic of the normal, cinematic metropolis." [1]

In the simplest, and apparently most arbitrary of shots, a director can instill a certain vision of the city in the viewer. Unfortunately, the city image is often a mere flash, a sudden rush that awes the viewer, but is never developed, and is subsequently neglected. However, some films 'wear' their design; the design structures the narrative and characters and becomes an integral part of the film, interacting with the dialogue and the plot, and thus creating a depth of vision that goes beyond the spoken word. In

this chapter, I will look at two films that offer radically different views of the city - *Seven* (1995) and *The Devil's Advocate* (1997), both lush, visually arresting films that deliberately seek resonances in the cultural (and specifically literary) history of cities. Whereas *Disclosure* reveals the urban corporate world in the microcosm of the company DigiCom, and *Blade Runner* delivers a complex reading of Los Angeles, Reaganism, cities of the present, and metropolises of the future, *Seven* and *The Devil's Advocate* offer a look at the contemporary city in a religious, specifically Biblical context.

Part I - City of Decay: *Se7en*

> Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgement come. [2]

"Wait, and you'll see; we're very close now," says John Doe (Kevin Spacey) to the unsuspecting and gloating detective David Mills (Brad Pitt) as they travel to their mutual destiny in *Seven*. In an ending unlike most others in Hollywood, everything goes wrong, and John Doe's project to preach the seven deadly sins to the unrepentant inhabitants of the city succeeds, leaving Mills a broken man.

In *Seven*, director David Fincher, along with photographer Darius Khondji and production designer Arthur Max, create perhaps one of most nightmarish dystopias in recent memory, a city of no name and of no specific date. If *Blade Runner*'s future was dark blue, Fincher's 'city' is grey and black. Surprisingly, the initial prints for the film were even darker and denser, but the processing required to produce them was too expensive and time consuming, leading him to say disappointedly of the standard prints, "they're so milked out." [3] The fact that his original is even darker than the version that shocked viewers all over the world, is frightening in itself, and by comparison, *Blade Runner* becomes seductively cheerful with its blues and bustling night-life.

Fincher and Khondji's city is one of decay both structurally and morally, moral disintegration that has come to a point where, for one citizen, severe action must be taken. He demonstrates, with painstaking patience and a limitless lack of remorse, the seven deadly sins using seven unfortunate victims, including the mind-twisting finale that draws himself and his young pursuer into his morality play. The gruesome screenplay, which courts literary erudition when it isn't revelling in the visceral horror of John Doe's 'sermon' is built on several conventional genres - black / white cop, young / old cop, and serial killer - and in this sense, the film was criticized as being, at heart,

not that original. But even those critics who declaimed the film as an example of style over content had to admit that the style was, indeed, substantial, to the point I would argue, that the style was a significant part of the content. [4]

Underneath those standard detective genres lies a commentary about the city that was missed by many in a curious replay of the debates voiced in the film by detectives William Somerset (Morgan Freeman), Mills and John Doe (an Everyman out of choice) as they head out into the country. Doe says at one point: "We see a deadly sin on every street corner, in every house and we tolerate it. We tolerate it because it's common..." and to an extent, the film is seen as a rather clumsy and visceral examination of contemporary society that, in the end, is more interested in the shocks it produced. Because the 'sins' of retreaded genres is so common we tolerate it, but I would look towards other elements in the film.

The city in *Seven* is always just that - The City. It is no identifiable place and has no date, and each day of the week is just a day, like any other day in the year . Architecturally, there are no defining features that would even suggest a specific place (though it was shot in downtown Los Angeles) and so it becomes an abstraction, a representative of the 'city'. As such, it keys in to the idea of utopias and dystopias being of no place and no time and this enables it to slide chronologically, depending on what the viewer is seeing at any one time: the current forensic technology, the old jazz records, Somerset's dated dress-code, and so on.

As a result, I would argue that the film's 'morality play' concerns the morality of cities in general, and throughout time rather than the morality of our cities today. The sin John Doe sees is maybe different in form but essentially the same as the sin of all cities, and the complaints he makes have been made about cities across chronological

and cultural boundaries. Doe implies as much when he says: "Don't ask me to pity those people. I don't mourn them any more than the thousands who died at Sodom and Gomorrah." Thus *Seven*'s central play is diachronic - a comment on the morality of the city as entity, rather than synchronic - a comment on the state of urban society today. It achieves this through its utopian stirrings under the surface of the narrative, and this utopianism is in turn confirmed by the film's design.

To an extent, such a reading of the film mirrors the unravelling of the crime within the film displayed in one scene where a frustrated Mills pores continually over the one-day-old case information while Somerset goes to the library to read Milton, Dante and Chaucer. Mills conducts his investigation thoroughly in the present, trying to understand the crime only on the basis of its current status, while Somerset, understanding the deeper moral intention at work looks back to history, to texts that can inform him about this current crime of the city. From the moment he locates 'gluttony' behind the fridge in that victim's house, Somerset realizes that there will be seven murders, but only once he sees John Doe's written journals, does he realize that their quarry is preaching, and it is here that he understands that it is all one crime, one where the solution is, from a pragmatic stance, inconsequential: it is a crime that can only be stopped.

John Doe's Babylon is not "arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls," [5] but rather a city in decline. Its decay is inexorable, partly because of the apathy of its citizens: 'Sloth's landlord is content because every month the rent is paid; and in 'Lust,' the S&M-shop owner who makes the brutal instrument doesn't wonder how it will be used. But the detectives themselves are as involved as anyone, and this is where the film's moral ambivalence comes to the fore. Somerset, who is a 'good' cop, admits to Mills's wife Tracy (Gwyneth Paltrow) that

he forced his companion to abort their child many years before, and says to Tracy: "If you don't keep the baby, that's your decision... don't ever tell him that you were pregnant. But if you choose to have this baby, you spoil that kid every chance you get." In a moralistic sense, and certainly in the eyes of one like John Doe, Somerset is immersed in the city's sin - involved as he was with a child born out of wedlock, and abortion. In the quiet before the final storm, Somerset and Mills talk about idealism and apathy, Mills contending that he can make a difference on his own, and Somerset - giving his reasons for leaving the city, answering, apathetically: "I just don't think I can continue to live in a place that embraces and nurtures apathy as if it were a virtue."

Thus the dimly lit halls, strewn garbage and soulless inhabitants, combined with dowdy buildings, drained colour - and almost Biblically excessive rain - portray the city as a rotting organism, a beast of ill condition sinking to its knees. The only flashes of colour appear in the Mills's apartment, its warm interior belying its unfavourable position next to the railway; and the sex den of Lust. Called 'the Hot House,' and located down below the street it is a literal hell of red lights and loud, industrial music - disorientating, with people shouting and speech almost inaudible under the noise.

But *Seven*'s power would be sapped if it were not for its blinding conclusion. Watching it on video, one loses the effect of the wasteland that erupts onto the screen after almost two hours of gloom (one can only imagine here what effect the silver-processed print must have in this scene).

> After the fungal greens, filthy browns and inky blacks that dominate the film, the wasteland light of the brilliantly handled conclusion - where the *mise en scene*'s combination of distance and proximity, of space and enclosure, emphasises an overriding helplessness - is not that of clarity and redemption but of blinding, disorientating bleakness. [6]

Finally the rain stops as John Doe pulls up at the station house and hands himself in.

Bathed in evening light, the journey out into the wilderness is immediately ominous. There is no gradual passage through the city's outer extremities, rather a sudden transition from the site of one dystopia to the site of another - a featureless, endless expanse as alienating in its 'purity' as the soaking gloom of the city.

> Wilderness also includes a border of atrocities, taboos, and endurance which some people cross and, by crossing, transcend their own humanity. The breaking of taboos carries the double meaning of 'unclean' and 'holy.' [7]

As the city is steeped in histories of morality, so is its obverse, the wilderness. However, this relationship is once again connoted not so much by the dialogue or screenplay - John Doe's need for an isolated site is practical, which he ensures by stopping beneath the powerlines, hence obstructing communication and a clear line of fire for the hovering helicopter - but by the play of light and space. In both Fincher and Khondji's interviews (cf. Taubin, Darke), the relentless considerations of light and space are emphasized.

> Staging to me is everything. That's the whole game - where do you place the window? Darius and I talked about, psychologically, where we wanted to be in any given room. [8]

While probably not deliberate, there are echoes here of the discussions over set design in such German Expressionist classics like *Dr. Caligari*, where the sets 'act,' communicating emotion and supplementing the actor's physical expressions. The sudden exposure to light and space offers no comfort to the viewer of *Seven*, and this final scene shows how necessary an understanding of wilderness is to an understanding of the city. [9] While the screenplay and the action of *Seven* may induce thrills and chills, it is the design that creates a dystopian urban portrait of enormous power and substance, unrivalled since *Blade Runner*.

Part II - Babylon, The Scarlet Whore: *The Devil's Advocate*

"What city is like unto this great city!" [10]

If David Fincher lets the city in *Seven* seethe below the surface, not intruding but keeping the whole film ankle deep in mire, then Taylor Hackford displays Babylon in all her sinful glory in *The Devil's Advocate* (1997). Here, Hackford takes away any doubts one might have about morality and the city by bringing Satan to New York, and in the guise of John Milton (Al Pacino), having him head up Manhattan's most exclusive corporate law firm. He entices a young Southerner, Kevin Lomax (Keanu Reeves), to make the move north from Gainesville, Florida with offers which neither Lomax, or his equally ambitious wife (Marianne, played by Charlize Theron) can refuse. What follows is not really the Faustian adaptation that the film pretends to be: the deal between Faust and the Devil which structures the classical plays, is only introduced right at the end where Milton offers Lomax everything if he will father a diabolical child, a deal Lomax turns down by taking his own life. Most significantly, the film does not end with descent into the fires of hell, but rather on an ambiguous note, returning to the courthouse in Gainesville, where the film starts. Here, the devil (in the person of a local journalist) succeeds in tempting Lomax again, but on a different tack, and so the film's narrative becomes merely an alternative, one of many potential ways that Mephistopheles will have his way.

It is potentially futile to read this flamboyantly over-the-top film as a serious invocation of urban morality. But in its flamboyance of style, its sensuous treatment of New York's visual iconography, it is one of the more interesting cinematic engagements with the paradigmatic metropolis of New York. What actually drives the film (other than Milton's wit and rhetorical power) is its architecture and design, and the way elements

of the script interact with the design.

The pre-emptive moment in this regard is Lomax's mother (Judith Ivey) who warns against his trip to New York by quoting Revelations 18:2, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils." [11] The context of her warning - outside a Southern Baptist church where she berates Marianne for working on a Sunday - instill in the viewer, whether correctly or not, a fundamentalist moralism which is seen to inhibit the young couple. The setting for the church is rustic and isolated, emphasizing a spiritually motivated rural anti-urbanism, expressed most obviously in the quote from Revelations.

Indeed, when the Lomaxes arrive in New York they encounter Babylon in all her sprawling, seductive glory. Their, and the viewers', first look at New York must be overpowering, and indeed Hackford and photographer Andrzej Bartkowiak produce a sweeping shot of the city which is far more impressive than many films where digital imagery has tried to make the city look bigger. The perspective from which this shot is taken is significant: it is much the same as the view from the top of Milton's firm, an example of the importance of a single establishing shot which I mentioned earlier. The perspective is linked to no-one: we are not travelling with anyone, and so here, we are placed in a privileged position, preparing us for a particular kind of urban life, literally the high life.

Brought to the firm's office, Lomax walks in and sees a woman speaking different languages into a headset, and, as he discovers later, Milton's firm is one that deals with international business. Milton himself speaks different languages during the film and so the firm, as such becomes a Babel, its top floor looking other New York landmarks like the Seagram building in the eye. At the top of the building, there is a

rimless pool where water seems to run straight over the edge into thin air, an abstracted and stylized presentation of nature atop the skyscraper. Keyed into the notion of naturalizing the concrete jungle with gardens and lakes, it offers its own minimalist contribution to the Babylonian lexicon of New York.

Milton's apartment (which has no bedroom) [12] is essentially a Gothic vault, a dark high-ceilinged chamber with a giant circular neo-baroque bas-relief behind his desk as the centrepiece. As with his office, the interior is sparsely but stylishly furnished, and has an obligatory fireplace. Even the clothes are tailored to suit the film: Lomax appears in New York shorn of the pale jacket that he wears in Florida, and matches Ermenegildo Zegna suits in charcoals and blacks with Milton for the rest of the film.

For those 'satanic' practitioners of law, life is geographically organized around three privileged sites - the firm, the court, and the home. If the firm expresses the vertical character of corporate monumentalism, then the courts are depicted as truly monumental as well in the most massively 'civil' way: far from the lightly coloured wood of the Florida courtroom at the start, the New York courts are cavernous, replete with classical frescoes, and dark wood panelling. In contrast to Milton's 'home', the Lomax's are appointed a beautiful apartment: light, white-walled, spacious and with trees outside. Crucially, one of the first pieces of advice Milton gives Lomax is to know the subways, and it is blatantly symbolic when Milton's first scene ends with him going down to the underground, his descent emphasized by a downwardly tilting shot. Milton seems to exist at the outer limits of urban spatiality - either hundreds of metres up in the air, looking down over the city whose every pleasure he has at the touch of a cell-phone button, or below the surface of the street.

The film's secondary characters also contribute to what is essentially a

dissertation on New York style and architecture. Eddy Barzoum (Jeffrey Jones) the director of the firm, is the subject of a long morality speech by Milton to Lomax, during which Barzoum is running through Central Park. He is a model of the rapidly burning out corporate man, greedy and remorseless, yet tired of moving sideways, and becoming increasingly aggressive in his growing desperation; a man whom Milton has helped through "two marriages and a pregnant secretary." In his next-to-last scene we see him and several other employees shredding boxes of documents late into the night, their faces sweaty, working in half light - minions to the devil doing hot work.

Lomax's first client, a black man practising Santeria (or a similar Caribbean religion), played by Delroy Lindo, is also Lomax's first experience of magic. The smart young lawyer defends him with a freedom of religion argument, equating his slaughtering of a goat with the rituals of Judaism and Catholicism - having them all "feed at the same trough" as Milton says - and confirms the multicultural slant of Milton's Babel. It is also the one time where Lomax has to leave his sites of privilege and enter sites that are differentially privileged. On arriving at a dilapidated house he is led down into a dank candle-lit basement by a boy where, like Milton does elsewhere, the man appears suddenly out of nowhere. Lomax's case is presented to us as a challenge - he only finds out later that the man is worth $15 million; but metaphorically, it represents his first descent and his first encounter with magic. [13]

Craig T. Nelson's property developer / triple-murder suspect, Alex Cullen - who we are led to believe is guilty (like Lomax's first client in the film, a paedophilic schoolteacher) - can easily be seen as a characterization of Donald Trump. Cullen has been married more than once, and is having an affair with a much younger woman (his secretary) when we meet him; and his apartment is an astonishingly garish neo-

Baroque penthouse in gold and glass, not far in ostentation and opulence from Trump's Las Vegas hotels. As property developer, he is partly responsible for the spaces in which Milton and Lomax work: he is a constructor of Babylon's constantly changing shape. Even the law firm's receptionist - in effect the first introduction that a client (or the viewer) has to the firm - is part of the play; her name Caprice has an oblique resonance in Milton's closing outburst where he declaims God as a capricious prankster. Of course, to Milton, his own caprice is far more tangible and sensual, and so acceptable against God's broken metaphysical promises.

The Devil's Advocate shows us that the Babylon of the 1920s still exists, though in different forms. The Art Deco splendours of New York are viewed through the panoramic office windows of sleek, modernist skyscrapers with Bruno Rubeo's minimalist interiors. The Gothic aesthetic is strongly apparent, whether in Milton's dark penthouse, the cavernous cathedrals (in stark comparison to Mrs Lomax's simple wooden Baptist church in Gainesville), the frescoed ceilings of the courts, or the coarse stone vaults of Milton's office. The excesses of money that produced such unique corporate signatures like the Chrysler Building and the Empire State are embodied in Alex Cullen who throws up modern Babels, and dwells in pharaonic isolation high above the city.

While decidedly different films, *Seven* and *The Devil's Advocate* offer interesting comparisons. Both films openly declare their Biblical and literary references about the city (and both deal rather cursorily with the latter). But where *Devil's Advocate* produces a cinematic essay of New York's paradigmatic style and architecture, *Seven* extracts a week from an abstract city, a dystopia of rain, grime and constant half-light.

However, there are trenchant similarities beneath the opposite visions of a scarlet and fallen Babylon. A seminal urban theme of madness and sanity, and the spatiality that contextualizes those deemed insane operate in interesting ways in both films. In *Devil's Advocate*, Marianne Lomax is driven gradually mad by monstrous visions and psychologically tormenting nightmares (her ovaries being stolen, for example). At first, we put her tantrums down to petulance and frustration - an over-reaction to her being alone in a strange environment, and being left alone by her (up until now) devoted husband. However, in an uncomfortable scene, Kevin tries to make up with her by 'giving her a child' but during their intercourse, he intermittently sees another woman (his diabolical step-sister, as it turns out). Kevin does not believe Marianne's visions - even when she claims that Milton raped her, standing naked and bleeding in the cathedral - and he has her committed. Her final space of safety, her sanctuary, is not the church - where Kevin disbelieves her - but rather the hospital where she uses its safety of glass and wire-mesh doors to take her own life.

In *Seven*, Mills frequently refers to John Doe as being 'insane' or 'nuts,' and in their apocalyptic ride into the desert, wonders sarcastically in a behavioural cliché, whether he "masturbates in his own faeces." Doe also works out his escape through death, knowing that Mills will succumb to wrath and kill him, and in the end the enraged and 'mad' Mills is pictured in the back of a police car, imprisoned by despair. Perhaps the most apt meditation on madness, and one that counterbalances the similarity and differences between the two films, comes from Somerset: "If we catch John Doe and he turns out to be the Devil, I mean Satan himself, that might live up to our expectations but he's not the Devil... he's just a man."

In both films, the architecture and design are characters in the film in a more

integral way than most, and in both too, the urban picture is drawn from the past. There may be glass and steel modernism, and fibre-optic communication technology in *Devil's Advocate*, but the interiors are of Gotham. Likewise in *Seven* where the lawyer's office is the only modern building in the whole film, and where the forensic technology helps the pursuers keep up with John Doe, it is in an understanding of morality in the city, millennia old, that the *solution* to the crime is found. Ultimately, these films are interesting not necessarily for their narratives, but rather as examples of how one can assess cinematic urban life by looking at issues other than mere plot and characterization, and by integrating these elements into the production design. Thus, in *Seven* we see a replay of various genre conventions, but we also get an historical comment on city (im)morality beneath the surface; and in *The Devil's Advocate*, we see a flashy modern *fin de siècle* engagement with some classic literary themes, but we also get a sumptuous evocation of New York as Babylon, integrating its boom years of the 1920s with uniquely 1990s style.

Chapter[Seven]

In these last two chapters, I want to investigate two recent films that have engaged with the SF genre in stimulating ways, especially in terms of spatiality. The first, Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys* (1996) is, like any Gilliam film, frequently bizarre, acutely critical and visually inventive, bursting at its narrative seams throughout. Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* (1997), on the other hand, is a design feast and mixed-up comedy / SF / romance, strung together with some fragile strands of continuity and story. Both, however, are significant features in SF cinema for very different reasons because of the questions that they raise about time, space and the city.

While my interest in *The Fifth Element* concerns mainly Besson's depictions of New York City, and how this fits into not only SF paradigms but also the idea of New York as an urban paradigm, the discussion of *12 Monkeys* will deal with time and space (and how this is illuminated through the film's design) as well as the metastructures of future dystopian societies - bureaucracies and their spacial construction. As I will show, bureaucracies are not only about the space they command (physically in massive civil architecture, and ideologically in the way they intrude on individual lives) but are also involved in a constant process of segregating societies, to apportion different groups recognizable and discrete spaces. The segregation that runs through most of Gilliam's work is that of madness and sanity:*12 Monkeys* deals intricately with the subjective configuration of psychological space, and the structure of behavioural spaces (like asylums) as determined by the powers of authority.

Part I - Here / There, Now / Then: Time in *12 Monkeys*

Here I was born and there I died

This line comes from a scene in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, where Kim Novak and James Stewart are looking at the rings of an enormous tree. *Vertigo* is the film that James Cole (Bruce Willis) watches at the end of *12 Monkeys*, while Kathryn Railly (Madeleine Stowe) fixes up his disguise. The scene from *Vertigo* acts as a tantalizing aural and visual corollary to the scene we are watching in *12 Monkeys* with Cole expressing doomed love for Kathryn, and the music for *Vertigo* swelling at the just right moment in their conversation. Not only is the reference to *Vertigo* a metatextual statement - a man obsessed with the image of a woman, and the woman he meets becoming that image - but it acts as an apotheosis of sorts to Gilliam's treatment of contemporary TV media in the film. Throughout *12 Monkeys* there are cuts to shows on TV that either mirror or anticipate the action of the narrative, a process that visually propels the polemical outbursts of Brad Pitt's character, mental patient Jeffrey Goines. From this scene (Cole and Kathryn watching *Vertigo*) one can literally spiral outward into the film, just as the *12 Monkeys* graphic is an infinite spiral of similar monkeys. *12 Monkeys* offers several such 'outwardly spiralling' moments, but it is through the *Vertigo* scene that one can expand most usefully into the issues of time and space that Gilliam confronts in his complex film.

12 Monkeys is based on a short French film by Chris Marker called *La Jetée* (1962). Distinguished by its composition of still black and white images (with the exception of one flicker of motion) it deals with the confrontation with one's own death, a situation where one occupies two places and times simultaneously. Relating this to Proust and his literary expressions of time and memory at the end of the nineteenth

century, Paul Coates writes:

> Here, as in Proust, the precondition of time travel is revealed to be the end of time (the sense of *fin de siècle*): the protagonist has pre-experienced his own death; or, rather, the entire film can be seen as the unfolding of the contents of the moment of death, in which the memory ranges through time in search of a way out of the present moment of imminent demise, only to return - having failed - to that deferred moment. [1]

Gilliam takes this narrative loop - a boy witnessing a death at an airport only to realize by the end that the dead man is himself - and constructs around it a dizzying array of characters, time slips and visual meditations on future dystopias. Marker's cycle of time (or diachronic parenthesis of a synchronic occurrence) becomes a more conventional series of SF time travels in Gilliam's hands, and yet resists some basic logical inadequacies that many other SF films choose to ignore in favour of mainly action narratives.

In his first trip into the past, Cole is mistakenly sent back to 1990, where he is incarcerated as a dangerous schizophrenic. In an interview with the asylum's psychiatric panel, one of them asks, "Are you going to save us Mr. Cole," to which he replies, "How can I save you, this already happened." There is never a sense in *12 Monkeys* that Cole's actions will alter the future, and indeed, the drama in the airport is not so much about Dr. Peters, the spreader of the virus, getting away, but rather our vain hope that Cole might be able to plot a new future with Kathryn. In a short final act, Peters sits down beside a woman on the plane who we know to be a scientist from the future - with Cole's failure (but with the advantage of his information), the administrators send one of their own back to obtain the information they need.

All this does not suggest that Gilliam avoids the unavoidable problems of time-travel, but rather that he interrogates them beyond the thrills of battles between beings from the present, the past, and the future. Instead of stories where intrepid time

travellers go back and try to save humanity from horrid dystopian futures (crucially, by changing history); or cautionary tales of our destructive impulse where the earth and its inhabitants regress, *12 Monkeys* springs a meditation on memory, and the behavioural aspects of time travel. Cole is an anthropologist of sorts, sent to investigate but not to touch, merely to gather information so that the scientists from the future can develop a way to counteract the disease. There is no changing the spread of the disease - it has happened, and both Cole and the scientists know that.

In *12 Monkeys*, Gilliam also, does not try to play scientific games, revealing the problems with time travel like Ray Bradbury's story, *A Sound of Thunder* (1952) where dinosaur hunters, by crushing an insect, alter the entire fabric of the future. Contrarily, Cole explains his 'volunteering' for the job when he says, "That's why they chose me; I remember things": Cole's back-and-forth leaps through time are not as disturbing and confusing as the temporal dislocations in his mind. In his ability to 'remember things,' lies the problem for Cole: he has excellent memory in terms of recalling information - numbers, pictures, conversations - but he also carries the enormous force of a recurring dream that he realizes more and more is a moment from his past. As the film moves towards its conclusion, we begin to see too the construction of Cole's memory - Kathryn buying the clothes we recognize from the vision, and finally Cole's realization at the airport that he has been here before. [2] Significantly, we only see the preparation for Cole's transportation once - otherwise he always just appears or disappears - and in this, one can see that Gilliam is not interested in digitally produced time portals, or tunnels of flashing lights, but rather in the nature of the environments that the time traveller finds himself in, and the mental disarray in the traveller's mind.

Ultimately, 'Here I was born and there I died,' - a simple linear motion traced by

Novak's finger across the rings of the tree - loses its simple linearity for Cole who dies in the body of a man, but who witnesses his dying in the eyes of a child, the space between them both limitless and momentary.

Part II - Subterranean Homesick Blues

Baltimore and Philadelphia might not evoke the same SF thrills as New York and Los Angeles, but as they operate in *12 Monkeys* they bring a distinctively industrial feel to contemporary SF. The sets and actual locations used for filming form part of Gilliam's design aesthetic that one can trace back to his 'mechanical' cartoons for Monty Python, but they are more than just post-apocalypse dressing. As Gilliam uses them, they frame and also infuse the different worlds Cole finds himself in, constructing the physical space for the narrative, and yet also shaping the space of Cole's psyche as the viewer sees it. Thus a discussion on space in *12 Monkeys* is about both interior spaces (those of the characters' perceptions) and exterior spaces (the environment the characters inhabit).

In the exterior spaces, Gilliam creates a tight locale for the city, using places that refer to one another throughout the film. The building Cole investigates in the future is the department store Kathryn and he visit in the present to buy clothes, toward the end of the film, and the bear that frightens him in the future, becomes a stuffed exhibit in a store window in the present. Gilliam's contemporary city is not a flourishing commercial one of high-rise canyons and endless streets, but one of homeless people, trash, graffiti and steam. Indeed, like Besson and Scott, Gilliam also creates a 'clutter-aesthetic' of sorts, but where Scott takes up space on an epic scale, and Besson creates infinite detail to astound the viewer, Gilliam seems more interested in breaking down readily identifiable spaces, disrupting the straight lines of streets, and obscuring the lines of buildings with grafted-on detail. Thus the walls of buildings are covered, palimpsest-like, with layers of posters - in one scene, Cole tears off a number of them to reveal the Army of the 12 Monkeys sign beneath - and rubbish is piled up on the

pavement, covering the bases of the buildings.

In the snowbound future we see buildings covered with vegetation - vines and creepers, once again distorting lines and shapes. The effect in this landscape is particularly Gothic - the building in Philadelphia (actually the City Hall) being a collection of pillars, arches and gargoyles - and when Cole goes inside, there are cobwebs and the statue of an angel dimly lit. This is where Gilliam and his designer Jeffrey Beecroft are most meticulous: the future and the present are full of visual corollaries that suggest that the dystopian future is already taking hold, even before the apocalyptic virus wipes out most of the world's population.

Thus the freezing, inhospitable future above the surface which Cole surveys is replicated in his flight from the police after Dr. Goines's party where he runs through the dark and frightening woods of folklore. The bears and lions that Cole sees in the future are echoed in Goines Jr.'s 1996 zoo breakout with tigers in the streets, giraffes on the highways and elephants on the sidewalks. [3] And the underground quarters where the inmates live in the future is alluded to in the cavernous dilapidated theatre where Cole and Kathryn fight off two muggers.

However, it is the interiors which are most important as they impact on the psychology of the characters. Gilliam says in an interview that the film "was less about design than 'found art,'" [4] and while the sets may not make an overarching design 'statement,' they do combine to develop acutely observed similarities between the future in 2035 and the past, particularly the asylum in Baltimore, 1990. Gilliam's unique style creates interiors of either sparse alienation, or chaotic confusion, the latter achieved through crookedly arranged furniture, irregularly proportioned rooms and spaces that hem all the characters in. The best example would be the two

interrogations that Cole is submitted to.

In the underground future, Cole is brought into a room (named the Engineering Room on set) that is enormously high with steel walls. In the centre is a steel chair which Cole is strapped into before being hoisted several metres up into the air. His interrogators question him through a large sphere hanging from gimbals and covered in screens of different sizes, their voices conducted shrilly through a dated amplification device. On the sphere's screens, Cole appears to himself and is also confronted with close-ups of the eyes and mouths of his interrogators - the whole apparatus representing, in Gilliam's words, "the nightmarish intervention of technology." [5] The 'nightmarish intervention' is not only the use of technology in the interrogation, but the physical intervention as well, the sphere obliterating any view that Cole might have of his questioners.

Contrarily, the interrogation Cole sits through in the asylum is face-to-face and intervening technology is entirely absent. However, any cosiness this might imply is dispelled by the room - ice-blue and empty, with an expansive shiny floor, and furnished only with an enormous steel table and chairs. Gilliam says that the room is "not about a real interrogation room, but what it feels like to be interrogated," and here is the key to the nightmarish sites in all of Gilliam's films. He continues, "I like to work from a subjective level more than anything," [6] and so one is terrified because the perspective is that of the character who is conspired against not only by his enemies, but also by the environments he finds himself in. Thus he is utterly alienated - a feeling Fincher and Khondji sought constantly in *Seven*, where in every room, they figured out "psychologically, where we wanted to be." [7]

In discussing the asylum itself (actually an old Penitentiary built by the Quakers

in the 1820s) Gilliam echoes the Expressionists, and Mallet-Stevens when he says,

> I've always used architecture as if it were a character, so it seemed to me this trifurcated room was right for multiple personalities. In three ways, it extends into infinity - or escape or the future - and which one do you choose? [8]

Where Gilliam's eye for psychologically disturbing environment, and intrusive distorting camera create diabolically constructed spaces for his characters, his 'technology' sets out to disrupt the very idea of technological evolution. Scattered amongst computer screens and isolation chambers (adapted from chambers used during the outbreak of the Ebola virus), there are mechanical gizmos - "an industrial detritus [of] electrical meters, manual typewriters and dentist's drills" - accouterment of what Morgan calls a "Mildewed Future." [9] Gilliam puts his unique approach to technology in SF down to an understanding of mechanical motion - "gears and pulleys" - and an "impotence" in the face of the electronic revolution; [10] but I would argue that the appearance of technology in both *12 Monkeys* and *Brazil* (1985) is perceptive in looking at the *use* of technology. Gilliam may not understand the technical aspects of the electronic revolution, but his mechanical intuition tells him that it can, and does, go wrong, that it is misused and abused.

Evidence of this can be seen to great humorous, yet tragic effect in the undersized floor-replacement in *Brazil*, a circular 'plug' fitted by government handymen that supposedly fits the hole made by government agents after they break into peoples' houses without warning. In *12 Monkeys*, Cole is sent back to the wrong year, an error in calculation by the scientists in spite of their obvious technological ability represented by the very fact that they can send someone back in time. The technology of the ballistics report tells the detective that the bullet retrieved from Cole's leg comes from World War I, but doesn't increase his understanding of the situation. Thus for Gilliam,

technology is not about the flash and appearance of efficiency that most SF films show off, but rather about the ever-present potential for inefficiency effected by human error.

The construction of space in *12 Monkeys* is a complex and deliberately obscuring process that unsettles the viewer through the way it unsettles the characters. [11] The future and the present are linked narratively by the plot about the deadly virus, leading us to see Baltimore and Philadelphia, or 1990 and 1996, as 'before' to 2035's subterranean 'after.' However, through the design of certain scenes, the present and the future become more and more similar, so that while the technology may be different, the same societal structures are in place. Gilliam may be producing a perversion of the Baconian scientific utopia, but it is undermined by the bureaucratic process that lurks beneath both the scientists of the future and the psychiatrists of the present. The scrubbing and interrogation Cole receives upon entry to both worlds suggests the continuity beneath the surface of radical change, and it is through both subtle and boldly motivated designs that such a relationship is achieved. This, in turn, makes *12 Monkeys* more than just a time-travel movie, so much so that it turns time travel into an aspect of memory and madness.

Part III - Insanity and Spatiality

Cole: I'm not crazy.
Goines: Of course not. You want to escape, that's very sane.

In the previous sections I have discussed temporal dislocation and memory, and the way the different times in *12 Monkeys* are connected by the production design. I want to close by looking at the spaces of madness in the film, and the way they form part of bureaucratic structures that, in Gilliam's visions, are always in place, in the present and the future. Like his cartoons, this critique of bureaucratic operations can be found in Monty Python rumbling beneath, and sometimes exploding through, the surface of the sketches and films (cf. 'The Ministry of Silly Walks,' or the revolutionary Judean Peoples' parties in *The Life of Brian*).

In SF urban dystopias, monolithic bureaucracies seem unavoidable - growing institutions of people dedicated to the management of increasing numbers of people. In exploding future cities, such government agencies manage the population by increasing segregation: human and non-human, white and non-white, male and female, and so on. *Blade Runner* grafted contemporary police department racism (topical in Los Angeles in the 1980s and just as topical today) onto the plot to chase down replicants by having them referred to disparagingly as 'skin jobs' by a policeman, but also represented the stratification of society literally in the architecture - Tyrell at the top of his Mayan pyramid, and the majority reeling about in the bad air and confusion of the street. In the forthcoming *Gattaca*, segregation is once again genetically determined, though the discrimination here is against 'Invalids,' people born physically and intellectually inferior. Society is under the control of Valids, those wealthy enough to engineer 'perfect' children, and the film's plot thus revolves around an overturning of class systems.

However, Gilliam's gift lies in the absurdities of such bureaucracies - nitpicking exploded to a grotesque scale - that are both tragic and achingly funny. The Ministry of Information scenes from *Brazil* are among the funniest and most brutally satirical ever filmed, but such showstopping setpieces can detract from the initiating moment in *Brazil*'s narrative - 'terrorist' Harry Tuttle's arrest record causing widespread bureaucratic panic after his name changes to Buttle because of a computer glitch. I said earlier that Gilliam's manic designs are not necessarily the product of a person uncomfortable in the electronic age: on the contrary, *Brazil* demonstrates his awareness of the electronic mechanisms of that are inexorably bound to information collection and dissemination, and, more importantly, the administrative structures that control these processes.

Brazil closes with a brilliant yet terrible double ending: Sam rescued, restored to Jill, and the two of them escaping the crowded city to the country, only for the viewer to be shocked rigid as Sam is seen still strapped into the chair, lobotomized, the whole escape confined to his mind. Gilliam's often humorous examinations of insanity are never far from being tragically overturned, and so is the case with *12 Monkeys*, a film that explores madness and society more closely than *Brazil*.

The first view we have of Cole in Baltimore 1990, is as a prisoner about to be psychologically evaluated. We have not seen his arrival in Baltimore, or the circumstances of his arrest, but the conversation between the detective and Railly is informative. We hear how Cole hospitalized several officers, to which Railly responds sarcastically, "That would explain the bruises - the struggle." Beneath what we hear is a subtext not only of police brutality but of a fear of difference, constituted as madness, by the authorities. Cole has no license, and no identity and so is accorded no societal

support - he is a threat because of his lack of identity, and is designated 'insane' upon arrest because of his explanation for his appearance and condition. All this is implied by a short conversation and, as I said earlier, we never see the actual time-travel and his arrival, both of which strengthen the idea that the film is more interested in Cole's psyche.

Once inside the protection of the asylum, he becomes the object of study for the panel of psychiatrists, [12] and also meets the other inmates. There are a lot of the usual inversions about sanity and insanity - Goines saying to Cole, for example "they're protecting the people on the outside when the people on the outside are as crazy as us" - and a number of cuts to crazy cartoons - a character repeatedly bashing his head against a wall - and so on. A more interesting moment, though, is the interruption by the inmate Washington, who tells Cole:

> I don't really come from outer space.... It's a condition of mental divergence. I find myself on the planet Ogo, part of an intellectual elite, preparing to subjugate the barbarian hordes on Pluto . But even though this is a totally convincing reality for me in every way, nevertheless, Ogo is actually a construct of my psyche. I am mentally divergent in that I am escaping certain unnamed realities that plague my life here, and when I stop going there, I will be well. Are you also divergent, friend?

It is another one of those spiralling moments, referred to later when Cole tries to 'stay' in 1996 by telling Kathryn that he *is* 'mentally divergent.' Washington's words produce a spatialization of the schizophrenic psyche, placing the person at once there and here, but also relate to the experience of the insane person in the sane world, or in Cole's case the sane person in two worlds. Cole is divergent, and by the end wants to 'escape certain unnamed realities that plague his life' *there* (in the future).

Interesting too is the subtle distinction between the criminal and the insane. As a criminal, Cole in entitled to a phone call, but initially, as an insane person, he is

denied that right, for as Goines says,

> Telephone call - that's communication with the outside world, doctor's discretion. All these nuts could make telephone calls, it could spread insanity, oozing through telephone cables, oozing into the ears of all these poor sane people, infecting them... wackos everywhere...

Here, there is an understanding of the threat posed by the insane in the technologically advanced world. In earlier times, those deemed insane could be physically cut off from society by being confined to discretely delineated spaces: but communication technology allows for the spread of ideas beyond physical structures that could break down those recognizable boundaries between the inside, and the 'outside world.'

The spaces that separate the undesirable from the rest of society are constantly built up and destroyed by Gilliam in *12 Monkeys*. Dr. Goines moves from the opulence of his house to the inside of a cage at the zoo as animals run free in the city, an exuberant yet essentially harmless precursor to the real apocalypse, announced in the first frame of the film:

> "... 5 billion people will die from a deadly virus in 1997...
> The survivors will abandon the surface of the planet...
> Once again the animals will rule the world."
>
> Excerpts from interview with clinically diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, April 12 1990 - Baltimore County Hospital.

And even though the inhabitants of the future have been forced underground together, the scientists work at a higher level than the criminals like Cole who, with their record tattooed on their necks, live many levels further down. Ironically, Cole's escape from Baltimore in 1990 occurs when he's at his most confined - restrained and drugged in a cell on his own with no windows, and a high ceiling. It is Houdini-like but, of course does not make him free, rather returning him to interrogation in the 'Engineering Room' in 2035.

Gilliam's dystopian future is as fraught with bureaucracy and discrimination as his present, and by doing so, he warns that many terrible aspects of our dystopian future are constantly in operation in our contemporary world. At his most nightmarish he is like Piranesi postulating a society of incarceration and carceral facilities to accommodate the growing population of those designated marginal or different. Significantly though, Gilliam is able, like Piranesi, to turn this aesthetic of imprisonment inward, to confuse and disorientate, the subject of his cinematic spaces. This is demonstrated through the time-tripping and mind-tripping of James Cole, who is physically divergent - witnessing his own death - but who, on meeting the woman of his dream, wants but can never have mental divergence, a desired insanity. What Gilliam adds to Chris Marker's original idea, and David and Janet Peoples's script, is a design aesthetic that produces psychologically motivated and motivating spaces - spaces that are constructed to act with and upon the characters in the film.

Chapter[Eight]

> Unlike Rome, New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. The spectator can read in it a universe that is constantly exploding... On this stage of concrete, steel and glass, cut out between two oceans (the Atlantic and the American) by a frigid body of water, the tallest letters in the world compose a gigantic rhetoric of excess in both expenditure and production. [1]

In Chapter Five, the issue of legibility in the city was raised via Mike Davis and the LAPD's aerial 'grid' over Los Angeles, co-ordinated by painted numbers on the roofs of buildings. If Los Angeles as megalopolis can be read aerially - an endless sprawl tip-toeing along the ocean's edge, snaking up through the canyons and out into the desert - then New York can be read vertically.

The ways New York has been 'read' by filmmakers and performed on film could fill volumes: there is a surfeit of material whether one chooses to look at gritty, realist films, actions films, romances, comedies, musicals, science-fiction or fantasy films. As main progenitor of *Metropolis*, and star of *Just Imagine* in the late 1920s, New York has a seminal place in the cinematic portrayal of cities through time. However, Donald Albrecht argues that New York's star has faded and been superseded by Los Angeles as the paradigmatic city of the future.

> From delirium to decay to nostalgia for a mythical past in the face of an impossible future, this cinematic empire has gone the way of the world's great civilizations. [2]

Though it would be interesting to hear Albrecht's thoughts on New York after *The Fifth Element*, his comment fails to acknowledge the complexity of portraying the city on film.[3] As has been my argument throughout this dissertation, the depiction of a city at any moment must be read fluidly, as a series of relationships that are constantly

changing. Even the most gritty and passionately unsentimental of films - *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), for example - is a reflection not just of the city but of the film's characters within the drama, and the viewers of that film, then and now. The film will not have the same effect on viewers today, and elements that were muted or undeveloped at the time, might be of more interest now, just as its major concerns may have dated. Thus any urban film is involved in an engagement with the future and the past of its subject, no matter how resignedly rooted in the present it may appear.

Inexorably bound with this historical complexity is the metahistorical nature of the film medium itself. As I showed in Chapter Five, Hollywood produces an almost endless stream of films that promote a mythic past (and present) for Los Angeles, so much so that it becomes difficult to disseminate the 'real' from the 'unreal.' In the end, one has to ask how important such attempts at dissemination are: as Soja argues from a socio-historical and architectural point of view, the 'real' and the 'unreal' are related in such a way that makes the appointing of discrete geographical, historical and chronological spaces, if not redundant, then of limited use.

To a large extent, New York is as mythically constructed as Los Angeles: whether through Busby Berkeley's musicals, Woody Allen's poignant comedies, Martin Scorcese's dramatic urban epics, or Spike Lee's incisive cultural clashes, New York exists as much as a mythical celluloid record as it does in history books, galleries and museums. The difference might be that where the myths of Los Angeles are founded partly on its decentred, unstructured nature - but more importantly originate from the non-place of Hollywood - New York's mythic origins exist partly in the very tangible form of its buildings, that 'gigantic rhetoric of excess' de Certeau describes.

In this chapter, I will take a closer look at this rhetoric, particularly as it is spelled

out in the more fantastical and utopian depictions of the city, and finally in its most flamboyant expression, Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element*.

Part I - Like New York, Only Different

> The constructed urban ensemble of *Batman*, *Dick Tracy*, and *Hudsucker Proxy* represent hermetic versions of the city which offer safety from the real contemporary one. Their view of New York mythologizes its pre-1960 incarnation - perhaps the last time there seemed to be a cohesion to the city and a hope for its future. [4]

It is tempting to read Albrecht's melancholy complaint in the same light as Sullivan's complaint about New York's 'immoral' Art Deco skyline of the 1920s. His criticism of Anton Furst's "pastiche of visual quotations" [5] in *Batman* (1989) could be a cinematic equivalent to the cultural eclecticism practised by the likes of Raymond Hood and Ely Jacques Khan in the 1920s, but for the crucial difference that recent films offer a celluloid recreation of the city populated with Hood and Khan's buildings. However, if one looks at a few statements made by the makers of these films, one will discover attitudes that are more than mere evocations of a lost era. That said, I do not intend a full analysis of any of these films, but rather a particularly utopian line of thought that will run into Besson and *The Fifth Element*.

Despite Tim Burton's desire to create a timeless, placeless city in *Batman*, he constantly returns to New York as a model, especially when he "imagines what might have happened to New York had there been no planning commission and had it been run by pure extortion and crime." [6] Burton's dark, carceral city of gothic spires, and inwardly cantilevering buildings is a dystopia beyond its comic-book origins and deliberate architectural ahistoricism. In his thinking behind the pastiche of styles lies a real concern with contemporary cities - that, under the colluding auspices of corrupt (or even just indifferent) civic officials, greedy property developers and opportunistic architects, cities might become planning dystopias (Michael Sorkin's anguished and angry essays about Donald Trump in particular, and New York in general, are an

example of these concerns).[7] Thus the dark, alienating city is a product of dark forces that work to secure the lush spaces of the corporate elite (Carl Grissom or Max Shreck's offices) to the disadvantage of the citizens in the streets below. In *Batman Returns* (1992), Max Shreck descends benevolently from the top of his tower to dispense Christmas greetings to the citizenry in an incisive play on the Rockefeller Center's multi-functionalism (a building that acts as a corporate symbol of verticality while offering horizontal 'civic' space in the form of a plaza).[8] The most dystopian Gotham of the franchise, *Batman Returns* infuses the monumental modernism with a brooding sense of nineteenth-century industrial England - Gothic and overridingly Dickensian, like the house where the Penguin is born, the Zoo, and even Wayne's manor.

Perhaps the most provocative moment in Joel Schumacher's third instalment, *Batman Forever* (1995) comes in an incongruous shot of Gotham by day where the cityscape is dominated in the foreground by a Sant'Elia-like HEP station and a gigantic statue of Atlas that crowns the 'Wayne Industries' building. Here, Wayne's philanthropy and civic interest is implicitly doubted, but in an otherwise unsubtle film, this ambivalence is never developed.

Albrecht's concern that these films persistently offer a package of past images ties in with the comments of Burton, Furst and the production designer for *Dick Tracy* (1990), Richard Sylbert. For all of them, it is necessary to construct a city that is unrecognizable geographically and historically, and yet the paradigm of New York appears at every turn even when the focus moves away to other influences like *Metropolis* (whose close relationship with New York was discussed earlier). Likewise Albrecht, who in criticizing these films (and coming from the opposite side of the

cinematic process) sees New York unmistakably in their design (despite, for example, the Chicagoan roots of *Dick Tracy*). However, the accusations of incoherent architectural nostalgia are perhaps symptomatic of the problem of filming 1940s comics as live action films in the 1990s: in this regard it could be said that the very reason one goes back to those texts is nostalgic.

To end, there is one film (or rather, one scene from that film) that expresses the problems of urban renewal, corruption and dystopia more intelligently than most , and acts as an example where urban design is more than just scenery. In the otherwise severely average *Robocop II* (1990), the battles of the cyborg cop are paralleled at an urban planning level in the fight between the young black Mayor Kuzac, and the Old Man, head of the OCP corporation. At a presentation, the Old Man reveals his plans for a whole new Detroit, and engages in this conversation with Mayor Kuzac when the latter interrupts.

> *Mayor:* You'll have to tear down a lot of peoples' housing before you can make that thing; you'll take away their homes.
> *Old Man:* We're going to raise towers of glass and steel. Every citizen will have a living unit, safe, secure and clean.
> *Mayor:* Won't be much room for neighbourhoods, huh? Not like the kind that we all grew up in.
> *Old Man:* These days, neighbourhoods just seem to be the sort places where bad things happen. Don't be nostalgic.
> *Mayor:* What about democracy? Nobody elected you.
> *Old Man:* Anyone can buy OCP stock and own a piece of the city. What could be more democratic than that?
> *Mayor:* Well let me tell you, there're a lot of people in this town who can't afford to buy your stock.

A variety of twentieth-century architectural ideals and practices are contained here: Mies van der Rohe's 'towers of glass and steel' (seen in the built form of his famous Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago, 1949-51); Le Corbusier's utopian plans, especially the residential tower blocks; and the modernist desire to break off from the

past (seen here in the Old Man's condescending remark, 'Don't be nostalgic'). The more recent urban principle of the cluster-development, ensuring safety and security, that Mike Davis discusses in *City of Quartz* is also evident. Perhaps most overtly, and made clearer by the fact that Kuzac is black, is the reference to disputes over urban renewal in America in the 1950s and '60s that displaced working class families (many of them black), and often erected in the cleared space commercial buildings - under the guise of 'gentrification' - that were supposedly multi-functional but economically viable only to middle and upper-class white families. [9]

This scene is an isolated example, however, of the debates surrounding future urban planning, and the details of such processes. The dystopian nightmare rather seems to lie either in the unfettered development of the city in the hands of organized crime (as in *Batman*) or in disorganized expansion, a sprawl uncaringly surveyed from the urban beacons of the Shreck Tower or Tyrell's Mayan pyramid.

Albrecht's opinion that the cartoon films hark back to a time when New York had hope for the future can be seen as slightly skewed if one considers just how dystopian these visions are. Agreed, the films themselves do not represent this hope, this urban 'cohesion,' but borrow stylistically from that period: however, is that optimistic pre-1960s period that Albrecht speaks of not riven with the same backroom deals that blight today's cities? [10] For in reading Furst's collection of architectural ideas for *Batman*, one cannot ignore Burton's directive that Gotham should be as if corruption had overidden all commissions and laws. Thus urban utopias or dystopias cannot be seen as entirely naturally evolved environments - in the hands of the Old Man, or Max Shreck, their growth is determined not in the details, but through a small number of large projects. In *The Fifth Element*, Luc Besson brings an entirely different 'comic-book' aesthetic to

the city, and New York in particular, and creates a light, bright city of marvels where once buildings hung over the streets and Commissioner Gordon stood expectantly over the spotlight, looking up into the night sky.

Part II - A Frenchman in New York: *The Fifth Element*

It is hard to know where to start with *The Fifth Element*. If one jumps into Besson's 23rd-century New York, as Leeloo does, one is likely to crash into any number of cabs that will take you in any number of directions. Though the viewer only really goes where Leeloo (Milla Jovovich) and Korben Dallas (Bruce Willis) go, there are still many interesting moments in the film that demonstrate a new way of looking at New York.

The talk surrounding *The Fifth Element* has, to a large extent, concerned comparisons to *Blade Runner*, and how this vision of the future city signals a break from Scott's bleak dystopia of Los Angeles 2019. [11] While I will offer comparisons between these two films, I feel that there is considerably more to Besson's vision and, indeed, to contemporary SF, than a reaction to *Blade Runner*. This is not just a case of day vs. night, light vs. dark, or utopia vs. dystopia. Mark Stetson, special effects supervisor for *The Fifth Element* also worked on *Blade Runner* in the model shop, and has thus been swamped by interviews asking him to compare the two. In one of his comments, he describes aspects of the films that not only distinguish them from one another but can also be read in a wider context, breaking the shackles of the *Blade Runner / Fifth Element* debate.

> *Blade Runner*... has become the benchmark for movie depictions of future cities, and I think there are two reasons why. 1) People look at it and think its a very possible future. 2) There's so much depth and texture to Ridley's vision that they believe what they're seeing.... But it's a very '80s vision - it reflects the sentiments of a decade and a half ago when we started to get afraid of what over-population and over-development might bring. [12]

Stetson goes on to describe the '70s influences on *Fifth Element*, as well its brightness and overall optimism, concluding: "you've got to understand that our version of New York is colourful and fanciful and absurd. It's not meant to be real." From here, one can begin to see *The Fifth Element*'s New York as a fluid space that engages with both

the future-shock reality of films like *Blade Runner*, but also the imaginary excess of the utopian / dystopian comic adaptations like *Batman* and *Dick Tracy*. *Blade Runner* scares us because it sets a date for its apocalyptic appearance, and a date only a couple of decades away. *The Fifth Element* is set far enough into the future that its extrapolative links from the present are tenuous, and more concerned with style than any real attempt to chart the development of the city's physical environment. If the buildings are tall now, they will be proportionally taller then, and so on.

In Stetson, Besson, and production designer Dan Weil's minds, *The Fifth Element* is essentially utopian in that the city is a bright, cosmopolitan and positive place, its size a contributing factor and not an oppressive presence. The orientalism that clutters up Los Angeles in 2019 becomes a Thai junk, floating hundreds of meters up in the air and navigates its way perilously, yet humorously through New York's infamous traffic. [13] The commercialization of the city through a hellish proliferation of billboards, flashing signs and jingles, becomes a giant, drive-by McDonalds, the site of a clichéd 'cops-eating-donuts' moment in the middle of the car-chase sequence.

However it is in the physical design of New York that *The Fifth Element*'s utopian character is most evident; coloured, I might add, by some dystopian shades. As in the discussion on *Batman* (above), it is necessary to see the city design in terms of both its motivation and realization, and so is interesting, given Tim Burton's comments on *Batman* earlier, when Stetson says:

> Although traditionally New York is characterized by its grid-like, rectilinear street layout, *curving* streets and T-intersections would normally be used to constrain the view, so as to fit it onto a model stage in miniature, or into a live-action screen, for that matter. Luc and Dan didn't want to do this. They wanted to depict New York as they saw it - a European rather than an American view. [author's italics] [14]

To achieve this alternative view, Stetson adopted Besson's vision drawn from the

French graphic art heritage from the 1970s, to create "a one-point perspective down the middle of the streets, with a straight vanishing point to infinity. And we have to look down those streets forever." [15] In addition to expressing part of Le Corbusier's fascination with New York - the liberation in its tremendous size, Besson also 'kills the street' by making the street level an uninhabited nether region of foul and almost impenetrable fog, while elevating all his traffic upwards in floating stacks of traffic channels.

This is the view that confronts the gasping Leeloo (and the relatively astonished audience) when she steps out of an air duct and onto a skyscraper ledge. Though the audience has an idea of what the city is like - Korben Dallas driving out of his little apartment into a stream of airborne traffic - the city is revealed fully, for the first time, through the eyes of Leeloo. She looks left and right, following cars and then down - a bottomless drop filled with endless layers of cars moving in streams according to the city grid. Implied in this shot, and indeed all the traffic shots, is a regulatory grid rather like the holding patterns for incoming aircraft, that prevents outright chaos, although we are never shown how cars move between levels legally. The audience is given little time to soak up the city as Leeloo, and what stands out is a classical, ornately decorated bridge in the foreground and a generally imposing verticality. With the benefit of freeze-frames (if you are watching the video) or production stills, one is able to see a generally pre-World War II architectural aesthetic - massive masonry building bases (at pre-extrapolation street level), and Art Deco tripartite structures. The view of the city as the Thai 'take-aways' junk moves off is more interesting: a techno-industrial jumble of rust-brown buildings that, structurally, resemble large-scale microchips. In the distance, the banks of the river below Roebling's Brooklyn Bridge fall away into an indistinct mass of

shapes that seem to suggest Sao Paulo's barrios in more monumental form.

The design and decor within this environment is more muddled. The cars are American, but with a European flavour - Stetson humorously describes Korben's cab as "a French vision of an American vehicle proportioned by an English art department that was accustomed to driving around London in British cabs." [16] Leeloo is almost run over by a vehicle moving down the side of the building that sounds like an old train, and later Korben swerves to avoid a sleekly worked over model of an old steam locomotive. Otherwise there are Victorian lampposts and filigree, and large gilt-edged clocks, like those one would expect to find in old railway stations.

Both architecturally and in terms of design, it is more difficult to describe Besson's visual aesthetic than that of Scott in *Blade Runner*, or Gilliam in *Brazil* and *12 Monkeys* who each have two distinctive SF films to their credit, and who can be evaluated in terms of an auteurist visual code. [17] Clearly Besson is a visually forceful director and there are strong themes, particularly in his lighting and editing, that run through *Subway* (1985), *The Big Blue* (1988), and *La Femme Nikita* (1991) into *The Fifth Element*. However, I would argue that the design is symptomatic of his vision as a non-American, and a Frenchman, in New York, seeing New York's iconography through different eyes. [18] Chris Chang writes that "New York as seen through his eyes, has never looked like this," for example in the opening sequence of *The Professional* (1994):

> An aerial traveling shot, skimming rapidly across water, suddenly discovers a lush treeline. The viewer is thus dis-placed before the revelation is made: it's not nature, it's the municipal reservoir in Central Park. Later, the exteriors outside Leon's apartment project an image of an almost alien Manhattan with odd sensations of horizon, openness, and topography. [19]

The Fifth Element, on the other hand, seems to revel in its identification with New York's

established iconography, and one look at the cityscape convinces the viewer that it could be nowhere else. Mark Stetson indicates a practical root to Besson's urban look when he says that the daylight context of the film meant that CGI crews and model builders had to produce much more detail. [20] Stetson himself, might be an example of what Bukatman sees in SF as an "auteurist consistency... located in the fields of art- and effects-direction:" [21] an idea confirmed by *The Fifth Element* whose costume and conceptual design was the subject of enormous excitement prior to its release.

Underneath all this computer-generated optimism and cosmopolitanism, there run a few dystopian streaks. The fog that covers the city floor is, in some ways a cursory nod to the unavoidably ugly parts of any city, and the funky orange or 'green' future of this New York has no call to visit the city's gloomier areas. However, the belligerent approach of the NYPD to the car-chase, including a bank of cars opening fire at will, irrespective of what may be beyond their target, wears its funny whiz-bang action uncomfortably over continued cases of police brutality in America's large cities.[22] Serious social concerns aside, the most noticeable, and yet most easily overlooked dystopian facet has to be Korben's 'cubicle.' He may wear luminous orange Gaultier tops, but he lives in a tiny windowless room, so small that everything either slides, folds or is compacted away. His shower is on top of his fridge, and his bed is in the wall, which Besson uses to humorous effect several times, further distancing us from the confined nature of his existence. True, Besson has gone some way to democratizing the residential tower as Korben's hole-in-the-wall is situated fairly high up the building, but it is somewhat ironic that in dystopian Los Angeles of 2019, Deckard should live in an apartment derived from a classic Frank Lloyd Wright house, while in utopian 23rd-century New York, Dallas should live like a laboratory mouse, sharing space with his

cab.

In *The Fifth Element*'s infinite streets, exploding skyscrapers and layers of traffic there are strong echoes of Le Corbusier, while *Batman*'s inward leaning, oppressive urban canyons, and gargoyled and terrifyingly vertical architecture suggest an American fascinated by the menace of early German expressionism. Both films (and filmmakers) continue the rich yet ambiguous relationship between European and American film and architecture that I discussed earlier. Burton remains an *enfant terrible* of sorts in America: not as extreme within the mainstream as David Lynch, and not an 'independent,' yet perversely interested in the trashier aspects of America's pop culture, as seen in *Ed Wood* (1995) and *Mars Attacks!* (1997). However, he has considerable respect in Europe, especially France. Besson, on the other hand is viewed as a "national embarrassment" by an American critic and, along with Jean-Jacques Beineix - *Diva* (1982) and *Betty Blue* (1986) - forms part of the French New Wave often disparagingly referred to as *Cinéma du Look* or *La Nouvelle Vague*. There is no lack of admiration for the visual flair of these directors from French critics, but in the light of the avant-garde schools after World War II, and especially in the 1960s, there is a dismay at the lack of 'content' in directors like Beineix and Besson's work. In spite of such criticisms, however, the new French cinema is astonishingly popular, and *The Big Blue*, *Betty Blue* and *Delicatessen* have already attained cult status.

How does *The Fifth Element* position itself in terms of contemporary SF film and the cinematic portrayal of New York? Well firstly, does it answer Albrecht's implicit plea for a return to the 'delirious New York' of earlier times? - or Jonathan Benison's assertion that "the SF that is peddled through the media is the wrong SF... [a] keying into the

collective yearning of an era." [23]

It is tempting to point to a particularly nostalgic strain in Albrecht's argument - in his reflection on the days when New York could challenge the future, as well as the cinematic products of that period. However, as I said in relation to Burton's thoughts on Gotham's design, there is an acknowledgement in the cartoonishly dystopian films of the past ten years of the forces that change the shape of the city; namely, the confluence of civic power and private interests. The Coen brothers' *Hudsucker Proxy*, on the other hand, is an open homage to Capra's 1930s films that sought to pick Americans up out of the Depression, and Albrecht's assessment of the film's nostalgia in this regard is correct. However, *The Hudsucker Proxy* also forms part of the Coens' peculiar cinematic style, and so should not be viewed so narrowly.

In its boldness and exuberance, *The Fifth Element* does portray a delirious New York: a city that is the centre of the world, that has the world's leader, and into which the ultimate warrior is pitched to meet her destiny with a lowly cabbie. Whether in doing so, Besson is 'escaping' a sense of nostalgia for New York's architecture and design is another matter. In his playful engagement with the iconography of New York (recalling Stetson's comments about the design of the cars) Besson is a Frenchman falling wholly in love with New York, and in this sense, one can relate *The Fifth Element* to *Metropolis* and Lang's visit of 1924. However, Lang's inspiration was New York in the making, in the process of realizing its unique appearance, and in Besson there is an interest in the signs of New York, most notably its image of Art Deco verticality - the impetus for *Metropolis*, and the city that so interested Le Corbusier in the interbellum era.

Besson's New York is truly an extrapolation and not an anticipation (following

Suvin), and exists in a state of gleeful incongruity. Manhattan, perched on top of a plateau with precipitous sides, is almost an island because of climatological change that has led to a drop in the sea level: and yet the effects of global warming are not seen elsewhere in the city environment. Utopian through its relative isolation - relative, in that the city has spread out over the 'new' land left by the retreating ocean - it is dystopian in what this isolation implies (changing weather patterns). So too the city which, despite all its brightness and overwhelming energy, would be a terrible place to live. *The Fifth Element* is not made for this type of scrutiny, and by the end of the film, with love conquering all and the world safe for another 5000 years, the 'orphaned utopianism' that Schubert speaks of [24] wins out over attempts at insightful utopian criticism. This is not a 'fault,' or criticism directed at a lack of originality: on the contrary, *The Fifth Element* picks up the momentum in urban SF, regenerated by *Blade Runner*, that had recently started flagging under the weight of armies of aliens, and some indifferent urban SF films. However, it is an indication of the design aesthetic that operates in contemporary SF film (and is as much about the viewers of the films as the artists who make them) - that in struggling to put together coherent ideas based on the contemporary urban environment, we look to the past for recognizable and easily adaptable shapes: that in envisioning the future we remember the past.

[Conclusion] ...Constantly exploding

Science-fiction cinema, it must be said, is resurgent at the moment. Though, like other genres, it has experienced dwindling interest from both viewers and filmmakers, a wide variety of terrifying and exhilarating futures have lit up the screens over the past few years. As with any trend, it's hard to point to a specific source but I feel two films in particular have been more influential than most: *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991) - for demonstrating the jaw-dropping possibilities of digital effects, and *Jurassic Park* (1993) - for making monsters cool again. *Terminator 2* has had two consequences: filmmakers, like children loose in a toy store, have plunged into SF because of the visual possibilities it offers - pyrotechnics, morphing aliens, spaceships and monsters. Filmmakers have also realized what the new technology can do for SF films, a subtle difference when expressed like this, but a not so subtle difference up on the screen. *Jurassic Park*, on the other hand, has combined these new creative capabilities with a nerd's-eye-view of cinema history, and called back the monster movies of the 1950s and '60s.

How has this affected those SF films with urban settings, those (mainly dystopian) tales of future megalopolises? Clearly a film like *The Fifth Element* benefits from these advances given the weaknesses beneath its stunning visuals, but more significant than the look of the film are the constituents of that 'look.' I have argued through this dissertation, that the concepts on which film cities are based today are strongly related to architectural and cinematic principles and developments from the early decades of this century. However, the cinematic depiction of cities is not so straightforward as an artistic 'evolution' to the engagement of sound, picture and motion in one moment: it is inexorably bound to the changing nature of cities themselves and,

perhaps most importantly, changing subjectivity within the city. Thus an attempt to examine science fiction cities must necessarily move outside what margins there are concerning science fiction, and urban paradigms.

Science-fiction film is, I believe, influenced very differently from science-fiction literature though they obviously share common ancestors. With the advent of film at the turn of the century, a whole new space was made available to the artist, a new range of technologies developed that allowed the artist to do more extraordinary things - as if the sight of a man firing a gun straight at the viewer was not enough for audiences in cinema's earliest days. Film benefited, though, from a breathtaking surge of technological development from the late nineteenth-century onward, and the arena of physical science enjoyed a period of frenetic and unparalleled advancement. It is in this environment of massive technological advancement and exploding scientific imagination that science fiction and film began making important strides.

But this period was also one of social and political turmoil as well, a reassessment of ideological systems and a re-examination of urban environments. Historical records frequently point to the 'salvation' inherent in urban disasters - the Great Fire of London, the San Francisco Earthquake - or, as Martha Bartter states succinctly, "Mrs. O'Leary's cow did Chicago a big favour." [1] Thus, in the aftermath of the Great War, and with the Industrial City straining under the rapid growth of new technologies, the stage was set for an outburst of utopian ideas and plans.

Those new technologies had made possible one of the most profound changes to urban space - upward momentum. With taller buildings, higher concentrations of people were possible - an ideal that found support in many utopian plans of the 1920s and 30s. However, the Great War had hardly affected America, and the rumble of

Communism was still getting started; and so in an exuberant decade of booming economic growth, new technologies, and increasing numbers of consumers, the city took on a distinctive shape in America, most notably in New York that came to be a definition of the modern city. Film too, took off, and in this environment of culture-seeking America, and Europeans seeking the space and money with which to realize their merely drawn ideas, a productive series of exchanges took place that led a Finn to influence the look of America's skylines, and an American skyline to inspire a German director to make one of science-fiction film's establishing statements.

It is important to see these processes not as a defined era, an arbitrarily delineated and transmitted collection of years and events. Through Piranesi, Eisenstein and Foucault, to Soja, one can see spatiality and subjectivity as a continual discussion, always related to the changing nature of the space and the subject. Thus, for Soja, Foucault's 'heterotopias' are part of a new way of reading cities and the histories of cities, and for Eisenstein, experiments with film editing lead to a new understanding of motion and space in Piranesi. All of these processes engage with film and science fiction constantly: what is science fiction without dystopia and terror of exploding spaces; what is film without spatial awareness, and the utopian desire to create constantly, alternatives to our own existence? And what is a city of the future without a city of the present?

As Jameson argues, we struggle to perceive the present coherently, and so the most fundamental urge in imagining the future is so that we may see our present as our past. But what form does that future imagining take? Suvin writes that, central to the utopian project, is analogy - the positing of alternatives to the present - and here one confronts the inescapable tension. In understanding the present so that we may

imagine utopian analogies, we seek those things that are comprehensible, things known and thus things from our past. From Le Corbusier's proposed Paris to Ridley Scott's imagined Los Angeles, this utopian 'bind' is evident - a looking back so that one may look forward.

Returning to the chronologically defined present, how can one contextualize film within this space of clashing particles? Much like the onset of photography that brought about fears for other visual arts at the turn of the century, so too digital technologies, which have raised muted concerns for the essentially unchanged processes of celluloid film. Word has it that the new *Star Wars*, the first 'prequel,' will be made digitally without celluloid, while the possibilities for animation through digital processing have already been seen in Disney's spate of 1990s blockbusters (starting with *Beauty and the Beast* in 1991).

Central to the nostalgic tendencies in Hollywood narratives are, I believe, ideas entrenched in the medium itself. As Albrecht argues, in returning to the films of an era, or even a moment, we return to the city of that moment and in the process, we mythologize that moment, making it harder with each return, to understand its context. It is via this process that ideals of New York and Los Angeles are constructed by mythologizers, just as other cities are idealized in paintings or literature. Admittedly, as I have pointed out, New York and Los Angeles both have 'histories' written and painted, and they also differ in the 'personality' of their histories - New York's perpetuated by acutely personal visions, Los Angeles (de)historicized by Hollywood. But they stand (or sprawl) as two significant loci in the cinematic depiction of modern cities past, present and future, their histories subject to iconographic selection, and temporal slides, or as Soja asks of historical 'monuments' in Los Angeles: "Is what we

construct now only a false representation of history, a simulation that accrues to itself only its own immediate contemporary meaning?" [2] De Certeau echoes this, walking through the grid of Manhattan; "[New York] presents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. The spectator can read in it a universe that is constantly exploding..." [3]

In the films we watch too, we witness a 'universe constantly exploding,' and so an analysis such as this becomes like a pillar or an arch in Piranesi's *Carceri*: in constant, and fluid, relation to its reader, its author and its subject. There is no doubt that urban utopian, or dystopian films will shock or amaze us in the future, and as viewers of those films and readers of their environments, we will seek an understanding of those relationships at that point. But the held form of those relationships will be for a moment only, unique and integrated as a whole, and yet constantly dislocated and redeployed as the context changes.

[End]notes

Introduction

1 Gleick, James *Chaos* p.117

2 Tafuri, Manfredo *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p.2

Chapter 1

1 Suvin, Darko *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p.30

2 Sontag, Susan 'The Imagination of Disaster' p.213

3 Agreed, there was much more wrong with *Dune* than just a faulty transformation from book to film, that had to do with the business side of the film industry and how this affects creative potential. That said, the final product though clearly problematic, contains marvellous costume and interior design, and some wonderfully moments that both acknowledge SF traditions and undermine them.

4 Hayward, Susan *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, p.302

5 Brosnan, John *The Primal Screen*, p.217

6 Craig W. Anderson, in his book *Science Fiction Films of the '70s*, makes the point that one of the reasons for the relative anonymity of these early 1970s SF films is their lack of a star, or an exciting character like a James Bond. With Heston, one had a proven star who had successfully changed genres with *Planet of the Apes*. It might be that this was *2001*'s legacy: a scenario where either Nature or artificial intelligence utterly dominated humans, and displayed more personality than their human co-stars (the case of HAL is well documented).

On the other hand, Sean Connery sought to lay his James Bond character to rest by taking a number of roles, including that of the savage Zed in John Boorman's *Zardoz* (1974).

7 Mumford, Lewis *The Story of Utopias*, p.1

8 ibid., p.8

9 Stableford, Brian 'Man-Made Catastrophes in SF' p.59

10 ibid., p.63

11 Concerning Godwin, Brian Ash writes in *Faces of the Future* that, "...unless an earlier reference can be unearthed, the modern vernacular expression 'speedy Gonzales,' must surely be attributed as originating from the pen of a man who in 1601 published a catalogue of the Bishops of England!" [p.21]

12 Of the former tale, Ash writes that; "In almost the same breath Cyrano turns from the idea of strapping bottles of dew to the body - in the hope, since dew rises in the morning, that they would

uplift the bearer - to the concept of multi-stage rockets." [p.21]

13 in Mumford, Lewis *The Story of Utopias*, p.104

14 ibid., p.108

15 Williams, Raymond 'Utopia and Science Fiction' p.55. These two loci appear in slightly different forms in the architectural projects of the early twentieth century as well, an issue investigated more fully in Chapter 2.

16 ibid., p.57

17 Suvin, Darko 'Science Fiction and Utopian Fiction: Degrees of Kinship' p.34

18 This particularly common component in SF literature and film finds its most influential early expression in Karel Capek's 1921 play *R.U.R.* where the word 'robot' was born.

19 Williams, Raymond 'Utopia and Science Fiction', p.60

20 ibid., p.63

21 Jameson, Fredric 'Progress versus Utopia' p.151

22 ibid., p.151

23 ibid., p.151

24 ibid., p.153

25 ibid., p.153

26 Suvin, Darko *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p.28

27 ibid., p.30

28 ibid., p.36

29 ibid., p.28

30 Somay, Bülent 'Towards and Open-Ended Utopia,' p.25

31 Schubert, Lawrence 'Future Perfect' p.80-87

32 Suvin, Darko *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p.39

33 Benison, Jonathan 'Science Fiction and Postmodernity' p.138

34 ibid., p.139

35 ibid., p.142

36 Bukatman, Scott *Terminal Identity*, p.5

Chapter 2

1 in Tafuri, Manfredo *Architecture and Utopia*, p.4

2 in Hall, Peter *Cities of Tomorrow*, p.174

3 Tafuri, Manfredo *Architecture and Utopia*, p.4

4 in Curtis, William J.R. *Modern Architecture since 1900* (3rd edition), p.225

5 Sennett, Richard *The Conscience of the Eye*, p.11

6 Of course, Sullivan was not the first or last person to invoke Biblical comparisons with the contemporary city; indeed, the anti-utopian strain of urban criticism has a rich history. However, within the context of New York in the 1920s, his comments operate within a lexicon of Biblical and ancient historical and architectural terms - from New York as a new Babylon, to the Chrysler building as a 'Cathedral of Capitalism'.

Additionally, Sullivan's gripe concerned more the lack of identity in the skyscrapers betrayed by the wholesale cultural appropriations evident in their design, rather than the skyscraper itself, something that he had produced an influential text on in 1896, 'The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered.'

7 Sennett, Richard *The Conscience of the Eye* p.11

8 ibid., p.172

9 Le Corbusier 'New York is not a Completed City' p.100

10 Sennett, Richard *The Conscience of the Eye*, p.172

11 Fishman, Robert 'Urban Utopias: Ebenezer Howard and Le Corbusier', p.20

12 It should be noted that Le Corbusier is not alone in these endeavours. However, the fame of his writings, designs and built structures is such that he cuts a dominant figure in the interbellum years, and also exerts considerable influence both directly (the design of Chandigarh) and indirectly (through the work of others) after World War II.

13 Hall, Peter 'The City of Towers' in *Cities of Tomorrow*, p.203-240

14 For example, Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981), and Michael Sorkin's scathing review of the same year, 'Wolfe at the Door' [in Sorkin, Michael *Exquisite Corpse*, pp.44-47]. On the other hand, Peter Blake - who wrote several books on modernist architects - disavowed his own earlier beliefs in the book, *Form Follows Fiasco: Why Modern Architecture Hasn't Worked* (1977).

15 Sennett, Richard *The Conscience of the Eye*, p.46

16 ibid., p.47

17 ibid., p.53. Of course, one could argue whether underplanned growth, or forced growth - a facet of contemporary cities, especially those in developing nations - is deliberate or not. Sennett's argument is more historically specific, but it illuminates an idea that is very significant in urban planning today.

18 Alexander Pope, 'Epistle to Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington', 1731 (lines 51-2)

19 Sennett, Richard *The Conscience of the Eye*, p.48

20 Tafuri, Manfredo *Architecture and Utopia*, p.38

21 Curtis, William J.R. *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, p.324

22 ibid., p.241

23 Tafuri, Manfredo *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p.29

24 In urban planning, a strong strain of utopian thought has proposed decentralization (and a frequent utopian partner, cooperative socialism), perhaps most persuasively represented in Howard's 'Garden City' plan.

However, this discrete spatiality of utopias is not expressed as clearly in dystopian visions. In SF film dystopian future cities are often characterized by a boundless expansion of the grid, and yet others resort to 'walling in' either physically (*Judge Dredd*) or by means of Buckminster-Fuller derived domes (*Logan's Run*). Of course, 'spaceship' movies necessarily promote the idea of physically separated socio-geographic entities, the Enterprise and the Death Star being the most recognizable cinematic examples or self-supporting inter-galactic communities.

25 in Mumford, Lewis *The Story of Utopias*, p.22

26 Dean, John 'The Science Fiction City' p.65

27 In *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) the time of cities is remembered by the children in the form of an oral tale - called the tell, and is told by the girl, Savannah. They are awaiting a messiah to lead them back to the city (hence their name, The Waiting Ones), and keep the story of their past alive in the ritualized 'tell', performed along with various props (a rough wooden frame creating a TV screen-effect, rock paintings, and fire).

28 Examples of the former being 'sanctuary' in *Logan's Run* (1976); and 'over the hill' in *A Boy and his Dog* (1976); and examples of the latter being 'tomorrow-morrow land' in Mad Max beyond Thunderdome (1985), and 'dry land' in *Waterworld* (1995), to name a few.

It should be noted that Dean does discuss the place of wilderness in SF in another article, 'The Uses of Wilderness in American Science Fiction.'

29 Dean, John 'The Science Fiction City' p.65

30 Corbett, Harvey Wiley 'Zoning and the Envelope of the Building,' p.18 The modern use of the term Babel may have been coined by Ruskin who, in 1853, had implored designers to "build a tower whose top may reach unto heaven" (in Sorkin, Michael 'Skyscrapers from A to Z' p.272).

31 Tafuri, M. *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p.179

32 ibid., p.180

Chapter 3

1 Williams, Raymond *The Country and the City*, p.275

2 Le Corbusier 'New York is not a Completed City' p.98

3 Sorkin, Michael 'Skyscrapers from A to Z' p.271

4 Markus, Thomas A. 'What do Buildings Have to do with Power' p.11

5 Crane, Hart from *Recitative*

6 Bender, Thomas & Taylor, William R. 'Culture and Architecture: Some Aesthetic Tensions in the Shaping of Modern New York City' p.200

7 Sennett, Richard *The Conscience of the Eye*, p.58

8 Concise Oxford Dictionary

9 Bender, Thomas & Taylor, William R. 'Culture and Architecture' p.212-213

10 Concise Oxford Dictionary

11 in Conrads, Ulrich [ed.] *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*, p.75

12 Le Corbusier, 'New York is not yet Completed' p.104

13 ibid., 105

14 Betsky, Aaron 'Lost Horizons: The Birth and Death of the Skyscraper,' p.9

15 Le Corbusier, 'New York is not yet Completed' p.104

16 in Bender, Thomas & Taylor, William R. 'Culture and Architecture' p.210

17 ibid., p.190

18 Philip Johnson's controversial 'Chippendale' ornament atop the AT&T building (1979), and Hugh Stubbins's less frivolous but striking Citicorp Headquarters (1978) are testimony to this process fifty years later.

19 Optimism regarding the latter plan, which has been around for a while, has suffered as a result of the Asian property market collapse, but apparently it has not been entirely discounted.

20 Its monumental scale and stylistic grandeur already has it being called a modern Acropolis or Palatine Hill [Colacello, Bob 'Meier's Moment' p.334]

21 It should be noted that the Art Deco boom in America lasted longer than just the 1920s, and was much more widespread than just New York. Miami, in particular, displays a strong Art Deco style in many smaller buildings - cinemas, theatres, restaurants, hotels. This latter point is equally important - Art Deco was not just about corporate structures and luxury residences (cf: Bayer, Patricia *Art Deco Architecture* and Robinson, Cervin & Bletter, Rosemarie Haag *Skyscraper Style*. However, in this section, the focus is specifically on New York's most notable

(and noticeable) Art Deco examples.

22 in Bender, Thomas & Taylor, William R. 'Culture and Architecture' p.206

23 ibid., p.206

24 ibid., p.209

25 It is the Charles Ennis house that is used as Deckard's apartment in *Blade Runner.*

26 Saarinen had actually produced a strong precursor to Art Deco over a decade earlier in Finland - the Helsinki Railway Station - though his Chicago Tribune Entry is probably more significant in an American context.

Concerning the Chicago Tribune Competition, it is interesting that, after winning, Hood said that the 'Gothic' and vertical appearance of his design (and that of an earlier tall building) was purely because "I happened to make them so. If at the time of designing them I had been under the spell of Italian companies or Chinese pagodas, I suppose the resulting composition would have been horizontal." [in Sorkin, Michael 'Skyscrapers from A - Z' p.275]

27 Sorkin, Michael 'Skyscrapers from A to Z', p.300

28 Curtis, William J.R. *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, p.218

29 ibid., p.223

30 in Curtis, William J.R. *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, p.218

31 Janet Maslin from the *New York Times* in her review of *The Fifth Element* [in Chang, Chris 'Escape from New York,' p.57]

32 in Robinson, Cervin and Bletter, Rosemarie Haag *Skyscraper Style*, p.67

33 Eisner, Lotte H. *The Haunted Screen*, p.23

34 in Vidler, Anthony 'The Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary', p.16. It is worth noting that the sets for *Der Golem* were designed by Poelzig's wife as well - Marlene, who was a sculptor.

35 Indeed, Eisner describes the interiors of the sets of *Der Golem* thus: "a tracery of Gothic ribs and ogives transformed into semi-ellipses composes a framework for the characters." [*The Haunted Screen*, p.59] Such organicism (and its resonance in *Alien*) is terrifying because it should be 'natural' and comforting, but instead it is alienating and disorienting.

36 Neumann, Dietrich 'Introduction' in *Film Architecture*, p.8 Giger's designs for *Alien* are a good contemporary example of this: unlike many 'creature-people' in SF film - Stan Winston or Rick Baker - Giger designed everything in *Alien* from the various stages of the alien to the exterior and interior of its spacecraft. Though Giger's *Alien* journal depicts the creative relationship on the set as less than rosy at times, he exerted enormous influence on the final 'look' of the film.

37 in Bordwell, David; Staiger, Janet & Thompson, Kristin *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p.73

38 Faure, E. '*De la cinéplastique*', 1922 [trans. Anthony Vidler] in Vidler, 'The Explosion of

Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary' p.14

39 Eisner, Lotte H. *The Haunted Screen*, p.155

40 Tafuri, Manfredo *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p.341, endnote 9

41 Neumann, Dietrich 'Before and After Metropolis: Film and Architecture in search of the Modern City' p.35

Chapter 4

1 in Neumann, Dietrich 'Introduction' to *Film Architecture*, p.7

2 in Wouters, Luc *Rob Mallet-Stevens: Cinema and Architecture*, p.92

3 From Eisenstein's essay 'Piranesi, or the Fluidity of Forms' in Tafuri, Manfredo *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p.75

4 Foucault, Michel 'Of Other Spaces,' p.23

5 Tafuri, Manfredo *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p.31

6 Wilton-Ely, John *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, p.83

7 Foucault, Michel 'Of Other Spaces' p.23

8 Tafuri, Manfredo *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p. 26

9 Neumann, Dietrich 'Before and After Metropolis: Film and Architecture in Search of the Modern' p.33

10 Kaes, Anton 'Sites of Desire: The Weimar Street Film' p.29

11 Definitely one of the most powerful literary evocations of these collisions between time and space, between the individual and the collective comes in T.S. Eliot's 'Preludes' (1917) and *The Waste Land* (1922).

In the former, Eliot makes a startling transition from the last stanza of part II -

With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

- into the poignantly observed personal episode of part III. In the latter, he contrasts images like the crowd that 'flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many' (l.62-3) - with the awkward scene between the typist and 'the young man carbuncular' in 'The Fire Sermon.'

12 Foucault, Michel 'Of Other Spaces,' p.24

13 'Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in Citadel-LA' and 'Postmodern Urbanization: The Six Restructurings of Los Angeles' both in Sophie Watson & Katherine Gibson [eds] *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, pp.13-34 & pp.125-137. Related to the latter is 'Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis' in Sallie Westwood & John Williams [eds] *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory*, pp.19-30. This article, in turn, appears within a larger context in Soja's book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places.*

14 Donald Sutherland's DigiCom enigmatic chairman to Michael Douglas's Tom Sanders in *Disclosure*.

15 Betsky, Aaron 'Lost Horizons: The Birth and Death of the Skyscraper' p.14. It would be interesting to consider *Rising Sun*, another Michael Crichton adaptation along with *Disclosure* in that both deal with controversial issues in the business world - sexual harassment and American xenophobia towards, particularly Eastern corporations. However the 'sentient skyscraper' (to use a term by Mike Davis) of *Rising Sun* is a very different space to the apparently unobtrusive DigiCom office building in which most of *Disclosure*'s action takes place.

16 David Fincher uses some of these qualities - rapidly expanding information technologies, paranoia and Michael Douglas's characterization to heightened psychological effect in his new thriller, *The Game* (1997).

Chapter 5

1 From the film, *The Two Jakes* (1990): Screenplay by Robert Towne.

2 *The Two Jakes*, for example, combines with *Chinatown* to bookend World War II and, in doing so, examines the area's two most important things - water and oil. In *Chinatown*, Jake Gittes investigates a murder over water rights in the 1930s: Los Angeles is a thirsty place where, "if one stopped the water for three days, the jackals would reappear and the sand of the desert" [Hanns Eisler in Davis, Mike *City of Quartz*, p.50]. In *The Two Jakes*, the crime concerns a conflict between oil rights and the explosive property development outward into the desert to cater for returning soldiers.

3 Soja, Edward W. 'Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in Citadel-LA' p.18

4 ibid., p.14

5 Foucault, Michel 'Of Other Spaces' p.24

6 Davis, Mike *City of Quartz*, p.223 Davis's choice of films is curious, though: they are all films that could be called SF (at a stretch) with the exception of *Die Hard* and *Colors*. *Die Hard*, with its technology an ultra-escapism does resonate with the other films, but *Colors*, whether Dennis Hopper achieved it or not, is intended as a harsh, gritty and entirely realistic portrayal of contemporary gang life, and in this quasi-documentary sense, is not really about extrapolation or even analogy at all.

7 Significantly, both of these films are based on novels by writers whose œuvres have interrogated the traditionalism that has distinguished this genre - Walter Mosley, by depicting the vibrant African American community of post World War II Los Angeles through the character of

Easy Rawlins; and James Ellroy, by interrogating that same era through the painfully personal memories stemming from the murder of his mother.

8 David Reiff in Ford, Richard T. 'The Collapse of Los Angeles' p.78. In the context of *Strange Days*, this volatile cultural mixture that runs amok in Los Angeles calls to mind the tension Bhabha finds between the metropolis and the community. "Community is the antagonist supplement of modernity: in the metropolitan space it is the territory of the minority, threatening the claims of civility; in the transnational world it becomes the border-problem of the diasporic, the migrant, the refugee." [*The Location of Culture*, p.231]

9 Davis, Mike *City of Quartz*, p.224

10 West, Nathanael *The Day of the Locust* p.262

11 Davis, Mike *City of Quartz* p.252

12 ibid., p.6

13 Dean, John 'The Uses of Wilderness in American SF' p.79

14 in Brosnan, John *The Primal Screen*, p.237

15 in Sammon, Paul M. 'Fear of a Bleak Planet' p.103

16 Kael, Pauline *The New Yorker*, July 12, 1982 [in *Neon*, March 1997, p.105]

17 Brosnan, John *The Primal Screen* p.239

18 Marco Brambilla referred to this famous opening provocatively in *Demolition Man* (1993). In an aerial shot we see a typically nightmarish Los Angeles, with the 'Hollywood' letters on fire at the bottom of the screen, and a massive burning building in the centre. As interesting as it is, this shot establishes the film's (often inane) running commentary of cinematic references.

19 Webb, Michael '"Like Today, Only More So": The Credible Dystopia of *Blade Runner*,' p.46

20 in Davis, Mike *City of Quartz*, p.54

21 "Most 1982 audiences didn't take to it; a lot of people had expected another Indiana Jones movie, not Harrison Ford as an alcoholic ex-cop shooting women in the back." [William Kolb in Sammon, Paul M. 'Fear of a Bleak Planet,' p.104.

This ambiguity in Deckard's character, and the fact that one feels great sympathy for the replicants, particularly Batty, calls up the old SF problem with movie stars again. Like Heston's SF films where his name on the bill helped sell the film, Ford's astronomical rise through Hans Solo and Indiana Jones, probably prepared audiences for a film they didn't see. Ironically, this struggle to shake off a famous character has, at times, dogged Hauer's career since his portrayal of Batty in *Blade Runner*.

22 Tafuri, Manfredo *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, p.53

23 Ruppert, Peter '*Blade Runner*: The Utopian Dialectics of Science Fiction Films' p.10

24 Webb, Michael '"Like Today, Only More So": The Credible Dystopia of Blade Runner'

Chapter 6

1 Chang, Chris 'Escape From New York,' p.57

2 *Revelations 18:10*

3 in Taubin, Amy. 'The Allure of Decay,' p.24 The initial prints were processed through a little-used method called silver retention which heightens contrast and density in colours.

4 Criticism over its religious content is another issue entirely. Even though Taubin says that it offers multiple-readings, for her it's "about as right-wing as Newt Gingrich's natterings about New York." (in 'The Allure of Decay') However, Michael Medved, film critic for the religious right, denounced the film, while John Doe is a character originating from Christian fundamentalism, so the issue is open.

Ultimately, the vision and design of Fincher, Khondji and Max (and Morgan Freeman's performance) is far more arresting than Andrew Kevin Walker's screenplay.

5 *Revelations 17:4*

6 Darke, Chris 'Inside the Light,' p.20

7 Dean, John 'The Uses of Wilderness in American SF,' p.79

8 David Fincher in Taubin, Amy 'The Allure of Decay,' p.24

9 In spite of *Seven*'s overtly moral content, it is interesting to consider this relationship in terms of the jettisoned introduction to *Blade Runner*, where Deckard comes back to the city after a holiday in the desert.

10 Revelations 18:18

11 Her version is different. Milton plays on the themes of Revelations later when he says; "Acquittal after acquittal after acquittal until the stench rises up to heaven and covers the whole fucking lot of them." In *Revelations 18:5* it says; "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."

12 "Where does he sleep?" asks one employee, quietly. "Everywhere!" says Milton with a grin, appearing suddenly at his shoulder.

13 His client performs a ritual act with an animal's tongue and nails, and the following morning in court the prosecutor is overcome with an unstoppable bout of coughing and gagging, allowing Lomax to present his tenuous argument unhindered. Clearly, Milton's interest in the man is not just his $15 million.

Chapter 7

1 Coates, Paul 'Chris Marker and the Cinema as Time Machine,' p.309

2 In *Blade Runner* too, the hero is plagued by an image, though Scott was forced to cut the

sequence after those financing the film objected. The origami unicorn that Gaff (Edward James Olmos) leaves in Deckard's apartment is supposed to link to a dream sequence Deckard has of a unicorn running through the woods, a memory planted in Deckard by the Tyrell Corporation, thus making him a replicant too.

Phillip K. Dick had played similar games with memory in 'We Can Remember It for You Wholesale' which became another SF blockbuster in 1990, *Total Recall.*

3 In both the future and present scenes, there are brilliant individual shots that link the narrative with the architecture of the city. In the future, Cole hears the roar of a lion and turns to see one in a dramatic pose on a ledge high above him. In such a heavily gothic environment of the City Hall building, and vertical, spired Art Deco buildings in the background, the lion appears as a gargoyle come to life.

Later, there is a shot of a high scaffolded structure at dawn, and suddenly, silhouetted in the red light, one sees monkeys clambering around the building skeleton. The Army of the 12 Monkeys have sprung their plan and let the animals out of the zoo, and for a day, mischievousness and madness will reign in the 'sane' city.

4 James, Nick 'Time and the Machine,' p.16

5 ibid., p.15

6 ibid., p.16

7 Taubin, Amy 'The Allure of Decay,' p.24

8 James, Nick 'Time and the Machine,' p.16

9 Morgan, David 'Extremities,' p.20

10 James, Nick 'Time and the Machine,' p.16 An interesting early example would be his Monty Python cartoons, very mechanical and simple in stark contrast to the elaborate animation achieved by the likes of Disney even before the digital wonders of the 1990s.

11 Perhaps the closest relation to Gilliam's vision is the French pair of Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro, whose two films, *Delicatessen* (1991) and *La Cité des Enfants Perdu* (1995) display enormous visual inventiveness. Both films play with audience perception by spatially alienating their characters, and make substantial use of distorted lenses, bizarre angles and amazing sets that produce interior spaces of nightmarish yet humorous intensity.

12 In one brilliant scene, Railly is interrogated by the panel and her responses are deemed 'defensive', an analytical inward spiral as the psychiatrists psychoanalyze one another.

Chapter 8

1 de Certeau, Michel 'Walking in the City,' p.152

2 Albrecht, Donald 'New York, Olde York: The Rise and Fall of a Celluloid City,' p.39 Indeed, Edward W. Soja discusses the growth and urban restructuring of Los Angeles in *Postmodern Geographies*, saying at one point: "There may be no other comparable urban region which presents so vividly such a composite assemblage and articulation of urban restructuring

processes." [p.193] It would be interesting, but time-consuming to consider, broadly speaking, New York as a modern, and Los Angeles as a postmodern city.

3 In the last footnote of his article, Albrecht does mention "a host of new television programs set in New York were being announced for the fall of 1995, suggesting the persistence of the on-again / off-again love affair between New York and the moving image." But if he is taking television series into account, there is a lot to be gleaned from pre-1995 series like *NYPD Blue*, and comedies like *Seinfeld* and *Mad About You*.

4 Albrecht, Donald 'New York, Olde York: The Rise and Fall of a Celluloid City,' p.41

5 ibid., p.40

6 Neumann, Dietrich 'Batman,' in *Film Architecture*, p.162

7 Sorkin, Michael Two essays in particular from his collection, *Exquisite Corpse*: 'Tipping the Circle,' pp.114-118, and 'Dump the Trump,' pp.141-147. Whether or not one agrees with Sorkin, there is enough evidence of such planning debacles in most cities (including my own city of Cape Town) to endorse his general point of view.

8 The Shreck building offers contradictory signals in the enormous statues at the entrance, Deco in style, but also resembling totalitarian 'figures of industry.' As they operate giant levers, the reference could look back, again, to the famous scene from *Metropolis* of exhausted workers moving the dials on the machine. However, the juxtaposition of totalitarian motifs and corporate monumentalism is in keeping with the film's deliberately jumbled architectural aesthetic.

9 cf. Hall, Peter *Cities of Tomorrow*, pp.227-240 The final section of Sorkin's essay, 'Tipping the Circle,' [see endnote 7] demonstrates this ongoing process in New York.

10 If one considers Curtis Hanson's adaptation of James Ellroy's *LA Confidential* (1997), one can see a film that stylistically revels in its *noir* iconography, and yet is wholly contemporary in its desire to re-examine the darkness beneath those established myths.

11 cf. Smith, Adam 'Review of *The Fifth Element*' in *Empire* 97, July 1997, p.30

12 in Bielby, Matt 'Space Camp,' p.47

13 "'It was always going to be set here,' mutters... Luc Besson, negotiating his way through the diminishing chaos of New York's rush hour." [Smith, Adam 'The Future is Now' p.64]

14 in Floyd, Nigel 'Infinite City,' p.8

15 ibid., p.9

16 in Bielby, Matt 'Space Camp' p.51

17 Scott's visual aesthetic can be extended to include films like *Someone to Watch Over Me* (1987) and *Black Rain* (1989), while Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Münchausen* (1989) and *The Fisher King* (1991) along with his SF films show a complex and unique style with strong roots in his years with Monty Python.

18 Besson constantly stresses the collaborative aspect of the film's design, saying at one point,

"It's a movie. Why put a flag on it?" [in Smith, Adam 'The Future is Now,' p.66] That said, the strong influence of the French graphic novel, the contribution of animation legends Moebius and Jean-Claude Mézières, and the costumes of Jean-Paul Gaultier give the entire production a decidedly French influence.

19 Chang, Chris 'Escape From New York' p.57

20 in Bielby, Matt 'Space Camp' p.47

21 Bukatman, Scott *Terminal Identity* p.13

22 New York is still coming to terms with the brutal assault on a Haitian man by four cops last year, an incident that gets dramatic coverage in Steven Bochco's controversial new police show, *Brooklyn South*.

23 Benison, Jonathan 'Science Fiction and Postmodernity' p.138

24 cf. Lawrence Schubert in Chapter 1, endnote 31

Conclusion

1 Bartter, Martha A. 'Nuclear Holocaust as Urban Renewal' p.148

2 Soja, Edward W. 'Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in Citadel-LA' p.14

3 de Certeau, Michel 'Walking in the City,' p.152

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__________ '*Batman*' in Dietrich Neumann [ed.] *Film Architecture: Set Designs from* Metropolis *to* Blade Runner
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[Filmography]

Only the films analysed in detail in this dissertation are listed below.

Blade Runner (1982)

Director: Ridley Scott
Screenplay: Hampton Fancher, David Peoples [from the short story by Phillip K. Dick, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"]
Photography: Jordan Cronenweth
Editor: Terry Rawlins
Production Design: Lawrence G. Paull, David L. Snyder, Syd Mead
Visual f/x: Douglas Trumbull
Music: Vangelis
Cast: Harrison Ford, Sean Young, Rutger Hauer, Daryl Hannah, Joanna Cassidy, Brion James, Edward James Olmos

The Devil's Advocate (1997)

Director: Taylor Hackford
Screenplay: Jonathan Lemkin, Tony Gilroy [from the novel by Andrew Neiderman]
Photography: Andrzej Bartkowiak
Editor: Mark Warner
Production Design: Bruno Rubeo
Music: James Newton Howard
Cast: Al Pacino, Keanu Reeves, Charlize Theron, Jeffrey Jones, Craig T. Nelson, Delroy Lindo

Disclosure (1994)

Director: Barry Levinson
Screenplay: Paul Attanasio [from Michael Crichton's novel]
Photography: Tony Pierce-Roberts
Production Design: Neil Spisak
Music: Ennio Morricone
Cast: Michael Douglas, Demi Moore, Donald Sutherland, Caroline Goodall, Roma Maffia

The Fifth Element (1997)

Director: Luc Besson
Screenplay: Besson and Robert Mark Kamen [from a story by Besson]
Photography: Thierry Arbogast
Editor: Dan Weil
Production Design: Dan Weil [with Jean 'Moebius' Giraud, Jean-Claude Mézières]
Visual f/x: Mar Stetson [and Digital Domain]
Costumes: Jean-Paul Gaultier
Music: Eric Serra
Cast: Bruce Willis, Milla Jovovich, Gary Oldman, Ian Holm, Chris Tucker, Charles Creed Miles, Brion James, Tommy 'Tiny' Lister Jr.

Metropolis (1927)

Director: Fritz Lang
Screenplay: Thea von Harbau
Photography: Karl Freund, Günther Rittau
Sets: Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut, Karl Vollbrecht
Cast: Brigitte Helm, Alfred Abel, Gustav Fröhlich, Rudolf Klein-Rogge

Se7en (1995)

Director: David Fincher
Screenplay: Andrew Kevin Walker
Photography: Darius Khondji
Editor: Richard Francis Bruce
Production Design: Arthur Max
Music: Howard Shore
Cast: Morgan Freeman, Brad Pitt, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kevin Spacey

12 Monkeys (1996)

Director: Terry Gilliam
Screenplay: David & Janet Peoples, inspired by the film *La Jetée* by Chris Marker
Photography: Roger Pratt
Editor: Mick Audsley
Production Design: Jeffrey Beecroft
Music: Paul Buckmaster
Cast: Bruce Willis, Madeleine Stowe, Brad Pitt, Christopher Plummer