

**Cinema and Commercial Space Tourism:
The Politics of Escapism**

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*This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere

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Supplementary Material

Link to Practice-Based Approach Portion of Dissertation:

<https://vimeo.com/359438679>

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Abstract

Space tourism has been one of the most enduring tropes in the cinema from the early 1900s until the present day, yet there exists no systematic, comprehensive investigation situating these widely diversified depictions of space tourism within a broader historical context of technological innovation and associated social transformation. The contemporary social climate, whereby commercial space tourism is an emergent possibility, calls for the decolonisation of the term ‘tourism’ and its categorical associations, in order to assess how visions of space tourism within cinematic, science-fiction futures project the history of tourism and its detrimental environmental, commercial, and colonial implications

The written portion of the dissertation uses close-textual-analysis and discursive transcoding as the primary methodologies to identify and investigate five unique trends in the thematic representation of cinematic space tourism, each linked to a distinct ‘moment’ of widespread crisis and transformation. Ultimately, this will contribute to a broader understanding concerning how science-fiction explores social constructions of race, class, and gender. As a practice-based accompaniment to these critical discussions, I relay my findings in a space film which compiles knowledge drawn from film and literature scholarship, as well as from the analysis of the selected case studies.

Chapter 1:

Unpacking the Space Film: Methods of Inquiry

1.1 Introduction: Selection of Case Studies

The main purpose of this investigation is to identify and offer a considered analysis of the thematic underpinnings in the representation of cinematic space tourism, as they relate to technological developments in transportation and mass tourism, and key ‘moments’ of crisis and social transformation stemming from the early 20th century until the present. In the written portion of the thesis, I investigate the significant dimensions of narrative, character development, and set design within a series of period-specific case studies sharing common subject matter and stylistic similarities. Chapters 2-5, which are each centrally organised around 1-2 primary case studies, confer observations regarding the representation of gender, race, and class in narratives concerned with cinematic space tourism.

Furthermore, from investigating the various means of portraying migration and tourism in the cinema, I aim to decolonise pervading notions of tourism, to gain a wider understanding of what tourism means and how the categorial associations of tourism have changed over time. In researching this topic, I first look at the cultural history of commercial space tourism, compiling a range of cinematic instances of touristic encounters with outer

space, as well as unfamiliar and otherworldly landscapes. While the thesis involves a wide diversity of examples of cinematic space tourism, including those stemming from Soviet and Eastern European cinema, I concentrate primarily on a series of case studies originating from the USA, France, Germany, and England, due to the fact that these accounts can be linked by shared histories of colonial exploitation and national fantasies involving Euro-American domination.

In Chapter 2, which is thematically organised around the earliest moving depictions of outer space stemming from the cinema of attractions, I look to the beginnings of modernity, in order to frame French film-maker George Méliès' whimsical short film, *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* (1904). In considering the relationship between cinematic space tourism and social change, I examine the themes of sexism, educational institutions, colonialism, imperialism, and early tourism within this film, and furthermore place this film within the historical context of emergent technologies and commercial tourist endeavours of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Before going further it is helpful to first define the terms 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' as used in this context. I refer to the following definition of the term 'colonialism' outlined in the Cambridge Dictionary (2020) which most closely matches my use of the word in the thesis: 'the belief in and support for the system of one country controlling another.' Colonialism, as a belief system, shares parallels with 'imperialism' which the OED (2020) defines as 'the extension or imposition of power, authority, or influence.' I would add to this definition that colonialism normally involves a ruling country

forcibly invading land, populating the land and exerting power over the citizens of a less prosperous country, at times enslaving those citizens or forcing them to adhere to a specific set of religious beliefs. Imperialism, in contrast with colonialism, implicates the expansionist ideologies framing militant influence over another territory, but imperialism does not necessarily mean that a desired territory is physically occupied by members of a foreign nation; colonialism is therefore a subcategory of imperialism. Colonialism and imperialism are two related themes of this investigation as they are key themes presenting in science-fiction narratives, however the topics of colonialism and imperialism in science-fiction are frequently metaphorically evoked by anecdotes concerning aliens forcibly taking over or settling on distant planets.

Chapter 3 investigates melodramatic space operas produced during the interwar period; the primary case studies in this chapter consist of Fritz Lang's *Frau im Mond* (Woman in the Moon) (1929), and Holger-Madsen's *Himmelskibet* (A Trip to Mars) (1918), which remain relatively obscure today despite historically coinciding with the development of popular rocketry. Within the films, I discover allusions to the key issues and debates of the interwar era, including Christianity, scientific and technological advancement, gold-mining, eugenics and racial purity, racism, colonialism, and gender inequality. Furthermore, Chapter 3 describes how lunar rocket prototypes were 'tested' and developed in *Frau im Mond* before being developed by scientists and engineers.

Chapter 4 is thematically centred around the black space tourist figure, focusing on director John Coney's *Space is the Place* (1974) and director John Sayles' *The Brother from*

Another Planet (1984). The examples in Chapter 4 diverge from previous case studies (conveying an almost exclusively white, Euro-American masculine perspective) to focus instead on the social movements framing the emergence of the 'Afronaut' figure in independent, experimental reverse space tourism narratives which have been omitted from the historiography of science-fiction film. These examples will be analysed to uncover how the radical restructuring of the symbolic signifiers of cinematic space tourism (rockets, the NASA program, space travellers, and the astronaut figure) reveals sentiments associated with African American racial identity during the 1970s-1980s, including the feeling of being an 'alien' presence in one's surroundings. This chapter also describes the latent social and cultural function of the Afronaut within the expansive, metaphorical landscapes of science-fiction cinema to ascertain how the Afronaut figure gazes at Earth and outer space differently in comparison to his white, space-faring counterparts.

Chapter 5 discusses the attributes of postmodern society in framing director Andrew Stanton's animation, *WALL-E* (2008) and director Christopher Nolan's science-fiction blockbuster, *Interstellar* (2014). These examples are used to describe a correlation between animation, computer-generated imagery (CGI), and the depiction of fictitious, simulated environments within cinematic portrayals of space tourism. The chapter investigates how these two period-specific examples project the global disaster of climate change by using the interior of the spaceship as a metaphorical allusion to contemporary media landscapes, offering a digitized escape from the effects of the environmental crisis on the psyche, the body, and society. Another key issue taken up in

Chapter 5 is the hierarchical depiction of race, gender, and class within the case studies, which offer projections of the phenomenon sociology scholar Andrew Szasz (2007) describes as ‘inverted quarantine,’ whereby wealthy, typically white sectors of the population defer to consumerism, seeking protection against a toxic environment.

Chapter 6 segues from the analysis of the key case studies into a written account concerning how this body of research into film, literature, historical accounts, and theoretical work pertaining to the cultural history of space tourism has informed my practice-based approach, which consists of the accompanying experimental short film, *Space Tourist* (2019). The multivalent process of writing, filming, directing, and editing the film encompasses a secondary approach furthering this investigation of the relationship between cinematic accounts of space tourism and sociopolitical change by creating and filming encounters with people and spaces to fill in the theoretical and experiential gaps left by the limitations of historical research and scholarly analysis. The elements constituting cinematic space tourism in the case studies will be noted and categorized to relay trends I have observed in studying the depiction of space tourism in cinema, including the element of ‘crisis,’ themes of social and technological change, and the transfigurations of sound, landscape, space, and time through digital editing techniques.

Chapter 6 also discusses the filmic figure of the ‘reverse-space tourist’ who travels from outer space to Earth, signifying to the spectator that cinema is itself a mode of space travel and unexpected encounters with the cabbalistic, celestial ‘Other.’

Typically in science-fiction cinema, the implicitly racialized Other is represented through the guise of aliens, monsters, robots, or cyborgs — creatures or interfaces physically and psychologically disassociated from Euro-American history and sentiments, void of Christian values, existing in bold defiance of the historical Euro-American valuation placed on white skin and Aryan features in signifying purity, morality, and intellectual superiority. Discussing narrative tradition in science-fiction, cultural critic Ziauddin Sardar notes that the Other surreptitiously exposes a dark, oppressed shadow lurking beneath the veneer of the Western world:

The contending tradition in Western storytelling has been to use the Other to show up the failings, internal corruption and fall from grace of Western civilization. The noble savage has always been a serviceable character (2002, p. 11).

Sardar further elaborates on the role of the alien Other as a narrative trope:

The alien holds up a mirror to humanity. The West has possession of immensely powerful new weaponry, the atomic bomb, the potential to destroy itself and planet Earth and invoke the animosity of aliens across the length and breadth of outer space. In light of these present dangers, the way forward is adhering not to alien ethics, but the reputable and entirely artsy alternative ideas of the pacific traditions of Western Christendom (p. 8).

While this is the case in many Cold War Era science-fiction films of the 1950s, including director Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Sardar offers a relatively beneficent interpretation of the Other as an enlightening figure. The Other is frequently vilified as

well, portrayed as a merciless threat to humanity which must be annihilated, such as in Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1999) and Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). Chapter 3 will elaborate on how the notion of the alien Other can also be used to reinforce Christian sentiment while also perpetuating the Western notion that Others are violent savages.

1.1.1 Introducing the Space Film

While there is currently no set of universal criteria which constitutes the immensely popular category of science-fiction works referred to as 'space films,' for the purposes of this investigation I begin by examining the etymology of the word 'space,' in order to clarify first what the space film represents. There exists a great deal of ambiguity regarding what, specifically, the term 'delineates. Historicizing the definition of the word language expert, Mark Forsyth, pins down the first instance of the word space in literature, in British poet John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667):

We rely on Milton. For example, he invented space travel, or at least made it linguistically possible. The word space has been around for centuries, but it was Milton who first applied it to the vast voids between the stars. Satan comforts his fallen angels by telling them that though they have been banned from Heaven,

Space may produce new worlds (2012, p. 17)¹

¹ 'Space may produce new worlds' is an excerpt from Milton's *Paradise Lost* quoted by Forsyth (2012)

Today, the word ‘space’ has developed into an umbrella term, connoting the absence of things, dimensional spaces (tesseract), physical spaces (open fields), psychological space (‘giving’ and ‘needing’ space), as well as inner space² and outer space. Space, therefore, remains a concept in flux; it is largely this mystery that is behind cinema’s fascination with infinite and even invisible spaces, which directors frequently attempt to visualize within narratives concerning outer space. The unifying theme surrounding all the case studies stemming from film and literature in this thesis involves the concept of accessing mysterious and formerly inaccessible spaces. I regard the ‘space film’ as an umbrella term which can be further divided into subcategories that will be defined in this dissertation, including ‘space operas,’ ‘outer space films’ and films involving ‘reverse space tourism.’ The overarching theme shared by these subcategories is the notion of ‘touring’ outer (and inner) space and encountering other worlds and ‘alien’ civilizations.

Drawing on the subject of decolonisation,³ I argue that there is a pressing need for scholars to decolonise the term ‘tourism’ and its current implications. In decolonising current notions of tourism, I add that the case studies in this thesis will address numerous forms of tourism, and furthermore, all of the characters discussed in the thesis represent tourists of sorts. The word ‘tour’ originates from the Saxton word ‘torn,’ meaning to depart with the intent to return (OED, 2017); in French the word ‘tour’ can indicate a trip or voyage, while the French expression ‘faire le tour’ means to go around something, or

² Refer to Page 25 for a more comprehensive discussion of ‘inner space’

³ See Chapter 4 for a comprehensive discussion of the term ‘decolonisation’

to consider all possibilities. Bearing these definitions in mind, there still is far more to ‘touring’ than merely coming and going. The notion of tourism is different from ‘journeying,’ ‘voyaging,’ ‘travelling,’ or ‘escaping’ due to its historical implications as a commercial endeavor which further implicates social class, race, gender, science, history, and geography. Sociologist Urry and Larsen (2011) note that traditionally, the status of ‘tourist’ imparts affluence and high social standing:

The category of tourist is a relatively privileged one in rural areas. To be able to claim such a status it is normally necessary to be white and wealthy enough to own a car, and be able to organize and purchase certain kinds of accommodation (hotel bed, caravan, or recognized camp site). It is also necessary, if people are visiting as a group, to use certain kinds of transport, such as coach or train, and not others, such as a convoy of cars or motorbikes, or a hippie convoy of travelers. It is also necessary to engage in certain kinds of behaviour deemed appropriate and not others (p. 112).

While this statement draws out the critical relationship between tourism and social status, I argue that there are many different types of tourists (which will be described in the case studies) that are not incorporated into Urry and Larsen’s (2011) assessment.

Rethinking what tourism means can also frame notions such as space exploration in an interesting, new light. The distancing effect which is created by decolonising current notions of tourism leads me to use the term in a flexible manner throughout the thesis in order to point out that tourism has far more connotations than it does currently – including historical linkages to violence, colonialism, racism, and sexism – associations which imply that tourism is stranger and less anodyne than current definitions would

imply. For instance, I draw on a more flexible understanding of tourism to argue that astronauts, including those aboard ISS today, might be thought of not as space explorers, but instead, as wealthy vacationers from privileged backgrounds making expensive getaways in outer space, soaking in the vantage points offered from the space station.⁴

Films involving mysterious spaces, including outer space in particular, are structured around strange encounters involving various kinds of tourists from outer space or unknown regions – such as in the Extra-Terrestrial heartfelt encounter between Elliott and ET in Steven Spielberg’s *ET the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), as well as in instances of the more fretful encounters between humans and alien entities in Spielberg’s other works – *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Poltergeist* (1982), *War of the Worlds* (2005), and more recently, *Super 8* (2011). *Poltergeist*, which involves an encounter between a young girl and an entity residing within a screen, and *Super 8*, in which footage of an alien is captured on film by a group of children, also function as poignant metaphors, resonating with spectatorial encounters with the landscapes and characters depicted on-screen.

1.1.2 Film Spectatorship and The ‘Tourist Gaze’

⁴ See Chapter 5 for more on the relationship between tourism and the ISS

Film spectatorship shares a number of similarities with the social phenomenon sociologists John Urry and Jonas Larsen classify as the ‘tourist gaze,’ describing a culturally constructed manner of orienting one’s reception of tourist sites, stemming from the overlap between individual perceptions of place and expectations gathered from various media forms:

The viewing of such tourist sights often involves different forms of social patterning, with a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape than normally found in everyday life. People linger over such a gaze, which is then often visually objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models, and so on. These enable the gaze to be reproduced, recaptured, and redistributed over time and across space (1995, p. 132).

The tourist gaze perpetuates itself in the reproduction of socially constructed, symbolic images standing in place of actualities – for instance, in the use of Hula dancers to symbolize native Hawaiians or the Queen’s Guard in place of the British. Mediating social relations between visitors and inhabitants, the tourist gaze is contrived from consumer-oriented narratives generated by travel agencies and companies. Such narratives are often problematic; for instance, tourist images and films often promote the dehumanization of the racialized ‘Other’ as a servile, primitive figure who is incorporated into a multitude of visual attractions offered by tourism companies.

In this way, the director’s framing of the travelogue experience is as revealing as the film itself. Gunning insinuates that travel films inadvertently provide as much (or more) insight into the cinematic process as the locations they attempt to capture, citing a Thomas

Edison film shot in the West Indies, entitled *Native Woman Washing a Negro Baby in Nassau*, B.I. (1903) – a title which conveys a primitive stance towards people of colour.

Through this film, Gunning explains:

In a sort of reverse angle we discover that the process of turning the daily life of native people into a spectacle has itself become a spectacle as the camera reveals a group of native children and adults watching the film (2006, p. 39).

The film-maker's expectations regarding how the 'Other' should (or should not) look and behave is revealing of the film-maker's own upbringing and assumptions about race, and so then, this implementation of the tourist gaze becomes unravelled, exposing the camera, film-maker, and ultimately the viewer as hidden components, critical to the process of making and viewing films.

Mass tourism, as Urry and Larsen point out, was initiated in 1841 by English tourism entrepreneur, Thomas Cook, a key player in the development of the tourist gaze:

Thomas Cook realized that 'mass tourism' had to be socially and materially invented and organized through producer experience. As a result of various system innovations, Cook turned expensive, risky, unpredictable and time-consuming individual travel into highly organized, systematised, and predictable social activity for the masses, based on expert knowledge. Cook's early innovations included systems of ticketing, guiding, conducted tours, block bookings, the railway coupon, and the organized collection and delivery of luggage (2011, p. 52).

Also resulting from this type of mass organisation is a phenomenon that seems to result in a new and different form of the colonial expansion of presence and influence over

foreigners in unfamiliar territory. Relatively affluent Westerners, invested in a particular holiday experience have, in part, paid for the idea of being catered to by local tourist industries, consisting primarily of unskilled, low paid workers. These workers, accommodating Westerners on leisurely holidays, are furthermore expected (and to some extent required) to remain cheerfully 'in character' in an effort to blend seamlessly into the backdrop of exotic attractions. This chain of unspoken social interchanges is explicated by Urry and Larsen:

Thus, the quality of the social interaction between the provider of the service, such as the waiter, flight attendants, tour rep, or hotel receptionist, and the consumers is part of the 'product' purchased by tourists. If aspects of the social interaction are unsatisfactory (the off-hand waiter, the unsmiling flight attendant, or the rude receptionist), then what is purchased is in effect a different service product (1995, p. 49).

This statement implies that through the tourist gaze, waiters, representatives, and attendants are dehumanized, expected to fit the fictitious image of the cheerful and servile foreigner. Like colonialism, tourism is linked with other modes of exploitation including the objectification of foreign, female bodies, as in the case of sex tourism which is most frequently associated with white, Western males seeking sexual encounters in the Far East (although numerous other models exist). The tourist gaze is similar to film spectatorship in the sense that it represents a complex dynamic that is influenced by factors such as the spectator's background, the object of the gaze, and the number of participants involved. While the tourist gaze might be mistaken for a passive phenomenon where the participant

remains in a continuously receptive state, it should be emphasized that, like the film spectator, the tourist plays an active role in deciphering codes of representation. Urry and Larsen explain that the tourist gaze requires tourists to actively piece together information from a range of sources to formulate a bigger picture:

Gazing is not merely seeing, but involves cognitive work of interpreting, evaluating, drawing comparisons and making mental connections between signs and their referents, and capturing signs photographically (2011, p. 17).

Urry and Larsen outline several factors structuring the tourist gaze:

Gazing is a set of practices. Individual performances of gazing at a particular site are framed by cultural styles, circulating images and texts of this and other places, as well as personal experience and memories (2011, p. 17).

Another component of the tourist gaze incorporates the reciprocity of participants observed in the process: 'the tourist gaze is 'mutual' where the eyes of the guests and the hosts intersect, however briefly, each time the tourist gaze is performed' (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 63). In this sense, there is an added, interactive dimension to the tourist gaze which is absent in film spectatorship.

In considering the renewed relevance of the earliest instances of outer space in the cinema to images of contemporary, real-world space exploration and tourism, it is helpful to begin with an understanding of the relationship between the development of cinema and the construction of the tourist gaze. The early 1900s in France represents a time when

novel, illusory experiences such as travelogues and travel ride films were popular and profitable. Tickets were sold for touristic exhibitions of ‘primitive’ peoples in human zoos consisting of mock village-like encampments, such as those at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900, which capture colonial sentiments towards other races, perpetuating the racist notion that foreign bodies are subhuman.

Early images of space travel simultaneously satirize and celebrate modernity’s limitless promise, drawing on a parallel existing between the vacuum-like nature of empty space and representations of an emergent world of illusory, visual experiences – most notably the cinema of attractions. Cinema’s early depictions of space coincide with developments in commercial tourism at the turn of the century, as the middle and lower classes found new means to ‘travel’ vicariously through the cinematic attractions, including travel ride films based around screenings of American, Canadian and European railway voyages offered by the *Hale’s Tours* company. This process is outlined by cinema scholar Lauren Rabinovitz in an essay describing the social transformations associated with cinematic sensory attractions throughout the early 20th-century as they pertain to specific populations of spectators:

Hale’s Tours latent content assumed a newly commercialized tourism – the traveller made over into a spectator by taking a journey specifically to consume the exotic, whether that was the city for the country “rube,” the “primitive” for the westerner, or picturesque nature for the urbanite (2006, p. 51).

1.1.3 Methods of Investigation

In this dissertation, I utilise a combination of research strategies which will be explained in detail, namely, the application of close textual analysis (CTA), discursive transcoding, and a practice-based approach. In *Camera Politica*, media scholars Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, use case studies from the 1960s-1980s to underscore Hollywood's role in reproducing and understanding conservative, American discourse:

We conceive of the relationship between film and social history as a process of discursive transcoding. We do so in order to emphasize the connections between the representations operative in film and the representations which give structure and shape to social life (1988, p. 12).

Ryan and Kellner use the term 'discursive transcoding' to describe the process of distilling a chaotic social world into symbol-laden codes transferring an existing social reality into a cinematic, narrative platform, explaining: 'These codes provided an essentially metaphorical version of U.S. history and society' (1988, p. 18). Ryan and Kellner's analysis of the possible transcoding of real world situations into the cinema draws on Freudian theories of the unconscious, in which dreams reinterpret through symbolic shorthand the bombardment of stimuli and emotions comprising everyday life. Citing psychoanalytic theory's explanation of neurosis, Ryan and Kellner draw a connection between film and the causal chain of schizophrenia to offer indirect evidence

that social reality is incorporated into the unconscious, where ‘boundary-disturbances’ (1988, p. 13), or discrepancies in this process, result in the conflation of a simplified, symbolic world and a more complex social reality. Schizophrenia can be considered a more extreme, ‘real-world’ manifestation of this process, where the junctures between existing and symbolic reality are rendered permeable.

Ryan and Kellner explain that discursive transcoding can theoretically reinforce or disassemble dominant, nationalistic and cultural ideologies:

Control over the production of cultural presentation is therefore crucial to the maintenance of social power, but it is also essential to the progressive movement for social change (1988, p. 13).

Thus, understanding and searching for possible instances of discursive transcoding requires the spectator's active attention in deciphering networks of coded representation, which oftentimes reflect the spectator's existing social reality. In film criticism, what I regard as the mysterious inner-workings of discursive transcoding (insofar as this process seems to operate at a partly subconscious level and is therefore partly buried) becomes the basis of speculative, detective-work for theorists bringing the hidden to light. Counterintuitively, the ‘hidden’ may not really be invisible at all, but to the contrary might be so uncomfortably visible and prevalent that it is collectively repressed and dismissed. Discursive transcoding theoretically has the potential to operate as an effective method of disguising and addressing potentially repressed subject matter, especially the divisive politics of race relations, gender identity, and sexuality. For instance, reflecting

on the subject of discrimination and social alienation from a white-dominated society, the African-American space travellers discussed in Chapter 4 appear to exist at the intersection of ‘boundary-disturbances’ between reality and fictional symbolism, in being represented, literally, as alien beings from other galaxies, looking upon white society as an alien civilization, or speaking of Africa as if it were a mysterious, alien homeland on a far-flung planet.

Ryan and Kellner’s understanding of film as both the product of and mechanism for psychological internalization allows room for conflicts and dualisms in the symbolic transcoding of reality, recognizing that reality is an ambiguous, fluid concept subject to innumerable levels of interpretation dependent on one’s perspective. As a result of this, films that are made during the same time period might appear to support or point to incompatible goals and desires existing within the same social reality. Ryan and Kellner provide an example:

Films have been used to reassert traditional representations of women in order to counteract feminism, but they have also permitted the prevailing representation of capitalism and capitalist government to be questioned (1988, p. 13).

The concept of discursive transcoding can be used to inform discussions of the science-fiction technique of ‘cognitive estrangement,’ described in an essay by science-fiction theorist, Darko Suvin (1979), as a strategy of introducing elements of

novelty within familiar scenarios. Suvin emphasises that the defamiliarized worlds of science-fiction must contain a key change resulting in detectable consequences:

First, the novelty has to be cognitively explained in each tale or group of tales in concrete (even if imaginary) terms, i.e. in terms of the specific time, place, cosmic and social totality within which it is acting, and especially in terms of its effects on the (overtly or covertly) human relationships upon which it impinges (1979, par 9).

In order to decipher the novel elements within the case studies, I also employ the strategy of close textual analysis. Rhetoric theorist Leah Ceccarelli outlines the process of CTA in the examination of sources:

Rhetoricians engaging in close textual analysis tend to focus on a single text at a time. By examining the details of the text, they uncover subtle and otherwise unrecognized rhetorical strategies. They do this to explain how a text was constructed to invite a particular response in a particular audience. The close textual critic, in other words, scrutinizes a work in order to determine how its form was designed to achieve its function (2001, p. 6).

Adding to Ceccarelli's explanation, the application of CTA also involves uncovering other meanings and functions which may exist inadvertently in the text as the result of subversive tactics or as the byproduct of discursive transcoding at a subconscious level. The case studies in this thesis, emerging from film and literature, can be regarded in this sense as primary historical texts. Ceccarelli acknowledges the drawbacks of CTA:

Because close textual analysis restricts its focus to one work at a time, it can produce a microscopic study of that particular work. Of course, one problem with the critical approach of close textual analysis is that a

researcher who spends so much time squinting through a microscope tends to become somewhat myopic. The critic who focuses too much attention on the internal characteristics of a particular work often neglects to fully explore the external influences that the text had on its context, or the external influences its context had over it (2001, p. 6-7).

To compensate for the limitations of CTA, I assume a broader approach, situating discussions of the case studies in each chapter within the historical context in which they were produced. My practice-based approach to film-making is an alternative method intended to fill in the gaps which are neglected in the processes of CTA. Film-making further represents an attempt to understand the notions of discursive transcoding and cognitive estrangement through the creation of a piece which self-reflexively captures and explores the ‘external influences’ shaping my own reality, by reconstructing my environment through set and sound design, directing, filming, and editing.

1.2 Rockets and Motion Picture Machines

Reflecting on the history of outer space films – which I define broadly as science-fiction and fantasy films that are set primarily in outer space – I want to put forward as the framing notion to this thesis that there has *already* been a massive migration of tourists navigating through outer space using an alternative kind of vehicle, aptly named the ‘motion picture machine’ – through which the cosmos is experienced by the mobilization of the mind, rather than the physical body (although images of sedentary

physical bodies seated in the darkened cinema offer an interesting parallel to cinematic depictions of space travellers which will be discussed). The fact that cinema has historically been a site of touristic encounters is one important reason why cinema is an essential and illuminating factor in the study of space tourism within cultural history. While early cinema links modernity to rural and barren landscapes through its preoccupation with railroad imagery and phantom railroad rides, it is noteworthy that contemporary Hollywood demonstrates a continued fascination with phantom journeys to the ‘unknown,’ using the spaceship as a trope to deliver spectators into outer space in much the same way the railroad train was, in its heyday, used to ‘transport’ audiences to the furthest reaches of America. In the cinema, the locomotive train, author Lynne Kirby (1997) argues, altered the public's relationship to space and time by allowing spectators to visualize the long-distance travel at unprecedented speeds. In the Western, the railroad is, moreover, a plot device representing American imperialism. Much in the same way travel ride films offered an escape to the open landscapes of the West, and, according to historian, Dominique Brégent-Heald, provided an ‘antidote to the stifling atmosphere of industrialized and urbanized society’ (2015, p. 9), cinematic voyages to outer space allow contemporary cinemagoers to escape from the even more stifling trappings of a global village increasingly linked by highways, boats, railways, and planes.

It is unsurprising that the cinema has been used with such intensity and regularity to reconstruct outer space on a mass scale; everything from the encroaching blackness, controlled air temperature, quietude, dehydrated and artificially packaged concessions

right down to the stationary seating arrangements provide a conducive accompaniment to the simulated interstellar journey. In fact, the outer space film itself, which often focuses on the interactions between astronauts fixated on flashing screens alludes to the parallels between the interior of the rocket ship and the cinema, and more recently, between consumers fixated on mobile devices. Even the earliest images of outer space allude to the possibilities of cinema; for instance, literary critic Fredric Jameson refers to the rocket designed by Professor Barbenfouillis in George Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) as:

a recording device for those all-too-human experiences of the physical world we know already – the hot and the wet, flying and falling... like the rides in amusement parks it offers the prenarrative satisfactions of extreme corporeal perceptions and sensations (2008, 173).

Jameson's observation suggests that it is not outer space itself that is the most compelling aspect of the space film, but rather, the way the camera 'captures' outer space and then reframes it to formulate a compelling cinematic experience. Discussing portrayals of outer space in the cinema of attractions, Jameson continues:

At the very least, then, we may conclude that such films are experiments in an essentially spatial form, a form dedicated to the exploration, not so much of what is called outer space, as rather of phenomenological space as such and thereby of the camera's capacity to register it and perhaps even to change or alter it (2008, p. 173).

Therefore, both the cinema and the rocket ship share the parallel purpose of exploring the phenomenology, or in other words, the dimensions and nature of space. As film theorist

Tom Gunning argues: ‘One could claim that Méliès’ film explores the new composite space of cinema as imaginatively as astronomers did outer space’ (2010, p. 100). Here, the exploration of composite space in *Le Voyage dans la Lune* refers to the image which is formed through multiple components, including the camera, the editing process, and the final product. This composite space includes also the depiction of the Moon:

Once they land on the moon, we again follow the explorers through even more visually unique sets (the surface of the moon, the lunar caves, the palace of the moon king). Rather than a space constructed through dramatic action, this succession of spectacular displays of set design provides an almost kaleidoscopic series of views (Gunning, 2010, p. 101).

Further attesting to the parallels in the development of cinema and rockets, competitive luxury theatres have tended towards outer space themes, yielding results such as the ‘Colossus’ multiplex built in Ontario in 1998, a ‘5,200-seater shaped like a giant spaceship, containing a 3-D IMAX theatre’ (Prittie, 1998, paragraph 1).

In considering the cinematic spaceship as a theatre-within-a-theatre, one might consider the astronaut crew member Talby in John Carpenter’s *Dark Star* (1974)⁵; sheltered underneath his observation dome and indifferent to the mission Talby remains in a perpetually intoxicated state, passing every waking hour seated, watching the stars unfurling outside with the same intensity normally reserved for watching a film. The enigmatic figure Talby, I argue, represents all spectators, rendering the audience briefly, if only vaguely, aware of their own enthrallment with the screen and visions of space

⁵ See chapters 2 and 5 for further discussion of *Dark Star*

whizzing by. After 20 years in space, Talby comments to his colleague: ‘You see I can watch things up here, Dolittle. I love to watch things...’

In examining unique characters like Talby within films pertaining to outer space, I look to science-fiction novelist J.G. Ballard’s (1963) notion of ‘inner space,’ describing the realm many of these characters seem to be navigating: ‘This zone I think of as “inner space”, the internal landscape of tomorrow that is a transmuted image of the past, and one of the most fruitful areas for the imaginative writer’ (par 6). The configuration of inner-space (which will be further elaborated on) is a trope frequented by a host of science-fiction space films involving the conflation of internal feelings with external reality. For instance, Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1972) invokes cinema in presenting the spacecraft as a mysterious portal where dreams and memories buried within the unconscious materialize spontaneously and are mistaken for reality. These depictions can be linked back to the process of discursive transcoding; films involving the mysterious appearance of objects and figures in outer space are not only evidence of the existence of discursive transcoding as a process, but are doubly significant because they seem to be simultaneously exploring the possibilities of discursive transcoding in the cinema.

1.2.1 Cinematic Vehicles

A brief overview of cinematic tourist attractions debuting in early 20th century fairgrounds illustrates the concurrent development of film technology and industries of mass tourism. Dominique Brégent-Heald explains that the Northern Pacific and the Transcontinental Railroad lines marketed a series of travelogues promoting tourist destinations in the US and Canada:

Motion pictures screened as part of illustrated travel lectures in legitimate theatres or commercial opera houses not only provided the new middle class and the cultural elite the visual experience of travel, but also served as advertisements for the vacation destinations and tourism infrastructure depicted within (2015, p. 11).

Comparing film spectatorship and tourism, both leisurely, profit-motivated industries revolving around the gaze, film theorist Amy Corbin characterizes the spectator as a ‘virtual tourist’: ‘film spectatorship is specifically touristic, and not just a generalized virtual travel experience, because of its entertainment value and its status as an experience you pay for’ (2014, 316). Drawing an analogy between the cinema screen and tour bus window, Corbin points out that the bodily positioning of the spectator in the theatre corresponds with being seated in a moving vehicle:

The tour bus controls movement so that your own body is immobile, you are looking through a window frame and a tour bus operator’s voice operates as a voice-over to frame the images you are seeing (2014, p. 317).

In joining movement and experience, author and film theorist Lauren Rabinovitz (2006) explains that ride films possess the ability to ‘coordinate the spectators’ physical

and cognitive sensations’ (p. 43). The stationary vehicle is one variation of the illusory model of travel known as the ‘travel ride film’ or the ‘phantom ride,’ defined by Tom Gunning in *Animating the Nineteenth Century* as ‘the genre of early cinema that most reveals the dynamics of energy exchanged between image and viewer’ (2014, p. 469). Historian and media theorist Anne Friedberg (1993) discusses the example of ‘Le globe Céleste’ – an early version of the phantom ride, displayed at the 1900 Paris Exposition where ‘a seated visitor could voyage to outer space by watching rolling painted canvas’ (p. 84). Media scholar William Uricchio (2011) details a number of travel ride films that debuted here, including the Cinerama, which offered a phantom balloon ride over Paris, and the Trans-Siberian Railway Panorama⁶, simulating a train ride from Moscow to Beijing. The following year, architect Frederick Thompson devised for the Buffalo Exposition an exhibit entitled ‘Journey to the Moon’ which resembled a theatre performance, exhibiting an ambitious cast of over 250 people, including sixty little people playing ‘Selenites’ (Miller, 2012, paragraph 7). The Paris exhibition inspired Georges Hale’s immensely prolific ‘Hale’s Tours’ which developed alongside the Nickelodeon, providing railway ‘rides’ in stationary vehicles through the use of projection screens, motion, fans, bells, and whistles. In 1986, director and inventor Douglas Trumbull’s motion-simulator, ‘Tour of the Universe,’ debuted in Toronto, enabling would-be space tourists to embark on an interplanetary voyage to Jupiter by shuttle.

⁶ Consisting of a painted, moving panorama used to simulate a train voyage

IMAX provides a modern-day counterpart to Hale's Tours, meanwhile, Disney theme park attractions are at the cutting edge of the contemporary travel ride. The Disney motion picture ride 'Star Tours' – an interactive visit to the *Star Wars* galaxy – as well as Disney's Space Mountain (a roller-coaster ascent into 'outer space') are two examples of literalized travel rides. Furthermore, Disneyworld's Epcot 'Mission Space' simulates the first mission to Mars using a spinning spacecraft, allowing even the least physically inclined of armchair travellers to experience the Universe at large. While films about outer space and phantom rides constitute imagined experiences, science-fiction coalesces fantasy and reality in a way that British science-fiction author J.G. Ballard suggests operates with some degree experiential veracity: 'cinema becomes then a way to experience the world and its landscapes, in the realm between inner and outer space' (1966, p. 84). This in-between realm is a site where there exists a degree of overlap between what is perceived as real and what is conveyed on-screen. Cinema, bringing with it progressively more immersive experiences, is at times like a controlled experiment tested on audiences. Media theorist Yuri Tsivian (1994) speculates on the existence of a 'train effect' based on accounts of anxious reactions to images of approaching trains. According to Brégent-Heald, Tsivian's 'train effect' suggests 'early cinema-goers had not yet developed the cognitive abilities to fully process projected moving images on a grand scale and thus initially received such images with shock' (2015, p. 17). In what might be considered a modern-day parallel to this phenomenon, some *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) audience members complained of a condition that has since been diagnosed as

‘post avatar depression,’ unable to acclimatize to Earth after exiting the theatre (Blake, 2010).⁷

1.2.2 Sci-Fi Westerns

Science-fiction narratives such as *Avatar* draw on the American West and its reputation as a lawless, morally divided frontier rife with explorers, villains, pioneers, and lone heroes. According to history scholar, Lindsey Collins:

Promoting the spectacular wilderness imagery of the West served the twofold purpose of luring folks to ride the trains as tourists and persuading them to settle in the West as Pioneers (2010, p. 94).

Science-fiction accounts of the colonisation of outer space relay the settlement of the West; like images of speeding rocketships in outer space films, approaching trains in the Western signify ‘masculine Anglo authority and lawlessness, and what counts as the U.S. national and natural body’ (Collins, 2010, p. 90). Along these lines, in an essay entitled ‘The Imagination of Disaster,’ author and filmmaker Susan Sontag cites a number of structural similarities in sci-fi film and the American Western:

The typical science-fiction film has a form as predictable as a Western, and is made up of elements which, to a practiced eye, are as classic as the saloon brawl, the blonde school teacher from the East, and the gun duel on the deserted main street (1961, p. 209).

⁷ For more discussion on *Avatar* and other contemporary Hollywood space films, see chapter 5

So closely related are the Western and the space film that the two genres have been combined; Clint Eastwood's *Space Cowboys* (2000), for example, features a team of aging astronaut cowboys making their second journey into space. Director Michael Polish's *The Astronaut Farmer* (2006) is a fictional film about an 'astronaut' who builds a rocket in his own backyard and launches himself into orbit, to the amazement of his conservative Texas community. In transfiguring the neutral image of the astronaut into that of the Western's lone cowboy, such examples are emblematic of masculine American fantasies of Manifest destiny.

Outer space can be thought of as the next frontier. In his essay 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History,' published in 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner argues that the advance of European colonies into the West cultivated a composite, new American culture: 'At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American' (p. 3). With each successive Westward advance into frontierland, settlers were faced with new obstacles that led to the formation of new factions and identities, which would eventually separate into distinct States:

We have the complex European life sharply precipitated by the wilderness into the simplicity of primitive conditions. The first frontier had to meet the Indian question, its question of the disposition of the public domain, of the means of intercourse with the older settlements, of the extension of political organization, of religious and educational activity (p. 4).

Considering the impact of the frontier on culture, it follows that an outward expansion into space could potentially lead to the development of entirely new civilizations. This is the subject of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) which describes the changes to a settlement of Mars over a number of decades, whereby the original Martians are displaced by Earthlings who have come to escape slavery, retire or set up commercial enterprises. Describing the gradual extermination of the Martian population, Bradbury recollects and reframes the violence and moral decrepitude associated with the genocide of Native Americans populations during the expansion of the frontier. Not only do the outer space film, sci-fi literary narratives about space, and the Western often assume similar formulaic approaches, many of these are preoccupied with the colonisation of space, as well as themes of alienation, encounters with the 'Other,' morality, and dominion over nature and living beings.

1.2.3 Constructing an 'Inner-Space' Suit

In Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) television series episode *The Long Morrow* (1964) (a title echoing JFK's 1962 'moon speech') a bitter space commander laments that Milky Way is little more than a tourist trap: 'Our neighbours offer us only one asset, they are accessible, they are in reach...they are the Mt. Everest of space.' This pessimistic vision of outer space points to the remoteness and inaccessibility

which makes space something to be endured rather than enjoyed. In the same way, competing railroad lines issued posters promoting barren new tourist destinations, privately funded agencies such as SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic, realizing the economic potential of space tourism, have begun issuing tickets for tours of space. In fact, recent history points to a renewed wave of interest in space; NASA has envisioned a collection of artfully designed posters entitled ‘Visions of the Future’ proposing vacation packages to destinations such as Earth – ‘Your Oasis in Space: Where the Air is Free and Breathing is Easy,’ the ‘Historic Sites of Mars’ an even ‘Ski Pluto – The Small Planet That’s Big Fun’). The development of commercial space tourism today requires that space must be sold to the public at the risk of ignoring a number of impediments to human survival in space. For instance, NASA’s proposed visit to Mars requires that both human physiology and psychology be precisely regulated and conditioned. In the *Time Magazine* docu-series *Year in Space*, documenting astronaut Scott Kelly’s prolonged stay aboard the ISS, author Jeffery Klugar explains:

Getting to Mars requires multiple systems in NASA to be working at once. The system that’s the most fragile and destructible of all however is the human body. It’s the one we didn’t invent, it’s the one we’re stuck with. If we plan to get to Mars, we have to figure out how to get that biological machine to survive in a place it was not built to survive (*Year in Space*, 2015).

Reaching Mars requires both a more advanced rocket and spacesuit as well as a novel reversal of perspective; among the plethora of issues NASA faces in sending

humans to Mars is the unnerving inability to distinguish Earth from a sea of stars, which could be a source of trauma for homesick astronauts.

Cinema responds to questions about the psychological nature of encounters with outer space through the figure of the maladjusted astronaut, better known as the ‘space case.’ Buzz Aldrin’s purported space-induced psychosis is hinted at in Jud Taylor’s made-for-TV movie *Return to Earth* (1976). In Rand Ravich’s *The Astronaut’s Wife* (1999), the astronaut, Spencer, returns from space after surviving a mysterious explosion, exhibiting a new signature, personality, and blood composition. In Robert Zemeckis’ *Contact* (1997) the clinical protagonist, Dr. Ellie Arroway emerges from a brief encounter with space as a newfound believer in life on other planets. Ballard (1966), illustrating what is at stake in the ascent into inner and outer space, points to an instance of Salvador Dalí arriving at an art exhibition wearing a diving suit:

The woman sent along to supervise asked how deep Dalí proposed to descend and with a flourish the maestro exclaimed: ‘To the Unconscious’ to which the workman replied sagely: I’m afraid we don’t go down that deep.’ Five minutes later, sure enough, Dalí nearly suffocated inside the helmet. It is this inner space-suit which is needed, and it is up to science-fiction to build it (p. 87).

Suggesting that a protective mechanism is as critical to the descent into inner space as the conventional spacesuit is in providing protection from the inhospitable environments of outer space, Ballard’s evocative idea of an ‘inner space-suit’ calls for science-fiction writers to consider the psychological effects of distortions in the

perception of space and time. To better ascertain the importance of an ‘inner space-suit,’ one might consider the case of select cinemagoers lacking this mode of protection. Film theorist Lauren Rabinovitz refers to the anecdote of one nameless ‘demented fellow’ who returned time and time again to Hale’s Tours, watching the same film in eager anticipation of eventually witnessing a train crash. This sort of behaviour may have less to do with a case of dementia than with the widely anticipated thrills of spectatorship, activating the desire for a particular outcome through narrative immersion, character identification, and the temporary suspension of belief.

If early cinematic train voyages were, for select audience members, vivid enough to be mistaken for real, then I suggest that the conflation of inner and outer space also results within space travel narratives, especially those in 3D and 4D IMAX. It is worth noting that *Avatar* audiences broke box office records as many spectators returned to the cinema for repeat viewings, to ‘key in on visual nuances’ and immerse themselves in a ‘fully-realised world, with its own people, language and culture’ (Wall Street Journal, 2010). The visual nuances offered by the film, including 3D (and in some instances IMAX), CGI, and real-time motion capture technology (used to translate facial movements and bodily performances to the avatars) all contribute to these feelings of narrative immersion.

Without the protection of an inner-space suit, cinemagoers including Rabinovitz’s nameless ‘demented fellow’ are left vulnerable to an experiential reversal of motion

pictures and perceived reality. Discussing the nature of travel in outer space films, literary scholar Thomas Ballhausen comes to the conclusion that:

With films like *Sunshine* or *The Fountain* (2006) the journey to the stars, to destinations relatively close to Earth or distant planets likewise, has been turning more and more into an expedition into the depths of the travelling individuals, a movement towards the 'I' (2008, p. 41).

The cinematic spaceship, through its illusory obliteration of time and space, becomes an experimental site for testing the effects of expeditions to deep space while simultaneously navigating the depths of the unconscious. If, as Tsivian suggests, early images of vehicles were initially perceived with shock but were, over time, recognized and incorporated into the standard cinema-going experience, then in helping to build an 'inner-space suit' the perspectives that science-fiction cinema imparts upon spectators through the apparent manipulation of time and space demonstrate the potential for collectively preparing future space travellers and tourists for encounters with outer space. The following chapter will address the earliest moving depictions of outer space as they relate to the social and technological consequences of modernity, including the development of railroads, mass tourism, and new modes of visibility.

Chapter 2

The Grass is Always Greener in Outer Space or: Space Tourism in the Time of Méliès

2.1.1 Space and the Cinematic Attraction

In assessing the ways cinematic narratives portraying outer space exploration have transcoded historical ‘moments’ of transformation and crisis on-screen, I begin by discussing case studies of the earliest motion pictures invoking outer space, to assess how these works comment on and relay the state of race and gender relations in early 19th century Europe, as well as reflect on and respond to a wealth of new visual attractions and technological innovations offered by modernity, including the railroad and the cinema. This chapter addresses those case studies originating from (and around) the time period film scholar Tom Gunning categorizes as ‘the cinema of attractions,’ referencing the ephemeral period spanning from the first cinematic projections until roughly 1906, when the recorded image was a novel and enthralling experience in itself. During this period, the

intrigue generated by the moving image and its ability to startle, shock, and trick spectators was the main attraction, while narrative construction was an understated by-product. Discussing the limitations of narrative in early demonstrations of film technology, Gunning stipulates that the dynamism which is integral to the cinema of attractions embodies the sudden shifts in attention and the excess of visual information at the heart of modernity's competing avenues of entertainment:

Attractions trace out the visual topology of modernity: a visual environment which is fragmented and atomized; a gaze which, rather than resting on a landscape in contemplation, seems to be pushed and pulled in conflicting orientations, hurried and intensified, and therefore less coherent or anchored (1994, p. 194).

As if to reflect modernity's new range of technological abilities – such as transferring the image from the three-dimensional environment to the two-dimensional planes of celluloid film, photographs, and projector screens, it seems that outer space depictions stemming from the cinema of attractions are, to a large degree, experiments in modernity's smorgasbord of conflicting orientations. The process of recreating the complex illusion of outer space on-screen, which requires the idea of a vast, 3-D space to be repackaged into sustained 2-D illusion proves a favourable method of testing the capacities of the cinematic apparatus, set design, and the editing process to build and uphold illusions of scale, space, and time. It comes as no great surprise that the earliest projected impressions of outer space stemming from the cinema of attractions draw from the tradition of magical illusions, such as the magic tricks performed by French film-maker and magician, George

Méliès, before he transitioned into cinema. In this progression of developments, visual trickery became a competitive avenue of output as film-makers devised optical illusions using suspended miniatures, models of vehicles, and rolling, painted backdrops. The portrayal of space in early cinema also tests the use of photographic effects and editing techniques including double-exposures, dissolves, and jump cuts, inventing new modalities of experiential space and time.

Before going further, it is necessary to introduce the idea of the ‘space tourism’ film, as a subcategory of the ‘outer space film.’ While no definition exists for the ‘space tourism’ film, I have come to define the category as an inclusive one which portrays people and aliens travelling through outer space for various reasons, including a sense of urgency, curiosity, and a desire to relocate. While this chapter concerns itself to some degree with what is easily the most well-known early ‘space tourism film,’ *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, it places more emphasis on a number of other early examples of space tourism that are overshadowed by *Le Voyage dans la Lune* – which has become a staple in any discussion of the cinema of attractions. This intensive focus on the film in introductory film courses and textbook discussions concerning early cinema has inadvertently resulted in a limited understanding of other early works pertaining to space tourism.

Examining the first known films depicting space tourism, the main contribution of this chapter is a considerably more expansive understanding of the earliest space films than that currently existing in the literature, recalling and analysing those works which are

conspicuously omitted from the overwhelming majority of scholarly criticism concerning the earliest examples of outer space on-screen, including: *La lune à un mètre* (The Moon at One Meter) (Méliès, 1898), *Les Quat'cents Farces du diable* (The Merry Frolics of Satan) (George Méliès, 1906), *Voyage autour d'une étoile* (Voyage around a Star) (Gaston Velle, 1906), *The Motorist* (Walter R. Booth, 1906), *Les Lunatiques* (Whimsical People) (Segundo de Chomón, 1908), *A Trip to Mars* (Thomas Edison, 1910), *The Automatic Motorist* (Walter R. Booth, 1911), and lastly, *À la conquête du pôle* (Conquest of the Pole) (George Méliès, 1912) (which is in the form of a fictional travelogue but nonetheless contains an extensive sequence taking place in outer space). In addition to these works, I draw particular attention to one vital yet much-neglected science-fiction depiction within Méliès' body of work – *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* (1904). *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is of particular interest, as it fits into a more specific category which I regard as the 'commercial space tourism' film, depicting passengers purchasing tickets for a guided tour of space. This film's obscurity compared to *Le Voyage dans La Lune*, and the lack of scholarly analysis pertaining to *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is evidence of a striking omission from a thorough understanding of what the cinema of attractions offered early 20th century spectators, considering that it is, significantly, not only the longest and the most expensive filmic attraction made up until that point 'costing 37,500 Francs, almost four times that of its predecessor' (Jess-Cooke, 2012, p. 27) but also the earliest known depiction of *commercial* space tourism on-screen. The film's unique conceptualization of space travel is far more developed than other works conceived during

the same time period, making it relevant to a phenomenon that is more prescient in the present day than the Moon landing, envisioning an imaginative prototype for the budding industries of commercial space tourism currently underway.

In illuminating the history and content of some of the earliest, rarest, and most neglected depictions of space travel on-screen, I apply Urry and Larsen discussions of the ‘tourist gaze’ and draw from the contributions of film scholars Elizabeth Ezra and Dean Conrad regarding gender, class, and representation in early cinema. Offering synopses of the aforementioned films, I extend the previous chapter’s discussion of the discursive transcoding of sociopolitical content on-screen to unravel, through CTA, the commentary offered by these early outer space films, thereby revealing the public’s rapidly changing perceptions of and attitude towards railroads, gender and race relations, colonialism, tourism, and institutions at the turn of the 20th-century.

It seems prescient that the company name and logo Méliès decided on, Star Films, relates to outer space; the correlation between the company’s name and Méliès’ preoccupation with representing celestial, cinematic bodies seems to suggest that it is actually the vantage points offered by outer space as well as perceived objects in space – such as the moon or the stars – that space travellers, real and imagined, are actually attempting to possess, in addition to the prestige conveyed by the purchase and consumption of a novel, commercial experience such as early cinema. In depicting attempts to possess outer space through travel, early European space films subversively conjure the subject of European expansion, particularly into Africa and America, areas

which were wrongly presumed to be uninhabited. Discussing the consumption of early modes of travel imagery, Gunning suggests that travel is so intimately tied with a sense of ownership over a particular location that a traveller's first instinct upon arrival is to capture or 'purchase' a place through the postcards or photos, which can be mailed home as a relic of the journey:

Rather than eratzes, images become our way of possessing the world, or the universe. Does anyone doubt that on the first tourist voyage to the moon, the first stop for tourists will be at a postcard rack to buy images produced by NASA? (2006, p. 33).

This notion of outer space as part of a commercial enterprise perpetuated through souvenir postcards can be better understood in conjunction with critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production' (1935) which interrogates the impact of mechanical reproduction on the validity of the image's 'aura' – or in other words, its degree of uniqueness, and its closeness to the original work. Benjamin notes that while aspects of an artwork's aura are inevitably lost in the anaesthetising process of printing and copying, the feeling conveyed by the duplicated work nonetheless retains a degree of perceived veracity that cannot be dismissed, leading Benjamin to comment on the process:

Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway, whether in the form of a photograph or in that of a gramophone record. The cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of an art lover; the choral work is performed in an auditorium or in the open air is enjoyed in a private room (1935, p. 21-22).

Gunning's vision of lunar gift shops suggests that these hypothetical space tourists of the future, flocking to the postcard rack, are perhaps on some unconscious level attempting to purchase small slices of mechanically reproduced space, in an effort to own a concrete representation of space's enigmatic 'aura.' I would add that by mailing lunar postcards back home, even those who retain a degree of separation from the direct experience of outer space would still be able to reap the dividends of the experience. If Benjamin's notion that the mechanically reproduced medium meets the viewer halfway in terms of producing a veritable perceptual experience, then it follows that one can experience outer space through photographic imagery and through more complex, immersive visual experiences including cinema.

The downside to mechanical reproduction, Benjamin points out, is that the 'aura' of the original content, locked in a specific time and place, is lost among countless other reproductions. This is perhaps the reason the public, so enthralled with the first moon landing, quickly tired of watching the Apollo missions on television and later forgot about the promise of venturing into deep space; despite countless billions invested in space exploration, it seems space does not necessarily need to be travelled through so that it can be 'consumed' or otherwise enjoyed; perhaps cinema offers a touristic experience of outer space in its most enjoyable and least threatening form. It is this ironic nature of unrelenting and uncritical technological development that early space films, full of characters grounded in pleasurable anticipation and oblivious to reality, seem to

humorously and self-reflexively support, commenting on various modes of technology at the turn of the 20th-century, while forecasting how such technology might continue developing.

2.2 Synopsis of *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible*

It is likely the lack of detailed analysis concerning the short film *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is partly an unfortunate consequence of its timing; as previously mentioned the work is overshadowed by *Le Voyage dans la lune*, which, Gunning argues, set a new standard for complex film attractions:

A Trip to the Moon shares the fairy pantomime dual focus, balancing complex visual effects with a simple storyline. Today, spectacle (such as special effects) and storyline continue to vie for audience attention, especially in contemporary blockbusters, so it could be said that *A Trip to the Moon* introduced a conflict that still marks popular movies (in a sense it was cinema's first blockbuster: costing more, lasting longer, and drawing larger audiences than any previous single film) (2005, p. 70-71).

Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible seems to be partly an attempt to recapture the success of *Le Voyage dans La Lune*, but also develops a new plotline, involving a train to the Sun. Despite being immensely popular upon reception, the film is wearily dismissed today by film scholar, William Parrill in a guidebook to early European cinema, who concludes his brief synopsis of the plot by noting that the film is 'a frank imitation of *A Trip to the Moon*

that is entertaining, but adds nothing artistically to the earlier film' (2006, p. 479). Another likely reason any detailed analysis of *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is lacking in the literature is because the film's clarity faded over the decades, making it difficult to view until the complete, colourized version was digitally restored and made available in 2011 by the Lobster Films company in Paris. The restored version includes an accompanying spoken narration of the film, written by Méliès, which is lost on the vast majority of existing versions found on VHS, in archives, and online. This recovered accompaniment, which will be quoted at length in the film's synopsis, is a crucial element of the film's biting satire.

A third reason any detailed consideration of *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* in film criticism and literature regarding film history remains sparse is likely the result of the fact that Méliès' films have a reputation of being stylistically complex but devoid of substance. Views such as these have been shaped by authors such as Lynne Kirby in her discussion of railway films, where she dismisses narrative potential in what she characterizes as 'out-of-control thrill trains of early films like *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible*' (1997, p. 108), suggesting the film instead characterizes 'the exhibitionist tendency of early film' (1997, p. 382). While I agree with Kirby's notion that the film is primarily a spectacular attraction, there is more to the film than mere spectacle; Kirby's and Parril's curt dismissals of the film call for a closer analysis.

Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible is loosely based on novelist and playwright Jules Verne's play 'Journey Through the Impossible' which debuted as a theatrical production in

Paris in 1882. Author Jean-Michel Margot, who specializes in the works of Jules Verne, explains that ‘Journey Through the Impossible’ is ‘the most oriented towards science-fiction’ of Verne’s works (2003, p. 11). Verne’s play describes a voyage to ‘the interior of the earth, under the oceans, and into outer space’ (Margot, 2003, p. 11). In Méliès’ film, the ‘central fire’ is represented by the Sun, rather than Earth’s core, and Méliès contributes a uniquely commercial element to this fantastic premise, tailoring Verne’s plot to suit the sociopolitical atmosphere of the late 19th and early 20th century, which oversaw the beginnings of mass tourism.

The film opens inside a lecture hall, where members of the ‘Institute for Incoherent Geography’ convene, comprised of male Assembly members and their wives. All are descendants of apparently wealthy, erudite European backgrounds as suggested by their extravagant early 20th-century Parisian attire; male members wear suits fitted with ruffled collars and women are adorned with ornate hats, flowing dresses, and long skirts (see Figure 1). Méliès plays the role of the lead engineer satirically named ‘Dr. Crazyloft,’ unveiling a set of plans charting a course to the Sun. The members of the Institute applaud and cheer in support of Crazyloft’s plans, and in the next shot, the proposed vehicle is shown being assembled by a cast of male workers in a machine shop.



Figure 1: Institute of Incoherent Geography - members and wives

Situated as the lead actor playing the part of the tour guide, Méliès links the experiences of cinema and tourism in a manner that is typical of his voyage films. As cinema scholar Matthew Solomon (2011) points out, in *Le Voyage Dans la Lune*, Méliès also ‘plays a role analogous to that of a guide – rather than a magician – leading the group on a perambulatory path from one site to the next’ (p. 144).⁸ The members of the Institute admire the machine’s assemblage as Crazyloft offers a tour of the factory. The Institute’s members and wives are overwhelmed with excitement and a heavysset woman comically faints from exertion. Next, the Institute convenes at a train station with suitcases and trunks. Members register for the tour at a booth referred to in Méliès’ accompanying

⁸ The theme of tourism can also be located in Méliès’ silent fantasy film, *À la Conquête du Pôle* (1912), in which Méliès plays the part of Professor Maboul, leading the excursion to the North Pole by ‘Aerobus.’

written commentary as the ‘Paris to Lausanne Line’ dropping luggage with porters. Passengers shove to be the first in line for the journey, while the unruly, heavysset woman slugs a porter who accidentally topples her baggage. The last couple to arrive at the gate is bumped from the train, appearing dejected as the steam train departs.

From start to finish, the journey is fraught with disaster; first, the train smashes through the wall of the dining room of aristocrats attended to by waiters and servants. Next, as it traverses the snow-capped mountains, the train meets its second major obstacle, cartwheeling from a cliff and landing in a twisted metal heap in the snow. Wounded passengers are fortunately tended to by ‘a party of mountain climbers and guides’⁹ remaining in the Swiss hospital for ‘a stay of five weeks’... ‘cured but not demoralized, they ask only to continue their journey.’ Eager to get going again, ‘Crazyloft sends his train to the summit where it leaps off and, sustained by the dirigible balloons, lifts off into space’ at which point the Sun’s decidedly human face appears. Yawning, the Sun swallows the entire train, which crashes on its boiling surface. Remarkably, ‘in spite of the unheard of adventure, nobody has been hurt.’ ‘Crazyloft, enthusiastic over the novelty of the landscape leads the savants in the discovery of this unknown country.’ When ‘the warmth of the rising sun becomes intolerably hot... the unfortunates see themselves doomed to certain death in a temperature of 3000 degrees.’ Fortunately ‘Crazyloft remembers the icebox’ helping to assemble the passengers inside. Crazyloft opens the door to a perturbing sight: ‘The savants, suddenly frozen, are imprisoned inside a block of ice.’

⁹Quotations from this section are taken from the film’s accompanying narrative

Setting a bundle of straw ablaze, Crazyloft advises the tourists to ‘leave at the earliest moment this inhospitable place’ shoving passengers into a submarine, which tumbles into space as a parachute unfolds, and the passengers wind up in a subterranean landscape. A fire breaks out within the submarine which is promptly put out with ‘superhuman efforts’ of the passengers who form a bucket brigade. The excursion finally concludes when the submarine crash-lands in a French seaport to the surprise of nearby sailors ‘busy with their occupations.’ ‘A piece of the boats falls among them... the sailors rush to seek out the singular thing that has fallen from heaven.’ Having fallen to Earth ‘without experiencing any severe wounds’ the members of the Institute emerge from the crashed capsule and partake in an impromptu parade. Crazyloft, brandishing a submarine propeller, is hoisted atop the shoulders of four men, waving proudly to the crowd as the voyage is declared a ‘resounding success’ by the Institute.

2.2.1 Special Effects in *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible*

In *The Information Bomb*, cultural theorist Paul Virilio describes how the recorded image, which can be played back at varying speeds, offers new insight into movement and time, uncovering ‘hidden’ aspects of natural phenomena such as objects smashing and petals unfurling:

When it was claimed at the beginning of the twentieth century that cinema represented a new age for humanity, people did not realize how true this was. In cinema, not only does nothing stop but, most importantly, nothing

necessarily has any direction or sense, since on the screens physical laws are reversed. The end can become the beginning, the past can be transformed into the future, the right can be the left, the bottom the top, etc (2000, p. 84-85).

Among the surviving depictions of the natural phenomena recorded in the early 20th century film is shot of a total solar eclipse taken by the British magician and film-maker, John Nevil Maskelyne, in 1919, which was recently located and restored by the British Film Institute (The Guardian, 2019). The transformation of outer space is a key trope in early cinema which reflects this public fascination with eclipses, shooting stars and other celestial happenings.

While *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* doesn't necessarily introduce novel visual illusions, it combines a variety of special effects common to the cinema of attractions, creating a stylistically complex journey through imagined landscapes and outer space. Within the set of *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is a detailed recreation of the railway journey featuring a ticket booth, a queue of passengers, a departure schedule, as well as designated waiting and departure areas (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Ticket booth and baggage area

The impression of a vast factory space is created by cutting from one location to another and the model vehicle lifted with ‘invisible’ strings (billowing smoke) remains in front of a rolling backdrop of painted clouds, creating the illusion of movement. Rain (water) and snow (scattered cotton) fall as the placement of the various model comets, planets, and stars, suspended from wires, creates the impression of space travel. Méliès also creates the illusion of the train spanning for long distances, using painted landscapes rolled across the backdrop. The film cuts to a cross-section of the train, revealing the passengers as they disembark in the Alps. In the shot where they appear to be lowered into the murky subterranean abyss is a double exposure of a parachute falling into an on-location image of the ocean, followed by a shot of a fish tank, with live fish swimming in front of a

painted oceanic backdrop. The landscape of the sun is depicted with jagged, painted rocks, accompanied by smoke, creating a fiery landscape.

2.2.2 Railways, Chance Meetings, and Anxious Encounters

In morphing a standard early railway journey into a succession of shocking vehicular transformations, *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* belongs to a tradition of work reflecting a fear and fascination with railroads that was evident in England near the start of the Victorian Era. While I classify the film as a ‘space tourism film,’ *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* also falls into a broader category of ‘voyage’ films, to cite a term used by Ezra describing films ‘which conveyed a sense of departure and return (or at least a journey’s end)’ (p. 117). Ezra continues:

In Méliès’ voyage films, the old world is shown in confrontation with the new; the inevitable collisions depicted in these films – the smashing of cars into buildings – the crash landing of airbuses and rockets ships – suggest, in this context, the collision of different cultural traditions and collective identities (Ezra, 2000, p. 119).

The railway’s impact on public consciousness can be located across a range of media, as in the case of English Romanticist painter J. M. W. Turner’s *Rain, Steam, and Speed - The Great Western Railway* (1844), portraying a steam train emerging from smoke and clouds,

speeding along a bleak landscape, reflecting the awe and anxiety marking industrialization and the development of railways (see Figure 3). As is implied by Turner's painting, this fear stemmed from the systematic uprooting of pristine countryside, linked to form an imposing mechanical network of transport overtaking the traditional horse-and-buggy.



Figure 3: *Rain, Steam, and Speed - The Great Western Railway* (1844)

There were even more immediate and visceral reasons for travellers and industrial workers to fear trains; technophobic reactions to the railroad also resulted from derailments and crashes frequent enough to be a bona fide concern for early passengers. Perhaps in reaction to this, crashes became a cathartic source of entertainment at live spectatorial events. Author and film scholar Lynne Kirby explains that before railway crashes were popular in the cinema of attractions, as evident in crash-films such as Edison's *A Railroad*

Smash-up (1904) (where two colliding trains are engulfed in smoke), controlled (to some degree) railroad crashes were staged for paying spectators:

The immediate inspiration for this footage was not the train robberies so widely reported in the 1890s and represented in stage plays, films, and popular fiction (dime novels); rather, such footage was the product of numerous train wrecks staged at the county fairs throughout the United States from 1896 through the 1920s. The first such head-on occurred in 1896, at Crush City, Texas, the brainchild of W. G. Crush, general passenger agent for the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad. Some 30,000 people paid to see the crash, which caused the deaths of two spectators, including a young girl whose skull was damaged by a flying piece of train (1997, p. 60).

Around the same time frame, the train's formidable nature was famously captured on-screen in the Lumière short, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) (Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat Station), which is apocryphally linked to anecdotes of frightened audiences fleeing from the hurtling vehicle in fear of it bursting through the projector screen; while there is no credible evidence to verify that this occurred, the anxiety surrounding the train is nonetheless a palpable theme within early cinema, manifesting in numerous popular narratives, including narratives involving train robberies, such as *The Hold-up of the Rocky Mountain Express* (1906). Railway-induced anxieties are also tied to racist portrayals of social transgressions, as in the case of Edwin S. Porter's *What Happened in the Tunnel* (1903) where, in a darkened carriage, an upper-class white man is angered and disgusted after he unwittingly kisses a black maid in a taboo act of miscegenation considered shocking and forbidden during this time period. This anxiety

concerning the taboo mixture of races and classes in proximity offered voyeuristic bemusement for spectators witnessing unprecedented social convergences on-screen. Aside from the threat of accidents and unprecedented social encounters, railroad passengers also endured the disorienting annihilation of space and time:

The speed of train travel created a temporal and spatial shrinkage and a perceptual disorientation that tore the traveller out of the traditional space-time continuum and thrust him/ her into a new world of speed, velocity, and diminished intervals between geographical points (Kirby, 1997, p. 44-45).

Railroad-induced anxiety and disorientation were the basis of early lawsuits against insurance companies for conditions such as ‘railway brain’ – a nebulous term for the hysteria and anxiety caused by railway accidents, as well as the related ailment, ‘railway spine,’ defined as:

a condition analysed as a deterioration of nervous tissue, a result of physical damage to the spinal cord – damage typically received in a railway accident (Kirby, 1997, p. 58).

The railroad’s initially ambivalent and technophobic public reception, Kirby (1997) argues, parallels cinema’s struggle for legitimacy, demonstrating that new technological innovations are often dismissed or met with anxiety initially. Ultimately the railroad and the cinema both found their footing alongside the more established field of photography, as explained by Kirby:

As noted, a similar phenomenon underlies the relation of photography to the railroad and the cinema: a spectacle-oriented “touristic consciousness” that pre-existed all three technologies but that came to be defined and refined in relation to each (1997, p. 42-43).

Kirby’s notion of a ‘touristic consciousness’ generated by technology parallels Urry and Larsen’s conceptualization of the tourist gaze; both of these notions implicate a perceptual awareness which exists in relation to mass tourism. While the tourist gaze is influenced by a wide variety of changeable factors that cannot be separated, Kirby instead suggests that touristic consciousness is developed in relation to specific modes of technology being used by tourists. However, the separation between the railroad and the technologies of visuality is not always as distinct as Kirby suggests; oftentimes these technologies were (and continue to be) used in tandem. Early cinema is full of touristic railroad escapades; like many others of his era, including Thomas Edison, the Pathè Brothers, and the Lumière brothers, Méliès experimented with phantom rides shot by cameras mounted at the top of trains in works such as *Panorama Pris d'un Train En Marche* (Panorama from the Top of a Moving Train) in 1898.

Méliès later on turned the documented train voyage into cinematic fantasy while invoking the subject of railway-induced anxieties; for instance, reflecting on the fear of missing the train in the short *How He Missed His Train* (1900), where a man rises to catch an early train and attempts to get dressed, only to have his clothing articles undergo incessant, spontaneous transformations, causing the defeated would-be traveller to retire to bed. Méliès also playfully captures railroad-induced anxieties by drawing attention to the

interior spaces of the train, as in the case of *A Tricky Painter's Fate* (1908) where a painter places a series of startling caricatures in the windows of a passenger car to deceive the conductor and fellow passengers into thinking the train is full, in order to reserve the whole carriage for himself; the plan backfires when chaos breaks out, and an enraged station attendant smashes the portraits one-by-one over the painter's head.

Like *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, *A Tricky Painter's Fate* opens with a frenetic shot of a train station full of confused interactions between passengers and porters colliding into one another, toppling luggage, and fighting. Describing the relationship between the confusing social interactions generated by the novelty of modernity, and the innumerable, fretful encounters between passengers and colliding vehicles in Méliès' shorts, Ezra speculates that Méliès' frequent, dramatic crashes involving people, rockets, trains, and automobiles can be made sense of as a visual metaphor for unprecedented encounters between groups around the globe:

The late nineteenth century witnessed the most frenetic imperial expansion the world had ever known, as Britain and France subjected huge areas of the globe to their colonial rule. The changing times brought changes to traditional ways the inevitable collisions depicted in these films – the smashing of cars into buildings, the crash landings of airbuses and rocket ships – suggest, in this context, the collision of different cultural traditions and collective identities (2000, p. 119).

This transportation-induced social upheaval described by Ezra is particularly evident within *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* when the train comes barrelling through the walls of a Swiss Inn; as the carriage rolls across the dining room table and debris and cutlery fly

through the air, passengers happily wave to the enraged party (see Figure 4). This comical image contrasts the feverish pace of modernity with the slow pace of a quiet, indoor meal.



Figure 4: Train interrupts diners at a Swiss Inn

The train, a powerful metaphor for modernity, appears to have its own agency in this scene, which alludes to the anxieties involving the loss of control enveloping the train journey, including threats of collisions and bodily harm and chance encounters between people of different races and social classes; the scene further satirizes the train's potential for disrupting of landscapes, native inhabitants, and cultural identity. Noting the prevalence of arrival and departure scenes in the cinema of attractions, Ezra further speculates that the voyages envisioned by Méliès interrogate the state of transport in an increasingly globalized world:

If movement was the feature of film that set it apart from photography and painting, then it was also the key factor in the development of the tourism industry, and in the transportation revolution inaugurated by the invention of the automobile and the airplane. The transportation revolution made the world a smaller place, and facilitated encounters between people who might not otherwise meet. These encounters were thematized in Méliès' voyage films, which combined magic and fantasy with the new and the very real social possibilities presented by developing technologies of motion (2000, p. 117).

By envisioning fantastic encounters between strangers inhabiting distant shores, Ezra argues that the voyages envisioned by Méliès 'thematise the emergence of the popular as a political force' (2000, p. 129). This statement refers to the potential for new inventions such as telephones, radios, typewriters, gramophones, trains, planes, cameras, and in particular the cinematic apparatus, to prompt radical social change by influencing the historical trajectory of social relations. As these inventions were made accessible to the general public, they disrupted the status quo and undermined systems of social stratification and division put in place by the elites by joining groups of people who previously had little to no contact.

Cinema proved a particularly effective political force as it transcended language boundaries, drawing large audiences on a weekly basis. More people became exposed to images of faraway places, such as those documented by American film-maker and photographer Burton Holmes, whose travelogues offered visibility to formerly remote corners of the world including the South Pacific Islands, Iceland, India, and Ethiopia. In contrast with the travel reels compiled by his contemporaries, Méliès primarily utilizes

imagined places and fictional accounts of exploration to humorously comment on the early 20th century enthusiasm for travel:

Yet unlike the Lumières who sent camera operators all over the world to film newsreels and exotic scenes, Méliès shot most of his films at his studio in Montreuil. Most of the mobility in Méliès' films occurred in front of the camera, which, itself, was relatively immobile. But this did not stop Méliès from depicting the most outrageous flights of fancy, as if his voyage films were compensating for the camera's immobility. The motto of Star-Film Company was, after all, 'le monde à portée de la main (the world at your fingertips): for Méliès, the 'world' was in large part an imaginary one – although it would be increasingly influenced by real-world events as the years wore on (Era, 2000, p. 118).

As the company's motto suggests, Méliès' work emerged within an increasingly globalized sphere where transportation contributed to a perceptual shrinkage of distance, allowing films to be distributed transnationally. Reflecting his role as one of the first transnational film-makers, Méliès' early sci-fi depictions use the strange realm outer space to recast global issues, particularly consumerism, colonialism, and tourism. In France in the 1830s, the divisions between social classes became blurred when luxury items reserved for royalty became available for consumer purchase. In a written account detailing the history of mass consumption in late nineteenth-century France, historian Rosalind Williams explains how this came about:

The specific legal status of nobility was far less important than it had ever been before, but the more general status of "living nobly" was as attractive as ever. The combination of low wages, long hours, and high tariffs enabled French workers to supply a growing domestic market for handmade but

relatively inexpensive goods (machine-made goods were even less expensive, but failed to convey the desired prestige). Calicos and cottons were treated to look like silk, while wallpaper with gold floral patterns and chairs were upholstered in Pompadour style were made for the salons of the middle bourgeoisie (1982, p. 50).

By the turn of the century, travel and entertainment were no longer luxuries reserved for the wealthy and furthermore, people of different social standing, such as white passengers and black porters and nursemaids, could occupy the same train carriages. Despite public enthusiasm for new inventions, technological development appears as a source of incessant, comic agitation in Méliès' shorts. For instance, another crash scene reminiscent of that in *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* can be located in Méliès' fantasy film *Les Quat'cents Farces du diable*, where a curious inventor sells his soul for a supernatural train designed by the devil. The train smashes through the roof of a house in the countryside, and spews from the mouth of a volcano, before lifting off into a wondrous backdrop of comets, planets, stars, and human-like celestial occupants and finally tumbling down to Hell, where the inventor is roasted over a pit of fire (see Figure 5).

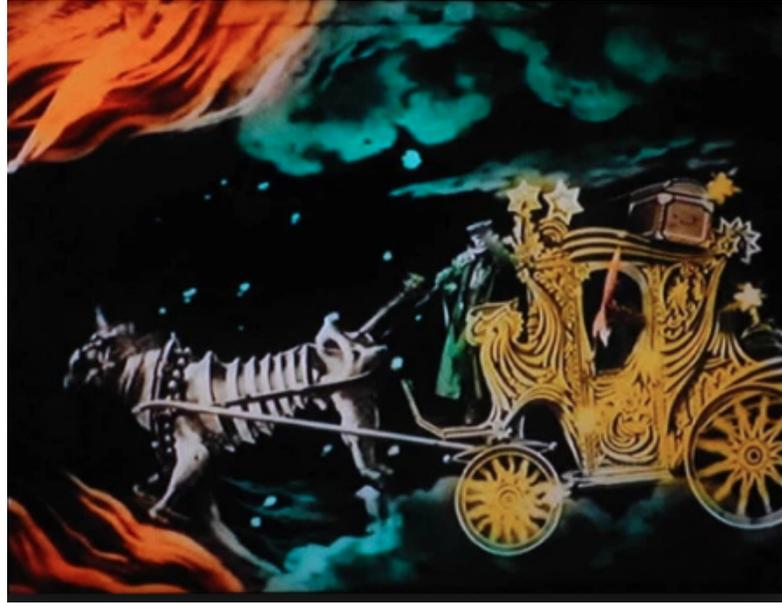


Figure 5: Horse-and-buggy spawned by the Devil

With this depiction of the devil punishing the curious inventor by roasting him alive, Méliès appears critical of modernity's hasty speed of innovation. A vision of modernity is reflected through a glass darkly, as the Devil spawns an out of control world undergoing continual metamorphosis, where disparate groups make brief encounters as the vehicle rushes perilously to Hell. There is evidence to support the idea that this seemingly technophobic commentary on the transportation revolution is intended by Méliès, whose political leanings can be inferred from a series of political caricatures he drew in 1889-1890 for the political magazine, *La Griffé*. One of Méliès' cartoons, described by film scholar Matthew Solomon, implies a disapproving stance towards European nationalism and colonial rule:

On the cover of the January 23rd, 1890 issue of *La Griffe* for example, Méliès satirized the British Ultimatum (which had forced the Portuguese out of territory in southern Africa) with a caricature of a tall, moustachioed, big-fisted British soldier physically intimidating the much smaller and stouter figure of Portugal. In this political cartoon, Méliès highlighted an asymmetry of European military power within colonized Africa, but some twelve years later in *A Trip to the Moon*, he turns from a specific incident between rival colonizing nations to a story that engages with the larger – but no less topical – issue of Western imperial ambition (2011, p. 12).

Le Voyage dans La Lune projects the parable of European colonial sentiment into the future, inserting these practices within the unlikely backdrop of outer space, using the Moon as the distant land and intended object of conquest, and aliens as the colonial subjects. Solomon elaborates on specific details in the film, including costumes, that support this reading:

Méliès mocks the militant nationalism that undergirds such imperial ambitions not only through the massive cannon that is aimed at the moon, but also through groups of chorus girls dressed as marines (Solomon, 2011, p. 12).

Le Voyage dans La Lune further satirizes the ruthless exploitation of colonial subjects using the image of the clearly racialized ‘Selenite’ who is captured and relocated to Earth, whipped by a French sailor, and forced to dance to entertain the victorious crowd (see Figure 6). As Solomon points out, this scene is duly critical towards the duplicitous ambitions of the all-male scientific Assembly, who, for all the pomp and circumstance, make no contribution upon their return:

In the end, apart from reaching the moon, their only other accomplishment would seem to be the unprovoked destruction of a number of very fragile moon-dwellers, whom Barbenfouillis mercilessly decimates with sharp blows from his umbrella. The one Selenite who does return to earth is led by a rope around its neck as part of the parade and harshly beaten with a stick until it dances for the crowd. This cruel moment, which has gone mostly unremarked to date, reveals the darker side of an ostensible voyage of exploration and unmistakably provides a pointed commentary on the unfortunate consequences of colonialism (2011, p. 11).



Figure 6: Selenite (left foreground in green) forced to dance

2.2.3 Gender-Space

I have so far established in this chapter that some of the earliest space films reflect Euro-American anxieties pertaining to the railways and relay Western fantasies of global

conquest. Early space films also shed light on the politics of gender relations in early 20th-century Europe. The preoccupation of early space films with gender can be better understood in conjunction with the knowledge that the earliest outer space shorts coincide with the first-wave feminist movements in France, England, and America, as the figure of the 'sportswoman' made headlines and women (some wearing pants) joined the workforce. The female experience of travel and leisure widened as spaces previously off-limits to women became within reach. Urry and Larsen, discussing the accessibility of mass tourism, point out that in the development of commercial travel offered new freedoms to thrill-seeking women:

In almost all societies men have enjoyed a higher standard of living and 'leisure-freedom' than women. This relates in an important way to the development of holidays. Until the nineteenth century access to travel was largely the preserve of men. But this changed a little, with the development of Victorian Lady travellers, some of whom visited countries considered at the time 'uncivilized and 'uncharted', especially for women. Other women took advantage of Cook's tours. As one woman wrote: 'We could venture anywhere with such a guide and guardian as Mr. Cook' (Enloe, 1989, p. 29; quoted in Urry and Larson, 2000, p. 70).

Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible introduces the progressive new possibility of women 'infiltrating' operations and venturing into space, reflecting attempts at the democratization of travel and leisure for women. The women in these works are afforded entry into space as passengers partaking in a journey, thus their subordinate status is thrown into question as they are offered the very thrills and vantage points enjoyed by the male Institute members.

To refer to a work emerging after the cinema of attractions ended, the suffragette figure appears in Méliès' *À la conquête du pôle* – a satirical voyage film where a group of male explorers makes an expedition to the North Pole aboard an Aerobus (made in the image of a bird) while evading a determined gathering of suffragettes who unsuccessfully attempt to force their way aboard the vehicle. The film's most remarkable sequence transpires when the Aerobus drifts on a detour through outer space while en route to the Pole as explained in an intertitle 'As King of the Air, the Aerospace professor visits the stars and Zodiac constellations.' In this death-defying illusion, Aerobus flies by comets and stars and crashes into a planet which explodes, before being booted out of the sky by the cretaceous tail of the Zodiac constellation, Cancer, tumbling down to the Polar region (see Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7: Aerobus drifts through space

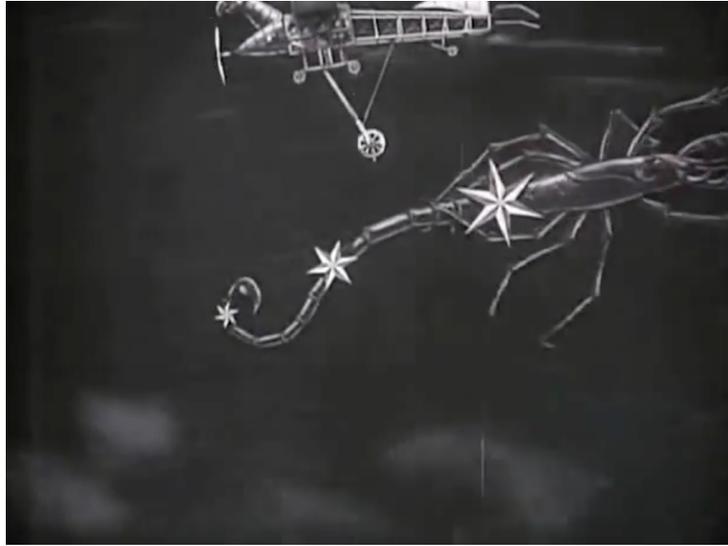


Figure 8: Constellation boots Aerobus from space

Discussing how suffragettes here function as a threat to the male voyagers, Ezra refers to the state of gender relations in Europe contextualizing the film's production:

Universal suffrage was a contemporary issue when Méliès began making *À la conquête du pôle* in 1911, the L'Union française pour le suffrage des femmes had been established in 1909, just three years before Méliès' film appeared, and the women's suffrage movement gained great political momentum in the years preceding the First World War. Not surprisingly, universal suffrage was perceived as a threat to male political dominance. There can be no doubt that women's increasing visibility in the political arena - if only, up until then, as protestors of their exclusion from it - was becoming a cause for concern, however latent (2000, p. 108).



Figure 9: Suffragettes interrupt Assembly meeting

Drawing from the historical context of first-wave feminism in Europe, Ezra reads the death of suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst's caricature in the film as a misogynistic effort to symbolically punish the suffragette figure for social transgressions:

Indeed, Méliès puts the determined aviatrix in her place, thus preventing her from ever again performing tricks of any kind: after a struggle, she is pushed from a hot-air balloon onto which she has jumped, and falls through the sky, landing spread-eagled onto a pointy spire in the town below, where she explodes into a puff of smoke. In one swift motion, Méliès has eradicated the nagging problem of the woman who demanded the same opportunities as men. By ending up impaled through her pelvis, the suggestion is, this woman is getting what she may have needed all along (2000, p. 108).

Counter to Ezra's interpretation of this scene, I instead read the character's death as a sign of the suffragette's willingness to risk her safety to further the cause. My reading is influenced by the concluding scenes, expounded by cinema scholar Dean Conrad in his

overview of the trends in female representation in sci-fi from the genre's emergence until the present day. Conrad pinpoints a more optimistic moment for female representation in the film when a suffragette flies alone in a dirigible to the Pole, rescuing the hapless male explorers who have fallen prey to the voracious Snow Giant:

Méliès did not have to use a woman in the climactic rescue scene of *À la conquête du pôle*; one of his male extras could easily have taken the role. Modest and ambiguous it may be, but this simple on-screen appearance was a clear departure from the norm in 1912. More significantly, it signalled a future of flux for female characters (2018, p. 31).

This particular moment in which the female becomes a protagonist overcoming the restrictions of a patriarchal society is a notable exception within the imposed hierarchical configurations represented in the cinema of attractions, introducing novel possibilities for female characters. Conrad observes that Méliès was the first film-maker to interject an active female presence into early cinematic spectacles:

While the importance of their sexual allure is not insignificant, Méliès' women go beyond mere set decoration and bystanders; instead they are employed within his narrative. In the case of *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, the dancers double as servants, sailors, and Selenites who are essential to help men on their way (2018, p. 24).

However, Conrad (2018) also recognizes that roles played by female here are rather inhibited, highlighting the scientific Assembly's rigid structuring of gender roles:

For example, the importance of the male scientists-cum-travelers in *Le Voyage dans la Lune* is reinforced by the women who run around after them. In this case, the women validate the men's pomposity (p. 26).

In fact, the comic arrogance and exaggerated pomposity of institutions is invoked transnationally, appearing in nearly all existing outer space-related shorts stemming from the cinema of attractions. For instance, in *A Trip to Mars* (1910) American inventor, Thomas Alva Edison envisions a male inventor floating out the window using ‘reverse gravity’ to reach Mars, where he is threatened by beasts of the forest and blown into a puff of smoke by a Satanic demon. As Solomon observes, *Le Voyage dans la Lune* formulates a critique of male-dominated scientific academies, suggesting that buried within the ceremonial demonstrations of institutions are stealthy operations to expand European imperial power and garner authority and personal recognition. A close analysis of the film by Solomon reveals the all-male institution as an entitled and destructive bunch, harping on their ‘accomplishments’ while assuming credit for the labours of subordinates:

The ceremony honouring the lunar journey is quite ironic given that the explorers previously squander much of their time on the moon napping and running away – an irony that is underscored by the self-important ways the explorers gesture and prance about after they each receive their medals and by outlandish scale of the medals themselves, which are larger even on their swelled heads. Likewise, a statue erected to honour Barbenfouillis’ hard work is rather absurd since a group of workmen are shown constructing the capsule with no help from him or his colleagues (Solomon, 2011, p. 10-11).

Discussing social hierarchies in Méliès voyage films, Ezra indicates that the women dressed as sailors who assist in the Lunar preparations and partake in celebrations without ever setting foot on the Moon are an ironic foil to the men’s ease of mobility:

The costumes worn by the female soldiers evoke the centuries-long tradition of nautical exploration, now replaced by other means (land-based and flying vehicles), and by other destinations (space). As eroticized and trivialized caricatures of explorers, the female sailors both compensate for and remind us of the absence of women from the expedition: they are dressed to travel, but they go nowhere (2000, p. 123).

In contrast, female characters express a threatening agency in Méliès' *La lune à un mètre* when a male astronomer in an observatory attempts to study the Moon. His efforts are thwarted when the Moon, whose femininity can be inferred from her eyelashes and plumped lips, bursts through the window of his observation deck, chomps up his telescope, and swallows the helpless astronomer. The astronomer's severed body parts are spit up by the Moon, and are reassembled limb-by-limb by a celestial female fairy. Ezra writes of this scene:

The implication seems to be that, as long as she is up in the air, unattainable, the woman poses no threat; but once she comes within arm's reach, she will cause harm (2000, p. 102).

As Ezra's observation indicates, this short, which is also the earliest known instance of outer space in the cinema of attractions, casts the female character as a distraction from scientific endeavour. Given this mixed bag of female representation, it is not clear what Méliès' intentions were in representing female characters, or whether he had any purposeful and consistent intentions at all. Discussing the roles of women in a number of

Méliès' films, Conrad draws the conclusion that Méliès' attitude towards women is less than progressive:

It was a world the 51-year-old veteran of over 500 films was not best placed to understand – or represent. On reflection, it is fair to suggest Melies liked women. He liked to include them in his films. Whether he appreciated their needs is a different question. His need to take the line of least resistance by ridiculing the female suffragists in *À la conquête du pôle* is an example of lazy misogyny, not uncommon to the period (2018, p. 31).

This aligns neatly with Conrad's overarching conclusion that the majority of sci-fi cinema is devoid of any critical inquiries into gender disparity, made apparent by the fact that the archetype of the sexualized female assistant can be found in practically any contemporary sci-fi film. I maintain that while Méliès engages with and, to some extent, sets the precedent for the 'lazy misogyny' that is inherent to the sci-fi genre, his portrayal of women is not as naive or one-sided as Conrad implies; instead a pattern emerges whereby women become of more central importance in Méliès' voyage films over the course of time, participating in the preparations for a moon voyage, travelling to the sun, and then, without the assistance of men, reaching the North Pole to rescue male explorers.

2.2.4 Outer Space, Scopophilia, and the Taboo

Early Euro-American visions of cinematic space travel are clear instances of the construction of the 'male gaze' in cinema, to draw on the term coined describing the

male-oriented voyeurism associated with the objectification the female form in cinema described in feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey's influential essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/ female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* (1975, p. 62).

The cinema of attractions frequently and self-reflexively draws on the dynamics of male-oriented scopophilia as evinced by numerous early space films centring on men voyeuristically gazing at female celestial bodies from observation decks or roofs, often aided by telescopes. Scientific 'endeavour' in these examples is undertaken exclusively by white males using a variety of means which are whimsical in nature. For instance, in *Voyage à la Planète Jupiter* (1909), Spanish director Segundo de Chomón envisions an astronomer climbing a flimsy rope ladder from his bed to Jupiter. French film-maker Gaston Velle envisions *Rêve à la lune* (1905) (Moonlight Dream), where an inebriated man climbs to the roof of his house and is blown away into outer space before being chewed up and spit out by the Moon. In Velle's subsequent film, *Voyage autour d'une étoile*, a scientist ascends to outer space in an enormous soap bubble. Gazing at celestial bodies while shrouded in darkness, these images of scopophilic astronomers embody Mulvey's understanding of the dynamics of spectatorship within the cinema:

Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which isolates the spectators from one another) and brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and the projection of the repressed desire on to the performer (1975, p. 583).

While Mulvey uses the term male gaze primarily in reference to the visual dynamics of Hollywood, the fact that the early directors of the cinema of attractions are exclusively men concerning themselves primarily with the actions of male characters suggests that this male-oriented gaze originated in the cinema of attractions. Méliès' novel 'space films' offer an excuse to gaze at 'femme-étoiles' – to cite a term used by Ezra, describing women draped in togas sprawled across planets, crescent moons, and stars:

The inclusion of these "femme-étoiles" in a drawing characterized by its economy of expression is notable, considering that these creatures only appear in the film very briefly, and suggests that their iconic status is disproportionate to their screen time (2000, p. 109).

Reflecting a changing society, gender stereotypes are conflated repeatedly in *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, as is the case of a minor female character dressed as a man in the foreground of the film's opening scene, who is confined to a servile role, delivering a model of the Sun to the Assembly members. The male attire serves to desexualize the female and align her with scientific inquiry, however, when she attempts to gain a better view of the action, the servant is pushed to the side by a scientist. Far from indifferent to

her position, she places her hands at her hips expressing impatience with the male assembly members, and is once again shoved, disappearing to the far right of the screen. In the second shot of *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, the proposed vehicle is depicted in the stages of assemblage by a cast of male workers in a machine shop, each labouring on different components of the Aerobus. A male dressed in a blue dress interrupts Crazyloft (played by Méliès) from his calculations offering tea, prompting Crazyloft to kick the tray into the air – the servant then falls and Crazyloft chases him/ her from the machine shop. In the next scene, Crazyloft once again shoves him/her away from an open flame. This scene contributes to the film's reflection of class and gender inequality, as described by Ezra:

The young servant who accompanies the group on their trip is subjected to a litany of comic and not-so-comic catastrophes, including being kicked by the inventor as he tries to serve tea – an uncharacteristic moment of realistic violence that throws class divisions into a stark relief (adding, since the servant is obviously played by a man, a dimension of sexual violence...) (2000, p.129).

The dress worn by the male character creates an incongruous image of gender roles, diverting the viewer's attention more closely to the spectacle of gender violence within the film. Clearly not all women in the film are intended to be sexualized – part of the spectator's enjoyment results when outcomes defy expectations. Another instance of this is the aggressive, rotund woman who voyages to space in the film – this character represents an unruly woman who is shown, in a misunderstanding, dumping a bucket of

water over a man's head. Compared with *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, where women serve men exclusively, gender roles in *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* are less clear cut.

Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible was followed by further cinematic images of women crossing into outer space. British Walter R. Booth's *The Motorist*, for instance, also captures the increased speed of modernity, depicting a couple in an automobile speeding away from an irate policeman. The duo escape by driving up the wall of a general store, where they are propelled first into the clouds, and briefly into outer space (see Figure 10), before crashing to Earth through the roof of a courthouse. A subsequent short film of Booth's, *The Automatic Motorist*, similarly relates a tour of outer space, as a bride and groom are propelled into a fantastic future in which a robot dressed in something resembling a metallic space suit steers a motor car with the happy couple in the back-seat, embarking on an intergalactic honeymoon. This time the car effortlessly glides up the side of a building facade modelled after St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and launches itself towards the moon, before making several revolutions around Saturn's rings (see Figure 11), finally crashing inside of the planet, where the trio encounters a gathering of primitive, dancing children wielding spears (see Figure 12).



Figure 10: Journey through space in *The Motorist*

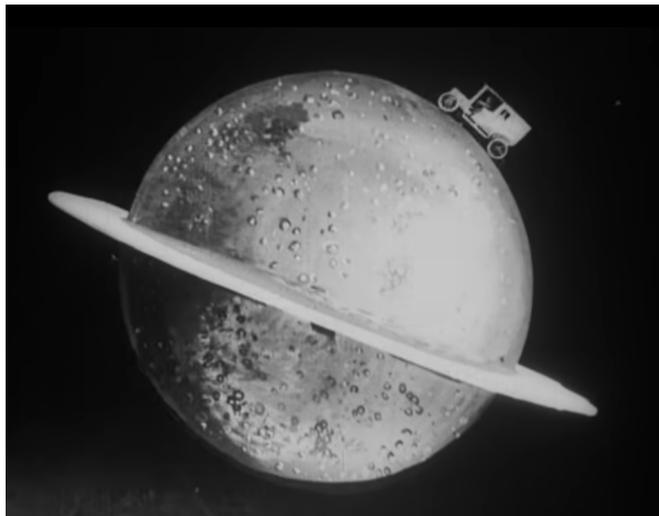


Figure 11: Automatic motorist reaching Saturn

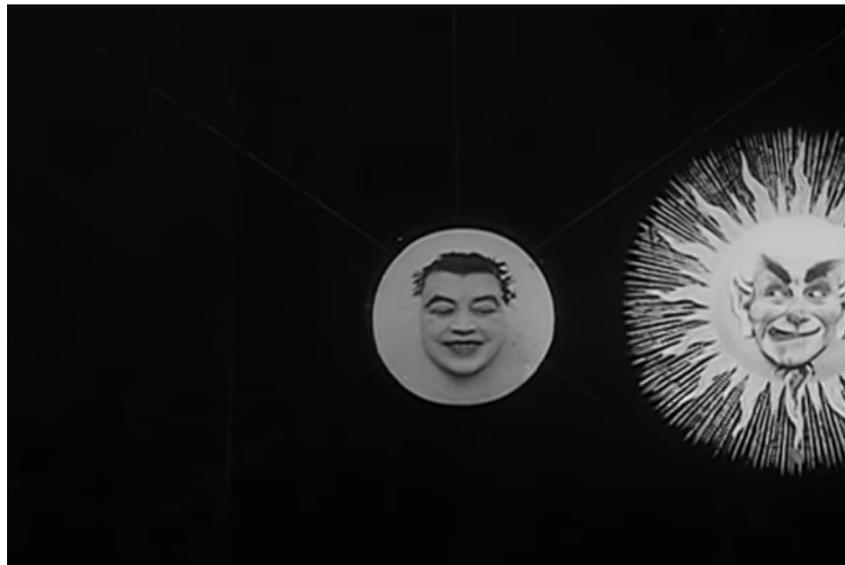


Figure 12: Primitive alien race on Saturn

Méliès undermines heteronormative expressions of gender on-screen in *L'éclipse du soleil en pleine lune* (The Eclipse: Courtship of the Sun and Moon) (1907), which is among the earliest representations of homoerotic subject matter in the cinema, exhibiting intimate interactions between the anthropomorphic Sun and Moon, represented by two male faces matted inside of celestial spheres. The eclipse here is a double entendre representing a sexual encounter between two men, as the Sun and Moon wink, suggestively lick their lips and make eyes at one another before overlapping only to re-emerge with evocative expressions (see Figures 13 and 14). The early 20th-century spectator is placed within a voyeuristic position, anticipating a rare planetary phenomenon while instead being served with a helping of taboo erotica. The spectator's position as a

consenting yet unsuspecting voyeur is heightened in *L'éclipse du soleil en pleine lune* by the film's depiction of a classroom of unruly astronomy students who observe the eclipse using telescopes, scribbling notes in a lecture room. The slapstick and self-reflexive nature of this piece becomes further evident during a scene titled 'an unexpected bath,' as females figures clad in tight bodices rain down alongside the stars in a meteor shower, causing the elderly astronomer Professor to lose his footing and tumble from the window.

Figures 13 and 14: Eclipse Progression





A succession of transgressive scenarios projected and acted out in the backdrop of outer space can similarly be found in Spanish director Segundo de Chomon's short *Les Lunatiques*, which explores bodily metamorphosis through the attraction. Firstly, five identical dancing men transform one-by-one into women through the use of jump-cuts. Following this, the women's dresses are abruptly transformed into men's attire. The cross-dressing women transform again, this time into five men painted in 'yellowface' wearing traditional Oriental attire, who then morph into five women in 'blackface' that fit the racist, cinematic caricature of the domesticated black 'mammy' (see Figures 15-18). In the final act, these women transform into the equally offensive black minstrel archetype, also wearing blackface.



Figure 15: Cross-dressing in *Les Lunatiques*



Figure 16: Men in yellowface



Figure 17: Mammy archetype in space



Figure 18: Minstrel archetype in space

From this work, a xenophobic attitude towards ‘Othered’ bodies during the time of the film's conception can be inferred, invoking that which English scholar Alice Maurice,

writing on the topic of early cinema's race-change gags depicting chimney sweeps blackened by soot, refers to as the 'race-change' trope, which serves a specific function in early cinema:

I want to suggest that in early cinema this commentary plays out in terms of linking on-screen boundary crossing to crossing the screen boundary. In the race-shift film, this has the effect of pulling the audience in, using the boundary between the spectator and the spectacle to expand/ exceed the frame. Ultimately, this creates a back and forth between the trick/transformation of race-change and the power of the cinematic apparatus to trick or transform the spectator (2013, p. 42).

Yet, what is described by Maurice as an expansion of experiential boundaries is, however, constricting in another sense, and constitutes a cheap gag at the expense of non-whites. As the first surviving depiction of non-white characters in outer space, *Les Lunatiques* sets a precedent for the ironic uses of white actors and actresses playing the roles of people of colour in science-fiction (as well as across genres). *Les Lunatiques* is evidence that the alienation of blacks and other races from science-fiction except as caricatures and literal alien 'Others' associated with contemporary Hollywood is an offensive construct that can be traced as far back as the earliest space shorts. Despite being invoked by the narrative, people of colour in *Les Lunatiques* are denied agency, while also being misrepresented, excluded, and stereotyped. In the process of being coded as racialized 'Others,' these dancing characters are portrayed as if they were alien races discovered among the variety of attractions and novelties offered by outer space. Segundo de Chomon's projection of dancing, foreign bodies onto a faraway planet echoes Méliès' display of the dancing of the

bright green Selenite relocated to Earth, setting the precedent for the estrangement of non-white bodies characterizing sci-fi aliens on-screen.

This ‘othering’ of non-white bodies is a projection of racist sentiments that can also be found, for instance, in two 1896 short films portraying black mothers bathing their infants, which Maurice characterizes as gags symbolizing an unsuccessful attempt to scrub off dark, ‘dirty’ skin:

The exploitation of “othered” bodies, and in particular the imbrication of these bodies/ spectacles with the essence or prowess of the apparatus begins with the earliest motion pictures (2013, p. 162).

Outside of cinema, the ‘Othering’ of human bodies has been evident for much longer, an issue taken up by author and feminist scholar Alice McClintock (1995), who describes a series of racist Victorian soap advertisements dating back to the 1830s, featuring images of monkeys with bars of soap, as well as two-frame ad depicting a black child who turns completely white from the neck below after bathing with Pear’s soap.

Like Maurice, Gunning recognizes the exploitative nature of the cinema of attractions, speculating that the widespread success of the attraction is the result of its shock value:

Attractions do more than reflect modernity; they provide one of its methods. They need to draw a gawker’s attention - to make one stop and stare - reflects not only the ebb and flow of the distracted urban crowd but also a new culture of consumption which arouses desire through an aggressive visuality. In this sense, the prehistory of the cinema of attractions need not be restricted to the apparatuses that led to the kinetoscope of the cinématographe. Instead, cinema appears within a modern channelling of visually towards the production of desire essential for the creation of consumer culture (2005, p. 193-194).

Race-change gags, homoerotic images, and cross-dressing are all evidence of early cinema audiences' desire to gaze voyeuristically at the unknown and to uncover the bodies and habits of the repressed, mysterious 'Other.' Themes of race and sexuality emerged on-screen in numerous other forms including ladies in bloomers on windy streets, interracial kisses, embracing lovers, and peeping Toms.

2.2.5 Evolving Spaces

The cinema of attractions soon found itself subsumed within the shopping centre, as the practice of browsing became integrated with cinema-going. Gunning explains:

With their simple fairy-tale plots and exaggerated performances, these films also enthralled children at another of Méliès's faithful customers in France, the cinema set up specifically for children in the Dufayel department store, so that mothers could park their kids while they shopped (2005, p. 74).

The image of stationary toddlers buckled in strollers, imagining themselves voyaging to the moon recalls Friedberg's discussions of expansion/ confinement paradox that immobilizes the viewer at the juncture between real and imagined spaces:

But the panorama and its successor, the diorama, offered new forms of virtual mobility to its viewer. But a paradox here must be emphasized: as the "mobility" of the gaze became more "visual" – as techniques were developed to paint (and then to photograph) realistic images, as mobility was implied by changes in lighting (and then cinematography) – the

observer became more immobile, passive, ready to receive the constructions of a virtual reality placed in front of his or her unmoving body (1993, p. 28).

It is useful to consider the portrayal of the expansion/confinement paradox in space films. The image of the contemporary interstellar science-fiction space traveller, cryogenically preserved in a coffin-like chamber, floating in a vessel through outer space is the pinnacle of the expansion/ confinement paradox; while the vessel offers the ability to travel freely and endlessly from one galaxy to the next, the travellers body and sense of mobility deteriorate inside the confines of this hermetically-sealed container. Perhaps sci-fi cinema is a preferable alternative to personal space travel, allowing spectators to purchase better and safer vantage points of space that can be travelled to and fro with ease. An understanding of the emergence of outer space depictions in cinema reveals that spectators have been safely 'touring' space for over a century now, therefore, today' private space tourism industries, which alternate between blowing up and fine-tuning reusable spacecrafts in the race to be the first to offer 'affordable' and routine tours of space, may have missed the mark. The earliest on-screen voyages to space make way for a critical understanding of how contemporary space exploration and tourism have gradually evolved from images in cultural history.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this chapter's case studies is that *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is ideologically different from *Le Voyage dans la Lune* and other early works pertaining to space, in that it is first clear instance of cinematic space

tourism, carving outer space into an expansive commercial terrain that can be bought, sold, travelled to, and possessed by wealthy individuals. In doing so, *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* also transforms the traditional conceptualization of outer space as an area of masculine conquest into a leisurely fairground of touristic thrills, open to men *and women* who are able to afford the experience. These space films were exceedingly popular subject matter, produced primarily in Europe and distributed throughout the rest of Europe and the US – so popular, in fact, that they were illegally copied, edited, and even remade shot-by-shot by rival companies, as in the case the Segundo de Chomon's *Excursion dans la Lune* (1908), produced by Pathé Frères. *Excursion dans la Moon*, film reviewer Fritz Kramer points out in an article comparing the work to *Le Voyage Dans La Lune*, is notably 'a virtual shot-for-shot do-over of the Méliès hit' (2016, par 1) albeit created on a tighter budget and with minor stylistic differences. The early sci-fi shorts of film-makers such as Méliès, Segundo de Chomón, Walter R. Booth, and Thomas Edison reflect the possibilities of mass tourism, moving vehicles, and the discovery of previously unknown locations and peoples. Perhaps the enduring and widespread appeal of space travel in the cinema can be understood as an expression of grass-is-greener-syndrome; just as families planning vacations fantasize about exotic places that are radically different from home, early sci-fi relates a collective yearning for different life elsewhere in the cosmos. Portrayals of space originating from and around the cinema of attractions attempt neither realism nor scientific accuracy, relying instead on slapstick, magic, and elements of the faerie in creating humorous exhibitions of aesthetic marvels.

The films examined within this chapter relay sexism and racism at the turn of the 20th century, while opening up the possibility for women and people of colour to make brief appearances in outer space. These films do not assume a straight forwardly positive or negative attitude towards progress; instead they simultaneously celebrate and critique railroads, tourism, and the cinema, using cognitive estrangement to shift the viewer into an enthralling future. These short films, furthermore, self-reflexively investigate the possibilities of cinema as a budding technology with the ability to shift the viewer into a touristic consciousness, vicariously partaking in the experience of travel on-screen. These case studies are a springboard for what has developed into an extensive collection of film imaginings of space expeditions from around the globe. The interest sparked by sci-fi cinema during the first half of the 20th century led the public to imagine themselves as space explorers and even go so far as to believe such expeditions were viable. For example, in 1950 the Thomas Cook agency sponsored the ‘Moon Register’ which, inspired by Irving Pitchel’s *Destination Moon* (1950), led 100,000 British citizens to sign a roster in hopes of receiving a ticket to the Moon. In continuing this analysis of how space films have transcoded socio-political change during historical moments of crisis and transformation, the following chapter will address space films that followed chronologically from the cinema of attractions, used different kinds of visual strategies to supplement more complex narratives envisioning space travel as a means of escape from a European continent thrown into turmoil.

Chapter 3

Eugenics, Colonialism, and Accelerationism in Early Space Operas

3.1 Space Operas During the Interwar Period

This chapter expands on the previous chapter's treatment of the first outer space films to identify a subsequent wave of outer space films made during the interim between World War I and World War II. These travel themed narratives draw thematically from the cinema of attractions, showcasing scientists executing daring rendezvous with the heavens while contributing new strategies to the genre, developing space voyages into lengthy, high-budget, melodramatic 'space operas' utilizing established film stars, expansive sets, large casts, on-location scenery, realism, scientific accuracy, and new special effects, including aerial shots. In the interwar space opera, the voyeuristic attractions of reclining, female celestial bodies, erotic, winking moons, and frequent, whimsical jump-cuts abruptly disappear, while the socio-political matters of gender, the academy, and colonialism previously satirized by film-makers like George Méliès, Walter R. Booth, and Segundo de Chomón continue to be drawn out in considerably more detail. In this next wave of space films protagonists and antagonists with far more depth of

character are placed at the foreground, projecting into an allegorical backdrop the European public's prejudices concerning race, gender, and social status.

While the cinema of attractions portrayed outer space as the primary spectacle in the first space films, subsequent films shift the emphasis to rocket ships, featuring novel, interior shots of the vehicle where voyagers can be observed working and dwelling. This shift from outer space to the vehicle's more complex interior parallels the shift towards more complex narrative frameworks and characterizations, focusing on internal world of the characters at a time when the cinematic rocket journey sprung up in the Soviet Union, Germany, Denmark, and the United States as a point of cultural intrigue. The intent of this chapter is firstly to identify the socio-political and technological circumstances framing the transnational cinematic imagination of rocket journeys, and secondly, to consider through close textual analysis, how sci-fi depictions of early rocketry offer insight into social movements in America and Europe between World War I and World War II – in particular the expansionist, male-dominated, xenophobic, and quasi-scientific ideologies framing the eugenics movement, which was mainstream during this time. In establishing this, I focus on case studies which evince strong political commentary concerning the shifting ideologies of post WWI Europe and the United States while depicting rocket voyages foregrounded by intricate preparations back on Earth – including *Himmelskibet* (1918), *Just Imagine* (David Butler, 1930), *Flash Gordon* (Frederick Stephani, 1936), *Kosmicheskiy reys: Fantasticheskaya novella (Cosmic Voyage)* (Vasili Zhuravlov, 1936), and *Frau im Mond (Woman in the Moon)* (1929).

3.1.1 Technological Acceleration in Interwar Europe

The period between World War I and World War II in Europe represents an era of tremendous technological transformation. Sci-fi rocket journeys are partly a projection of the novelty of commercial airlines; tourism made significant headway after WWI aeroplanes were recycled into passenger planes and commercial airline companies such as Britain's Imperial Airways shuttled well-to-do travellers between Europe, the United States, Asia, and Africa. A series of advances was also made in the field of rocket science, as European engineers including Fritz von Opel and Max Valier tinkered with prototypes for rocket-powered cars, sleds, planes. Following WWI, European borders changed dramatically, as new countries were formed, Russia dissolved, and Germany conceded over one-tenth of its territory.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the eugenics movement spread as racist agendas were promoted by scientists, medical professionals, academics, and physicians from the USA, spreading to European countries including Germany, England, Sweden, Denmark, and the USSR. Eugenacists used Darwin's theory of evolution as a means to 'scientifically' back the enforcement of a racial hierarchy where whites (particularly those with pale skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes) were classified as genetically superior and all other races were considered genetically inferior. Eugenacists

also sought methods to sterilize individuals considered a threat to the gene pool; discriminatory new legislature in The United States and Europe approved the forced sterilization of an expansive number of groups deemed unfit for reproduction, including immigrants and people of colour, poor women of reproductive age, young, unwed mothers, psychiatric patients, gay people, people with disabilities and deformities, as well as the weak and chronically ill.

For some economically devastated populations of post-war Europe, including Germany and the Soviet Union, now faced with immigration, the potential mixing of races, changing borders, and newly emerging governments, speeding headlong into uncharted future terrain perhaps seemed to be the only route to the preservation of European values and identity. The image of early astronauts escaping the planet in capsules pointed at outer space perhaps offered a shared sense of identification for spectators who in turn sought refuge from the tumultuous world outside, within the hermetically sealed quarters of the cinema. In 'Utopia and Failure' Jameson correlates the desire for escapism that is associated with seeking out utopia with the disappointments perceived within an ailing society; Jameson writes: 'Utopias have something to do with failure and tell us more about our own limits and weaknesses than they do about perfect societies' (2010, par 1). Jameson further argues that while Utopia implicates something that is unrealizable:

My modest recommendation was simply that we use the Utopian visions we are capable of projecting today in order to explore the structural limits of such imaginings, in order to get a better sense of what it is about the

future that we are unwilling or unable to imagine. In so doing, we will probably want to sort out what I call an anxiety about Utopia – a repression of the Utopian imagination (2010, par 6).

Applying this notion to the examination of the utopian planets portrayed in science-fiction, as I have done so far, offers a glimpse into a subpopulation's hopes and desires for the future – and furthermore those civilians who are relocated to sci-fi visions of utopia thereby represent those who consider themselves to be the most socially desirable. The flip side is that those who are left behind consequently represent, from the perspective of those who have left the planet, the least socially desirable pool of society. This chapter therefore uses CTA to unravel cinematic projections of utopia in order to ascertain what these planets offer that was absent from Euro-American societies during the Interwar period.

I argue that the means of reaching utopia is as interesting and important in the diagnosis of societal ills as the conceptual structure of utopia itself. The road to utopia is a rocky one which implicates not only a society in turmoil but furthermore requires a dramatic and socially divisive means of escape; the visually captivating image of the rocket speeding headlong into uncharted terrain offers not only a visual metaphor but also a literal embodiment of the divisive ideology of 'accelerationism' – to cite a body of work discussed by literary and critical theory scholar Benjamin Noys in his detailed critique of accelerationist scholarship, *Malign Velocities*. The theory of accelerationism assumes innumerable forms which are too varied to outline for the purposes of this

discussion, but the unifying thread of accelerationism is a fanatic obsession with the speed of capitalist innovation to the point of societal breakdown and chaos. Noys explains: ‘In fact, the very point of accelerationism is going too far, and the revealing and enjoyment engendered by this immersion and excess’ (2014, p. 15). The enjoyment of capitalism-induced instability and social collapse is, however, a sign of disregard for the homeostasis of the planet and society. Noys in fact maintains that the purported enjoyment associated with accelerationism itself is a by-product of the innumerable pathologies generated by capitalism including narcissism, depression, schizophrenia, obsessive tendencies towards the acquisition of material wealth and, I would add, a blatant disregard for morality

It is intriguing, therefore, to consider that the narrativized rocket journey which (aside from the imminent collision of asteroids and planets) is the most obvious metaphor for accelerationism in science-fiction, is often fraught with characters that are consumed by pathologies associated with the acceleration of capital, often uncertain of their mission and purpose. The nausea, speed, stagnation, and exhilarating changes of time, scale, and perspective characterizing sci-fi rocket journeys discursively transcode the impact of capitalist accelerationism and its resulting social transformation on the comparatively fragile human body and psyche. As the rocket’s timely emergence in sci-fi cinema indicates, a dizzying pace of technological development was a large-scale social issue after World War I and, as the development of weaponry on a mass scale has demonstrated many times over, one important consequence of accelerationism is that capitalism quickly

overtook the pace of critical thinking necessary to maintain a state of equilibrium between humans and machines.

Aside from stipulating accelerationist sci-fi narratives, cinema factors into the rapid developments of pre-mid 20th century technology in other ways; the Hollywood Studio System formed in the US set in place a chain of events discussed in film scholar Geoff King's work on the standardization of Hollywood cinema:

The major studios had large national and international distribution networks that formed a vital link in the chain. Any production company wanting to get its films seen had to go through this avenue. The overseas distribution networks developed by the majors were particularly important, enabling Hollywood to dominate most of the world's markets as early as the 1920s (2002, p. 25).

Writing on the role of female characters throughout history, Conrad frames his discussion of early and pre-mid 20th century films by noting key developments in cinema between the late 1920s and early 1930s when, to the surprise of many actors and directors in the industry, sound rapidly overtook silent film:

Although "talking pictures" were initially considered to be just another of cinema's fads and gimmicks, by the end of 1928, it had become apparent from audience reaction that the new format would endure. The days of the silent movie – despite the best efforts and accompanying artistry of the theatre organist – were numbered. By 1929 some science-fiction projects already in production had been converted to sound, or had sound segments inserted, in order to protect investments already made (2018, p. 41).

Conrad further argues that the development of sound contributed to a standardized style of sci-fi cinema:

The need to use familiar narrative elements in order to balance new format elements is magnified by the introduction of technical innovations. Sound-on-film is an example of this; *Just Imagine* is an early result. New cinema technology is expensive. Add to this the fact that sound arrived around the time of the Wall Street Crash, established itself during the Great Depression, and required the upgrading of thousands of cinema buildings, it becomes understandable that production companies would take measures to protect their investments (2018, p. 47).

During this period of time, European nations banded together in competing with Hollywood while looking for ways to preserve a national cinematic identity, as explained by film and television scholar, Andrew Higson, in an article discussing the challenging attempts to achieve international collaboration between studios in Europe in producing blockbusters and developing a transnational identity, while maintaining cinema's national identity as specific to individual countries:

It was these sorts of initiatives and aspirations that some commentators at the time referred to as Film Europe. The argument was that through such collaborations, the strongest and most ambitious European film companies might be able to establish the sort of critical mass that the Hollywood studio enjoyed. The hope was that this would enable European companies to compete on more equal terms with Hollywood. Ironically, during this same period, the governments of various European countries set up trade barriers – quotas, tariffs and the like – designed to protect the national production business, motivated in part by straightforwardly economic concerns but also often in part by concerns about the erosion of what were perceived as specifically national cultures (2010, p. 72).

According to Higson the result of this was the development of simplified, familiar representations of various nationalities in film, made to appeal to international audiences as a universal language of images:

Or, to put it another way, if films asserted a sense of cultural difference, the culturally different often figured as the object of a voyeuristic gaze, at the same time, the need to reach markets meant stressing the familiar, finding ways of nationalizing the international co-production (2010, p. 81).

During this time, European nations blended film technology with nationalistic WWII propaganda; one striking example is that school curriculums in Weimar Germany required the screening of documentaries urging students to submit to their instructors lists containing the names of relatives and acquaintances with mental or physical challenges fitting the criteria for forced sterilization.

Given the slew of controversial, confusing, and rapidly evolving technologies and ideologies developing in Europe and the United States during the interwar period, it becomes evident why the budding, accelerationist image of the rocket appealed to the public consciousness in science-fiction as a symbolic harbinger of rapid change. It is furthermore unsurprising that cinematic rockets were portrayed in a morally ambiguous light, considering that while escaping Earth was science-fiction's imagined solution to crisis, rockets paradoxically also factored into the destruction wrought by the V-2 rocket missiles used by Hitler against England and France. Cinema reflected the unstable nature of early rocketry in several pre-World War II outer space films, which are torn

thematically between the various political concerns of the interwar period: eugenics, colonialism, and warfare.

3.3 Production and Summary of *Himmelskibet*

Himmelskibet is a silent, black-and-white film directed by the prolific and influential Danish director, actor, and screenwriter, Holger-Madsen. The film resurfaced in 2006 and was digitally restored by the Danish Film Institute. Information regarding the film's production can be gathered from an original poster for a New York based screening, promising 'An All Star Cast of 5,000 Actors, 50 Gorgeous Settings, and \$100,000 Worth of Mechanical Devices' – rendering *Himmelskibet* a European blockbuster (see Figure 19).



Figure 19: New York poster for *Himmelskibet*

Himmelskibet was produced by the Nordisk Films Kompagni during the twilight of the Golden Age of Danish cinema lasting between 1910 and 1920. Cinema scholar Mark Sandberg, discussing political allegories in early Danish films, notes the studio's initial success: 'The Nordisk Film Company, founded in 1906, became one of the world's leading studios by 1913, in that year second only to the French Company Pathé Frères in terms of film production' (2014, p. 28). Nordisk's films were distributed in the USA and across Europe and Russia. Sandberg observes that while silent cinema crossed borders before WW1, allowing European nations to collaborate on film projects which were

distributed across Europe and to America, the success of Danish quickly faded when the Great War began. Sandberg further considers the significance framing the Nordisk logo, a polar bear on top of a globe, relating this image to a scene in *Himmelskibet* where the Martians bestow a globed Earth replica to the space voyagers: ‘The fantasy just under the surface here is the Nordisk bear’s reconquest of a world with reopened borders’ (2014, p. 39).

The resurgence of those borders through trade embargoes during the war proved to be the undoing of Nordisk Films Kompagni and its successful international production model, so there is something more at stake in preaching pacifism; for Nordisk Film, it is most surely also a desire to return to the open markets it had enjoyed before the war. In this way, there is a particular resonance in the moment when the Martian leaders hand the globe of Earth to the space travelers. It is not just giving back a peaceful world to the representatives of the war-torn human societies; it is also giving back a cooperative global market to the Nordisk Films Kompagni (Sandberg, 2014, p. 39).

Himmelskibet is classified by film critic, screenwriter, and journalist Phil Hardy in the introduction to the *Overlook Film Encyclopedia of Science-Fiction* as the first ‘space opera’ (1995, p. 56) – a category associated with sci-fi film, literature, magazines, television, and comics. The term space opera is a derivation of ‘soap opera’ used in reference to radio melodramas sponsored by soap companies. Outlining the history of the term space opera, Westfahl (2003) points out the space opera was originally a pejorative term coined by science-fiction author and fan writer Wilson (Bob) Tucker in a 1941 fanzine, describing melodramas transpiring in outer space:

In these hectic days of phrase-coining, we offer one. Westerns are called “horse operas,” the morning housewife tear-jerkers are called “soap operas.” For the tacky, grinding, stinking, outward space-ship yearn, or world-saving for that matter, we offer “space opera.”

Westfahl defines the space opera by underscoring the rocket ship’s presence as a component of the subgenre’s narrative arc:

First, space opera involves a ‘space-ship’ like the nautical fiction from which it borrows its terminology and tropes, space opera depicts journeys through uncharted realms in vessels bringing humans into contact with the mysterious stuff separating their safe harbors (2003, p. 197).

Aside from the space vehicle’s vital role hosting and transporting interplanetary voyagers, there remain two other characteristic aspects of the subgenre:

Second, space opera is a ‘yarn’ - an exciting adventure story. Typically, the universe is filled with human or alien spacefarers – some hostile, some friendly – space opera is a literature of conflicts, usually with violent resolutions (Westfahl, 2003, p. 198).

The final criterion cited by Westfahl represents both the source of the subgenre’s proliferation and its weakest quality: ‘Third, space opera tends to become ‘hacky, grinding, stinking and outworn’; like the Westerns and domestic dramas, it often succumbs to formulaic plots and mediocrity’ (2003, p. 198).

Himmelskibet’s descriptive title foreshadows the space opera’s plotline; in Danish, the word ‘himmel’ translates to ‘sky’ or ‘heaven’ and ‘skibet’ translates to ‘ship’ – thus the title ‘ship to heaven’ or ‘sky ship’ neatly captures the film’s storyline, whereby a

rocket ship ventures to an interplanetary Paradise resembling the Christian imagination of heaven. In *Himmelskibet*, the scientist presciently named ‘Professor Planetaros’ lives with his adolescent daughter Corona in a mansion with a domed observatory. The film’s protagonist is the Professor’s son, the seafaring Captain Avanti, who has taken a leave from the navy ‘to undertake a scientific expedition.’ Together, Professor Planetaros and Avanti devise a set of plans to build a spaceship to Mars. The envious Professor Dubious,¹⁰ a friend and rival of Professor Planetaros, antagonizes the father and son duo (inquiring ‘would you mind taking a letter for me to Venus?’). Unperturbed, Avanti enlists the help of his colleague Dr. Krafft and a meeting of an exclusively male scientific society is held, where Avanti screens a mini-documentary detailing the forthcoming Mars expedition.

Avanti recruits several young, undaunted men and shortly after, ‘The Excelsior’¹¹ a rocket ship – a hybrid between an aeroplane, blimp, and submarine (see Figure 20) ascends into skies drifting for six months in darkness before being pulled into Mars’ gravity, where the men encounter a breathable atmosphere and an Earth-like environment. Here they are welcomed by a peace-loving civilization of Martians who appear human, adorned in long, white flowing ‘robes of innocence.’ An intertitle explains that the Martians communicate (as is characteristic of sci-fi aliens) through ‘a mutual language understandable for all souls.’

¹⁰ Original character names used

¹¹ The Latin term for ‘ever-higher,’ ‘still upward and superior



Figure 20: The crew prepares for takeoff in the 'Exelsior'

The Martians ceremoniously present the travellers with a globed replica of Earth and exotic melons plucked from the dining garden; the men offer in return wine and canned goods which are rejected by the Martian Priest. What begins as a respectful interplanetary exchange turns sour when the American drunkard, Dane, demonstrates the procurement of meat by shooting an ethereal white bird from the sky. Startled by the sound of the gunshot, flocks of Martians emerge from distant hills, descending towards the Earthlings. A squabble ensues as an Earthling tosses a hand grenade, killing a Martian. The humans are delivered by the seraphic Martian, Marya, to the 'House of Judgement' and are instructed to judge themselves. The crew expresses remorse and is effectively 'baptized' with the white robes of innocence. Avanti falls in love with Marya and the two are joined

in a Martian ‘marriage’ ceremony. Finally, the crew, along with Marya, board the Excelsior and return to Earth to spread the Martian vision of peace.

3.2.1 Outer Space is White

In an analysis highlighting Marya's role as a mediator between two disparate civilizations in *Himmelskibet*, Conrad notes the film’s commentary concerning the sociopolitical circumstances surrounding its production:

Himmelskibet was directed in a peaceful European ‘oasis’ of neutrality existing in Denmark while the carnage of World War I was unfolding 600 miles to the south-west of Copenhagen (2018, p. 34).

While Denmark stayed out of the war, Conrad’s vision of Denmark as a neutral oasis is not entirely accurate. As explained by journalist and historian, Bent Blüdnikow (1989), assessing Denmark’s role during WWI, to avoid being forced into the war Denmark assisted Germany – for instance by providing medication and supplies to soldiers and offering humanitarian aid to POWs from Russia, Germany, and Serbia; it was through such measures Denmark was able to maintain its ‘neutral’ status.

Conrad notes that *Himmelskibet* ‘takes a tale and title made familiar by Méliès and gives it a pacifist twist’ (2018, p. 34). Film and literature scholar Mark Bould reaches a similar conclusion in an article assessing three sci-fi/fantasy feature films in

pre-mid-20th century Danish cinema, explaining that the commentary in *Himmelskibet* on non-violence straightforwardly reflects Denmark's commitment to neutrality during World War I: 'Premiering in February 1918, the film's boldest move is overtly to transform the God of War into the Planet of Peace' (2011, p. 114). Conrad's reading of the film delves into the specifics portraying the Martians as a peace-loving population:

Martian civilization combines elements typical of nineteenth-century utopian or lost-race fictions, pseudo-classical architecture, costumes and customs; divine ancient wisdom; telepathy; social, psychological and physiological engineering, in this instance organized around a fruitarian diet; and a scattering of super-science technologies (2018, p. 114).

Furthermore, Conrad notes that *Himmelskibet* was distributed in the US, signalling that the film's pacifist appeal was appreciated across the West. Yet, in the same way Denmark's commitment to neutrality was ambiguous, under close scrutiny *Himmelskibet's* message is not as straightforward as Conrad and Bould imply. I argue that *Himmelskibet* has less to do with the spread of pacifism than with the perpetuation of white Anglo-Saxon notions of racial superiority through colonialism and eugenics.

The historically problematic portrayal of white, Euro-Americans can be better understood in conjunction with Richard Dyer's *White* an evaluation of racial imagery stemming from white cultural production. Such inquiry, Dyer argues, is of critical importance, because while the virtues associated with white skin in literature, film, sculpture, and visual art are largely uninterrogated, imagery associated with whiteness has long been revered in American and European cultural history, where the word 'white'

is linked with semantic definitions of neutrality and purity: ‘The idea of whiteness as neutrality already suggests its usefulness for designing a social group that is taken for the human ordinary’ (Dyer, 1997, p. 47). This designation of whiteness as natural enables white Americans and Europeans, securely unified by skin colour, to gaze upon other groups as deviations from what is deemed normal while remaining unnoticed. Furthermore, white as a symbol of neutrality within a palette of colours assures that the further a group’s skin tone deviates from white, the more foreign it appears, a sentiment that is expounded on in numerous science-fiction alien depictions – for instance, the Selenites’ translucent kiwi-coloured skin, the rust-coloured, hermaphroditic parent and child duo in Wolfgang Peterson’s *Enemy Mine* and the Na’vi Tribe in *Avatar* (2009) – a band of oversized humanoid figures with phosphorescent, cobalt blue skin (see Figures 21 - 23).



Figure 21: Member of Drac species in *Enemy Mine*



Figure 22: Selenites (in color version) of *A Trip to the Moon*



Figure 23: Na'vi native in *Avatar*

Whiteness has historically been associated with tourism, leisure, and colonial privilege, not to mention white skin is a passport to privileges such as jobs, bank loans, college admissions, passports, and visas, as discussed in an essay written by feminist scholar, Peggy McIntosh, listing dozens of instances of what she refers to as ‘the daily effects of white privilege’ (1988, 293) undermining the notion of a true meritocracy:

I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of colour who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion (1988, p. 294).

While Dyer suggests that whiteness normally goes unnoticed among whites, Dyer also devotes a chapter to the estranging qualities of white skin, and more specifically, to the relationship between whiteness and death in horror films featuring vampires and zombies. Discussing the significance of white skin in the horror genre, Dyer implies that zombie and vampire films are essentially narratives about white people:

There is no difference between whites, living or dead; all whites bring death and, by implication, all whites are dead (in terms of human feeling) (2005, p. 211).

To add to Dyer’s observations, white colonialists, immigrants, and tourists – as historic harbingers of death and destruction, may become a subject of a counter-gaze; whites can be perceived as ominous and ghostly cadavers, invoking the phrase ‘white devils,’ commonly associated with thievery and colonialism among whites. White skin, at

times, has been interrogated and made 'strange' through Western cultural production in other interesting ways. For instance, the notion of whiteness as ominous is highlighted visually in Nicolas Roeg's (1993) film adaptation of author Joseph Conrad's (1899) novel *Heart of Darkness*, where the main characters, consisting of Europeans imperialists in search of ivory in Africa, appear out of place and exceedingly feeble as they succumb to the effects of mental instability, physical attacks, and fever (see Figure 24). Roeg also portrays the European as alien in Nicolas Roegg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* where the protagonist, Thomas, is outwardly an exceedingly frail, light-skinned and mentally unstable European, and inwardly, is an alien only remotely familiar with the human body and Earth's planetary customs (see Figure 25). A third instance of Roeg's counterintuitive renderings of white Europeans as foreign agents can be located in *Walkabout* (1971) where two young siblings lost in the Australian outback (see Figure 26), clinging to their school uniforms, appear asynchronistic in the context of an unforgiving, sweltering desert. The pair cannot survive without the help of the comparatively more adept Aboriginal teenage boy, whom they become dependent on for survival. The white, Western outsider can also be located in the more recent example of *Avatar*; a parable about resource extraction whereby the white protagonist, Jake, is disabled, partially paralyzed, and vacant; Jake's pale, abandoned corpus grows thinner and more decrepit as he identifies more with the Na'vi and his translocated consciousness takes on an alien perspective so that his failing body and violent species are viewed as destructive, foreign entities (see Figure 27).



Figure 24: Defeated colonialists in *Heart of Darkness*



Figure 25: Thomas in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*



Figure 26: Deserted schoolchildren in *Walkabout*



Figure 27: Jake's debilitated body in *Avatar*

The persistence of racialization in science-fiction cinema is undeniable, as whiteness continues to be the 'non-raced' norm in the vast majority of contemporary Hollywood film.¹² Therefore Dyer's call for a recognition and evaluation of whiteness

¹² See Chapter 5 for further discussion of whiteness as a 'non-race' norm in contemporary sci-fi

throughout cultural history is pertinent in assessing *Himmelskibet*, where whiteness is a prominent motif. The presence of white Martians in *Himmelskibet* is unusual, representing a clear deviation from outer space films where aliens are normally construed as foreign, racialized ‘Others.’ Rather than being racialized aliens, the Martians hold dear the ideology that whiteness signifies purity and spiritual enlightenment. For instance, the ‘dance of chastity’ scene, featuring a ring of girls and young women in white robes adorned with flowers, evinces the film’s Christian sentiment, invoking the maternal virgin Mary, idealized for chastity, and subordination and for being a silent vesicle for the appearance of Christ (most often painted with blue eyes and golden hair).

Existing alongside the theme of whiteness in science-fiction is the narrative thread of masculine domination over a feminized, virginal landscape. The marriage ceremony between Avanti and Marya following the courting ritual initiated at the ‘tree of longing’ ensures that the Martian model of chastity and marriage will be replicated on Earth. As Conrad points out, Marya fits the stereotype of the female mediator in sci-fi, uniting opposing male forces ‘It can surely be no coincidence that Maria¹³ and Marya share their name with the Virgin Mary, whose mediation between Man and God is a quintessential example of this female stereotype in the Western tradition’ (2018, p. 36). In assessing the representation of women over more than a century of science-fiction, Conrad observes

¹³ Conrad refers here to the character Mariia who mediates between the proletariats and the ruling class in Fritz Lang’s German Expressionist sci-fi film *Metropolis*

that since the beginning of science-fiction, representations frequently portray female characters as aids to and mediators between men:

Male domination of moving pictures inevitably led to a screen celebration of the male Self in action and women – equally inevitably – were added to the men’s creative toolbox (2018, p. 25).

Further enforcing Marya’s role as a female character that is acted upon, Marya joins Avanti only after asking for her father’s hand in marriage, drawing from a familiar patriarchal system enforced on Earth. This film’s patriarchal pedagogy is further apparent when Marya sacrifices her Martian existence to follow Avanti’s plan of returning to the sin-laden Earth. The union of Marya and Avanti is a social contract which not only reinforces stereotypes of women of objects rather than subjects, but also appears to reinforce inter-Aryan marriage policies encouraged in Weimar Germany, which offered incentives for white people of high social status to marry other Anglo-Saxons, especially Nazis. The Martian’s uniform white robes bear a startling resemblance to those worn by the Klansmen in Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), through which racist discourses around the perceived inferiority of dark skin are revealed as mainstream entertainment.

The Birth of a Nation is clear evidence that the construction of whiteness as superior rests on the assumption that darkness is inferior. Griffith’s pro-confederate film, which premiered three years before *Himmelskibet*, depicts actors in blackface playing the roles of freed slaves who are, during Reconstruction, revealed as rapists and savages infiltrating government offices and threatening the tenuous fabric of white society. While

the nation's most controversial film, initially screened in the White House under the administration of President Woodrow Wilson, was protested in Los Angeles by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), *The Birth of a Nation* also had an overwhelming number of supporters and was distributed in cities across the United States and Europe. Describing the film's reception, film history scholar Melvyn Stokes overviews the mixed reactions of audiences, starting with its emotional reception in Los Angeles in 1915, which roused applause, cheers, and even a standing ovation for Griffith. Moreover, Stokes notes that the film was approved by members of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures. It was also the case that 'Many white liberals would find themselves torn between their dislike of *The Birth of a Nation* and their dislike of censorship' (Stokes, 2007, p. 120).

Given the mixed reactions and the rise in the KKK's membership in response to the film, it is perhaps no coincidence that the god of war, Mars, makes a brief appearance near the end of *The Birth of a Nation*, suggesting a thematic connection between the Martian god and the location, Mars, in *Himmelskibet*. While *Himmelskibet* is far less divisive and explicit than *The Birth of a Nation*, a deeply embedded intolerance of non-whites lies at the heart of both works, linking dark-skinned individuals with savagery and warfare. In a scene which parallels *Himmelskibet*, *The Birth of a Nation* concludes in the 'Hall of Brotherly Love in the City of Peace' with a daydream sequence that is cast in an ominously red-tinted frame, where the god Mars sits atop a horse wielding a sword, threatening a crowd of warring people who stand beside a stack of dead bodies belonging

to white men, women, and children (see Figure 28). Next is a jump-cut to an oversized figure of Christ standing in the centre of a more calming, purple-tinted frame among the crowd, in a bright garden with white marble pillars. The slaughtered crowd of white men, women, and children have apparently ascended to heaven, with many women wearing long robes with chains of flowers circling hanging loosely around their necks (see Figures 29 and 30).



Figure 28: God of War in *The Birth of a Nation*



Figure 29: *The Birth of a Nation*'s concluding vision of Paradise

In *The Birth of a Nation* and *Himmelskibet*, religion is used as a justification for racist agendas, conflating the Christian imagination of heaven and purity with white skin and a cultish devotion to Euro-American values. In fact, the foundation of American cinema rests on the narrativization of ideological struggles between dark and white skin. Dyer observes that the Western has played a role in relaying geopolitical struggles of skin colour in building an American national identity:

Beyond this, it is also one of the founding myths of the USA, a country which has (for about the same span as the Western itself) symbolized the direction, the hopes and fears of the world (only countervailed by the communist dream, whose national exemplar, the USSR, seldom seized the imagination as did the USA and the Western (1997, p. 32).

The Western portrays white cowboys expanding territory and influence by killing and imposing boundaries on Native Americans:

White cultivation brings partition, geometry, boundedness to the land, it displays on the land the fact of human intervention, of enterprise. The frontier and all the drama and excitement its establishment and maintenance entail, is about the act of bringing order in the form of borders to a land and people without them (Dyer, 1997, p. 33).

In *Himmelskibet*, the projected image of the planet Mars is Christian and Eurocentric – the celestial Martians spiritualists inhabit a world where, an intertitle explains, ‘everything here is beautiful and clean’ – implying that the purity of the Martian city stems from its white colouration. In fact, the juxtaposition of light and dark is visually ingrained into the film where scenes associated with humanity and sin, taking place in the interior of houses and inside of the spaceship, are cloaked in shadows and high-contrast lighting; Martians are perpetually bathed in low-contrast lighting, populating exterior spaces surrounded by trees and sky (see Figures 34 and 35). All the signifiers of holiness – the robes, temple, pillars, and most notably the Martians themselves are white (see Figure 3). In the ‘House of Judgement’ where sinners are delivered, a small selection of Martians don all-black ‘garbs of mercy.’ Darkness is also linked with a lack of virtue in the Earthlings’ dark militaristic uniforms which contrast sharply with the Martians’ luminous, white robes.

Figures 30-33 : Contrast of light and dark in *Himmelskibet*





Figure 34-35: Whiteness as purity in *Himmelskibet*



In the Martian catacombs, Marya screens a re-enactment of a time before the Martians were civilized – the purported undesirables wear feathered headdresses commonly associated with Native Americans (see Figure 36) and have dark skin and jet-black hair. They also wear furs, and wield long, pointed spears (see Figure 37) in

place of the crosiers held by the ‘contemporary’ Martians. Subsequent shots show early Martians as a warring civilization of natives, drenched in dark shadows and plumes of smoke.



Figure 36: Martian planet's history



Figure 37: Primitive Martians

Marya verbally extends the analogy between darkness and savagery, remarking: ‘Look! We too have been fighting our way through darkness. Also here on Mars there was once killing with fire and iron.’ Though it is never explained where these primitive Martians have gone, their fate is hinted at in the headdresses and feathers they wear, which invoke the relationship between Native Americans and colonial settlers in the New World, who regarded the indigenous people as primitives, killing them to make room for a new Anglo-Saxon society.

Dyer notes that while Christianity is practised by people of all colours, whiteness has been historically linked to Christianity through the Crusades, depictions of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and imperialism. The seemingly paradoxical film *Himmelskibet* promises a vision of a new society on a faraway planet, yet the film’s Christian

Eurocentric vision is not a universal vision of peaceful, interplanetary tolerance and cooperation, but instead reflects Euro-American discourses of racism and eugenic ideology. It is noteworthy that *The Birth of a Nation* and *Himmelskibet* are both put forward using intertitles and dialogue as pleas for peace, while apparently supporting divisive political agendas. In the same time period these films were released the Ku Klux Klan increased in numbers across the United States, while in Europe socio-political circumstances gave rise to the Nazi party's vision of eugenics which stressed racial purity. In *Himmelskibet* it is the mutual understanding which assumes the form of white skin that unifies the crew and the Martians in the end.

The themes of interplanetary escapism and eugenic policies recur in the futuristic sci-fi musical, *Just Imagine* (1930), where the protagonist, J-2, travels to Mars in hopes of reversing the decision of a marriage commission which ruled that he could not marry his sweetheart due to his inferior social standing. *Just Imagine* is an American production which uses a Broadway cast, and offers a far more critical outlook on science and eugenics which is relayed by the character nickname Single-O (in reference to a one-person carnival act) who is revived by a group of all-male mad scientist figures following his death in 1930. The ever-cheerful product of the experiment, Single-O, ventures into New York in 1980, fifty years after his death, and remains in a perpetual state of shock as he uncovers a sexless, strict socially engineered world where babies are sorted by gender and dispensed to happy couples from vending machines (see Figure 38). The nostalgic Single-O, a space tourist in many senses of the term (waking up in the

future 'space' of Manhattan in 1980 as well as voyaging to Mars) repeatedly quips 'I don't know boys, give me the good ole' days!' Conrad suggests that the film reflects the political atmosphere of both Europe and the USA:

It does not take long for *Just Imagine* to reveal itself as a proto-fascist 1930 vision of 1980, in which the laws of society are bent towards the pursuit of convention and tradition (2018, p. 43).

In spite of the film's stereotypical portrayal of women as passive and vain, there are liberal elements embedded into the film which should not be discounted; rather than enforcing the idea of eugenics, the film uses humour and musical numbers to satirize pseudo-scientific ideas, poking fun at convention by projecting these practices decades into the future. Despite its strong undercurrent of sexism, in retrospect *Just Imagine* can be considered a warning against fascism, portraying a dystopian future where marriage and reproduction are government regulated.



Figure 38: Baby boy dispensed from vending machine

3.2.2 Imagining Colonial Tourism

While Westfahl, Conrad, and Bould have discussed *Himmelskibet's* prominent pacifist message, there is nothing present in existing critical writing on the film that pertains to the equally prominent, more nuanced subject of colonialism, or more specifically, a variety of 'colonial tourism' which can be located within the film. *Himmelskibet* exhibits a plot twist when what began as an expedition conceived, apparently, in the spirit of curiosity shifts from a touristic excursion to an exchange tinged with European imperialist sentiment. This is first apparent when the Earthmen

eschew the Martian's frutitarian diet in favour of 'dead meat.' Rejecting the Martian vision of high society and carrying guns, the crew appear backwards and uncouth on Mars, where 'for thousands of years no shot has been heard.'¹⁴

Against the civilized Martian backdrop, the sinners are foreign and outnumbered as their status shifts to that of the primitive and war-driven alien civilization who must be taught by more attuned beings – a storyline that has driven numerous films since *Himmelskibet* – most notably, *Tarzan of the Apes* (Scott Sidney, 1918), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968), *Enemy Mine*, *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990), *Pocahontas* (Mike Gabriel, 1995), *Avatar*, and *Ender's Game* (Gavin Hood, 2013). In such examples, the gap between species (or societies) is idealistically bridged by mutual love between the human and the former 'alien' enemy, in favour of understanding and interspecies (or intraspecies) cooperation. Superseding the Earthlings' colonial gaze, it is the Martians who are the real imperialists in *Himmelskibet*.

In the early 20th century, the budding industries of cinema, tourism, and rocket science were in malleable stages; though these industries were separate, cameras, vehicles, and warfare overlapped at times, creating unprecedented techno-social interactions. In *War and Cinema*, Virilio makes the point that the importance of film scholarship lies in understanding the feedback between cinema and political realities; some of the earliest observable evidence of the interaction between warfare and cinema

¹⁴ As indicated in an intertitle

can be glimpsed in the 20th century phenomenon Virilio refers to as ‘the commercialization of airspace’ (1984, p. 25) when, after WW1, the public occupied the skies, which were formerly reserved for military personnel:

When commercial flights began again in 1919, often using converted bombers like the Breguet-14 the aerial vision became a widespread phenomenon with a large public. Right from the beginning, however, aerial photography had posed the problem of knowing which, in the technical mix of chrono/camera/aircraft/weapon’, would gain the upper hand in the making of war film, and whether the topological freedom due to the speed of the engine, and later its firepower, did not create new cinematic facts incomparably more powerful than those of the camera motor (1984, p. 25).

Virilio insinuates that using warcrafts to view landscapes leads to a frightening hybridization of cinema and warfare. Expounding on this, Virilio draws on the example of the release of an aerial torpedo on a small group of Galla tribesmen in Ethiopia in the 1930s, which led to an explosion, causing the dead bodies to scatter in a circle. The war pilot, Virilio argues, has created the scene intentionally ‘just as a director working on a viewer can edit a scene in an aesthetically pleasing manner’ (1984, p. 26). While this provocative comparison appears tenuous initially, Virilio’s observations prompt valid inquiry concerning where the boundaries between cinema and warfare can be drawn in cases whereby formerly disparate modes of technologies have merged, leading to unforeseen consequences. While Virilio focuses primarily on the theme of technological warfare, this notion of powerful, detrimental, and unanticipated combinations of vehicles and film can be applied equally to tourism. Tourism scholars suggest that some forms of

contemporary American and European tourism are an extension of colonialism; in fact terms such as ‘colonial tourism’ and ‘neo-colonialism’ have sprung up to describe these practices. For instance, geography scholar Pawel Cywiński describes inequalities which characterize tourist activities that mimic colonialism:

Tourist neocolonialism occurs when the relationship between the person from the outside local system (a tourist) and the local host of the meeting is significantly unbalanced or even objectifying. At the same time, the primary goal of the relationship is generally to satisfy the needs of the tourists. If the tourist practice does not include relations based on equal conditions, it should be seen as a practice of the privileged – the practice of using the other, the weaker, and the poorer (2015, p. 22).

Sex tourism and slum tourism¹⁵ are two of the most straightforward examples of this. I would further Cywiński’s observations that the intrusive nature of tourism is always in flux, due to endless combinations of technologies – vehicles, cameras, cell phones, maps, and video apparatuses and selfie-sticks used by tourists to navigate and to record locals and landscapes. Early 20th century space films reinforce the notion of the male-dominated scientific academy and its preoccupation with outer space as the extension of a colonial mindset. Outer space films are the result of the camera’s recoding of space; this new visibility offered by cinema portrays outer space as an object of colonial conquest, formulating images of what future space exploration ought (or ought not) look like.

¹⁵ Referring to the practice of visiting impoverished areas as an attraction

3.2.3 Confinement vs. Expansion Paradox

Perhaps the most intriguing scene in *Himmelskibet* consists of a cinematic premonition of the emotional impact of prolonged space flight, which seems to be an extrapolation of the phenomenon of jet-lag experienced by early airline passengers subjected to rapid changes in time zones and locations. The rocket in *Himmelskibet* is a source of endless frustration as a series of dark, shadowy shots of the spaceship's interior emphasize the cramped living quarters. In a preface to author and director Thea von Harbou's novel, *The Rocket to the Moon* (1928) literature scholars Ivor A. Rogers and Deborah C. Rogers provide a useful description of German Expressionism that is applicable to both film and literature:

The Expressionist writer shows the world as it is seen through the Ego of the character. The Ego, or the essential aspect of the individual, is the primary force for Expressionists. The character's Ego acts as interpreter for nature to the audience. He perceived the world through his Ego, which transforms the "reality" of the world. The character's Ego then radiates those perceptions of the universe back to us. This usually results in the distortion and displacements of the physical universe, and even the actions of the characters in it (1977, p. 7).

Himmelskibet predates German Expressionism in the cinema, using the rocket's interior to convey the characters' stress, claustrophobia, and cabin fever. A shot of the rocket

depicts the first meal onboard, where the seven men are squashed in a tiny cabin where the walls appear to be closing in on them, with four bunk beds framing the edges of the shot. Five crewmen are seated around an emphatically narrow, rectangular table, crowding out the outline of a small doorway, as Avanti wearily toasts to the mission's success (see Figure 21). The analogue clock face centred at the top of the frame appears primitive and irrelevant within the context of the rocket ship, emphasizing the tedious passage of time as the hands of the clock turn fruitlessly during the stagnating journey. After six months, the hefty and brutish American, Dane, is suffocated by listlessness and anxiety, pacing around the cabin, remarking to himself 'this endless night of space', 'always darkness brooding around us,' and 'now six months have passed, and we are getting nowhere.'



Figure 21: First Meal aboard the 'Excelsior'

Describing this comically compelling scene, Westfahl observes:

Himmelskibet is the first film to suggest that space travel might lead to mental instability. During the flight Dane returns to his “old addiction to drink” and encourages others to drink the bottles of wine that he managed to bring along. Dane also announces, “We cannot bear to live anymore in this flying Hell,” and plans a mutiny to return the spaceship to Earth (2012, p. 13).

This scene captures the paradoxes outlined by Jameson, who attempts to make sense of cinema’s century-old fascination with outer space:

The first question with which one is confronted in the representation of space flight is one it shares with some other genres, such as tragedy, for example, namely, why should we take pleasure in the contemplation of what must be among the most painful and uncomfortable, constricting claustrophobic physical experiences recoded by human beings? (2008, p. 172).

Ruminating on this dilemma, Jameson offers several possibilities, including:

Perhaps it is the very blankness of the raw material and the possibilities it offers that allows the narrative of spaceflight to inscribe all kinds of different things, a surface on which quite different matters than those of space and technology might be registered (2008, p. 173).

These qualities render outer space an opportune area for the melodramatic narratives characteristic to space operas; both melodramas and space operas are relatable to most audiences, inscribing domestic issues within confined spaces. Secondly, Jameson suggests that the fascination with outer space reflects our fascination with cinema itself

and its seemingly implausible manner of inserting ‘a square peg in a round hole.’ Jameson discusses the specific example of the beach-ball shaped pets which resemble large rotting tomatoes in *Dark Star*, whose round, rolling three-dimensional existence comically contrasts with the flat and lifeless chamber of the rocket ship:

The joke about the alien pet, as round as a soggy football, in fact initiates something like a phenomenology of space, whose very humour is itself derived from the properties of the latter. In English we talk about the square peg in a round hole, this is a round ball inside of a square space (the squareness of the space itself is a paradox for this presumably oval shaped spaceship (2008, p. 175) (see Figure 39).

Cinema’s preoccupation with the rocket voyage, Jameson suggests, emphasizes the ‘phenomenology of space,’ or in other words, the mysterious spatial paradoxes generated by seemingly impossible recoding of the expanses of outer space to the three-dimensional confines of a flat screen, and within this, the transformation of the tubular spacecraft into a series of rectangular chambers containing the organic shapes of living bodies.



Figure 39: Beachball pet in *Dark Star*

I would add to Jameson's explanations that the intrigue generated by the cinematic rocket journey results not only from the recoding of space, but also experience. The removal described by Jameson signifies freedom from a plethora of terrestrial miseries. While being an escape pod from Earthly limitations, the rocket ship simultaneously offers whimsical, new experiences - passengers can float through the air and pick up and hurl heavy objects; there is no up, down, left, or right and time and space may shrink or dilate, water becomes solid, and perhaps most liberating of all, passengers can undergo dramatic development in being freed from the social constrictions of class and status formerly imposed on Earth – a notion leading into the next case study, *Frau im Mond*.

3.3 Summary of *Frau im Mond*

The black-and-white silent film *Frau im Mond* begins with the feeble, unkempt elderly Professor Manfeldt, holed up in a dingy flat, ostracized by the scientific community and living in abject poverty, consumed by the dream of mining gold on the Moon. The pathetic mad scientist is visited by his well-to-do scientist confidante, Helius. A flashback to 1896 ensues, revealing Manfeldt as a young man presenting a ‘Hypothetical Description of Gold Contents of the Mountains of the Moon’ to an all-male scientific panel who erupt in laughter. As the flashback ends, Helius surprises Manfeldt by offering to accompany him by rocket to the far side of the Moon, following heartbreak after news of the engagement of his beloved scientist Friede to his colleague and fellow scientist, Windegger.

In planning the lunar voyage, Manfeldt enlists Helius to protect his life’s work, explaining that a ‘scoundrel’ reached into his window at night and attempted to steal his engineering manuscript. A series of thefts reveals that an American capitalist, Turner, and several of his cronies are behind the crimes. Turner hijacks the mission for personal gain, threatening Helius with the destruction of the manuscript. Helius reluctantly agrees to let Turner be part of the moon voyage with Friede, Windegger, and Manfeldt, and all five set forth for the moon. While in flight, the crew discovers the stowaway rascal Gustav (and it is also revealed Manfeldt has brought along his female live-in companion, a mouse credited in the film as ‘Josephine.’) The unlikely company makes their descent to the moon; upon discovering hordes of gold in a lunar cave Manfeldt stumbles to his

death. Meanwhile, by the rocket ship, Turner ties up Windegger, attempting to journey back alone. Windegger is freed and kills Turner, accidentally damaging the oxygen tanks during the spat. When it becomes apparent that one person will need to remain stranded on the Moon, the men draw straws to decide their fate. Helius wins and arranges to return with Friede and Gustav but instead sets the ship on course while remaining on the Moon in secret. After the rocket departs, Helius is surprised to discover that Friede has also decided to remain on the Moon, and the lovers embrace.

3.3.1 The Moon is Made of Gold

In a review, film scholar Iris Luppia notes that *Frau im Mond* was ‘voted best film of the 1929-1930 season in a survey by Film-Kurier, a prominent journal for both film professionals and movie-goers in Weimar Germany’ (2011, p. 298). Cinema scholars Tom Gunning and Katharine Loew note the film’s historic reception included an impressive gathering of intellectuals:

The premiere of *Woman in the Moon* took place on October 15th, 1929 at the Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin with over 2,000 illustrious guests, including Albert Einstein. For the first time a film premiere was broadcast live on the radio (2015, p. 563).

Despite its ground-breaking reception and the historic appearance of the film’s insignia on German V-2 missiles, only a single sentence is reserved for *Frau im Mond* in

the book *Imagining Outer Space: European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century* (2012), which contains essays describing an otherwise comprehensive list of major works in the literature, film, comics, and lyrics pertaining to outer space, emerging from European cultural history. In this book, European studies scholar Alexander C.T. Geppert defines ‘astroculture’ as:

a heterogeneous array of images and artefacts, media and practices that all aim to ascribe meaning to outer space, while stirring both the individual and collective imagination (2012, p. 8).

Perhaps then the curious omission of *Frau im Mond* within the context of discussions concerning European astroculture results from the films two most prominent, yet-to-be analysed themes – colonialism and gold-mining – is evidence of Europe’s collective attempt to repress a long-standing and embarrassing history of European abuses of African slaves, and mining operations in the Gold Coast. Film scholarship has similarly neglected to address the theme of colonial mining in the film, which perhaps can be attributed to the fact that there exists no analysis of the film which incorporates a comprehensive discussion of the original version – co-director Thea von Harbou’s novel, *The Rocket to the Moon*. To bypass the novel version risks missing some of the most important thematic aspects which are present, though less explicit in the novel’s translation to the screen.

One of the last major silent science-fiction films, *Frau im Mond* encapsulates a chapter in history when sound quickly overtook silent cinema, the Wall Street crash of

1929 sparked the Great Depression, and World War II was imminent. Furthermore, the film was produced just as Germany's economy was collapsing due to owed war payments. Considering these circumstances, it seems logical that contrasts between wealth and poverty are pervasive in the film and novel versions. This is expounded by authors Rogers and Rogers, in a preface to Thea von Harbou's novel, citing the importance of gold within the narrative:

Another aspect of this novel which may seem peculiar to modern readers is Manfeldt and Turner's obsession with gold. Literally dozens of science-fiction novels were written on the theme of gold: cornering the market on gold, transmuting base metals to gold, attacking gold as a monetary standard. This is particularly true of Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s which suffered a catastrophic inflation and consequent depreciation in the value of paper money. A loaf of bread might cost millions of marks in paper money during the worst of this episode, but gold still had a real value. We might see why a German writer in particular might turn to a theme based on lust for gold. Gold was real wealth; paper money was not worth the paper it was printed on (1977, p. 10).

Thea von Harbou's novel, *The Rocket to the Moon* vividly describes a 'city of towers made for gods and kings' (p. 151) made entirely of gold. Manfeldt, in both the book and film is consumed by the fantasy of unbridled wealth which ultimately leads to his demise. Of Manfeldt, who goes mad upon discovering the golden city, von Harbou, writes: 'But the gods of the moon would not share their gold with the men of the earth. He collapsed and fell' (p. 139). Manfeldt's insurmountable greed transparently reflects the Euro-American fantasy of possessing infinite wealth by the impossible conquest of

limitless space. These descriptions of Manfeldt in Thea von Harbou's novel alongside images of the unkempt professor in the film paints a condemning picture of the German scientist as a haunting figure, lacking objective detachment and consumed by personal gain. Equally greedy is the American, Turner, who blackmails his way into space:

Juxtaposed with the idealism of Helius and his collaborators, the American and capitalism that Turner and his 'cheque books' represent is cast in a negative light (Luppa, 2011, p. 299).

The film's critique of capitalism is not limited to America, also recalling European involvement in extracting gold and diamonds from the colonised regions of South Africa's Gold Coast, dating as far back as the early 1400s. The deaths of both Turner and Manfeldt in the film allude to what Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899) also makes evident – illnesses and death were a common consequence in the hazardous industry of Gold Coast gold mining, however it was African slaves who were killed primarily. The two characters Turner and Manfeldt indicate an extended transference of such jungle-induced illnesses, both mental and physical, which afflict Conrad's characters Marlow and Kurtz, to the capitalist paradigm of space.

3.3.2 Science Facts and Fictions

In *Frau im Mond*, it is noteworthy that the rocket doesn't depart until after the first hour and a half of the film's duration; Jameson speculates that this prolonged suspense shifts the spectator's exploratory frame of mind reserved for outer space to direct attention instead to the film's lengthy sequences shot on-location in Germany:

What also begins to happen here is that the domestic interior, which Lang rendered so brilliantly in all these early films, becomes gradually drawn inside the spaceflight motif and is itself radically estranged. It is as though our apartments and our middle-class habits were themselves merely habituated forms of space travel, Earth being itself a kind of rocket ship or space vessel – Berlin and Weimar Germany themselves being immense space pods propelled on their way to an unknown destination (2008, p. 174).

Jameson's observation evinces that 20th century sci-fi films use cinema self-reflexively in experimenting with new ways of coding space:

But there are any number of ways to make the spatial appear, and they do not all take the form of direct representation. This is indeed what is fascinating about Fritz Lang's *Frau im Mond* (1929) where the ostensible space theme is delayed so long as to produce a new sense of the spatial by puzzlement and generic confusion, in a kind of strange inversion of that "distraction" that Walter Benjamin famously took to be our privileged mode of experiencing architecture. Indeed, the Berlin sections of the movie – almost half! – show us, instead of spaceships and lunar flight, drawing rooms and attics, domestic servants, learned societies, police, spies, robberies, and the like – all the trappings of Lang's other thrillers (2008, p. 147).

The film's focus on Berlin's interior spaces and the rocket journey with no clear purpose transcodes technological development in Weimar Germany during an ambivalent period

when the controversial physicist Werner Von Brau was designing V-2 rockets for Nazi Germany under Hitler's command while quietly aspiring to land the same breed of fuel-powered, multi-stage rockets on the moon. Virilio observes that *Frau im Mond* plays a historic role in funding of early rocketry experiments, and also suggests that *Frau im Mond* is a parable reflecting the development of rocketry in post-war Germany:

Nor is there much difference between the science-fiction of the young Werner von Braun, and Théa von Harbou's, and Fritz Lang's script for *A Woman on the Moon*. As for the impoverished schoolteacher Hermann Oberth, whose work on rocketry met with mocking incomprehension, he could almost have been the fiction hero of the latter undertaking. For it was only the hope of UFA financial backing for his *real experiments* that drove Oberth to collaborate on the technical planning of the film, and in the end Lang himself paid half the cost of Oberth's experiments in order to put an end to the producers' doubts and haggling (1984, p. 74).

There is more still to the relationship between *Frau im Mond* and Oberth's research, as discussed by art scholar Dona A. Jalufka and planetary geology scholar Christian Koeberl in an article describing the varying levels of realism in cinematic moon depictions throughout the 20th century:

The space pioneer Oberth was even commissioned to build a real rocket, which was supposed to lift off for the premier, but a fuel tank explosion during a test prevented this ultimate promotion item (1999, p. 184).

Stylistically, *Frau im Mond* attempts to depict space flight realistically as possible by enlisting the help of engineers. Film reviewer Simon Chlosta describes the painstaking lengths taken by Lang to achieve this level of realism:

The film was a hugely expensive feat. For the moonscapes in *Woman in the Moon* for example, he had an entire freight train of sand delivered from the Baltic coast. Moreover, Lang hired space travel pioneer Hermann Oberth as a consultant, as well as science journalist Willy Ley: Oberth had been working to develop a rocket since 1917. It's true that over 30 years were to pass until men actually landed on the moon, but as usual, Lang was ahead of his time (2018, par. 12).

The film became the subject of controversy; in a section on the making of *Frau im Mond*, Ron Miller, author of *Spaceships: An Illustrated History of the Real and the Imagined* explains that the Nazi party decided *Frau im Mond's* depiction of rocket science risked national security in revealing missile building secrets to enemy nations. The film was subsequently banned in 1933 until the end of WWII in 1945:

Meanwhile, all prints of the film were withdrawn from distribution by the Gestapo, who also seized the 5 ft (1.5 m) metal model of the spaceship which was either destroyed or lost during the war (2016, p. 74).

Miller refers to a detailed miniature model of the spacecraft used in the film; close-up shots of the model feature all four sleeping cabins, a motor room, and storage space for the oxygen tanks (see Figure 40).

A great deal of information can be found in Helius' documentary film-within-a-film, which describes all the parts of the rocket, including its engine, nose,

and the ‘egg shaped register chamber where the automatic camera is located’ as well as ‘schematic rendering of the H32 trajectory.’ Such detail is remarkable considering that only four years prior, Hanns Walter Kornblum’s short, quasi-scientific film *A Trip to the Planets* (1925) proposed a rocket operated by two men standing in a cabin, with one turning a hand-cranked motor as an airship levitates within a cylindrical tube (see Figure 41) accompanied by an intertitle that reads ‘We need electric motors strong enough to overcome the pull of the Earth and the Sun.’ In comparison, *Frau im Mond* discloses a considerably more plausible and sophisticated picture of the rocket’s trajectory and interior with an accuracy that was until this point, entirely unprecedented in cinema. In fact, the large-scale multistage rocket which is depicted is essentially a cinematic prototype of the liquid fuel Apollo rockets (see Figure 42).

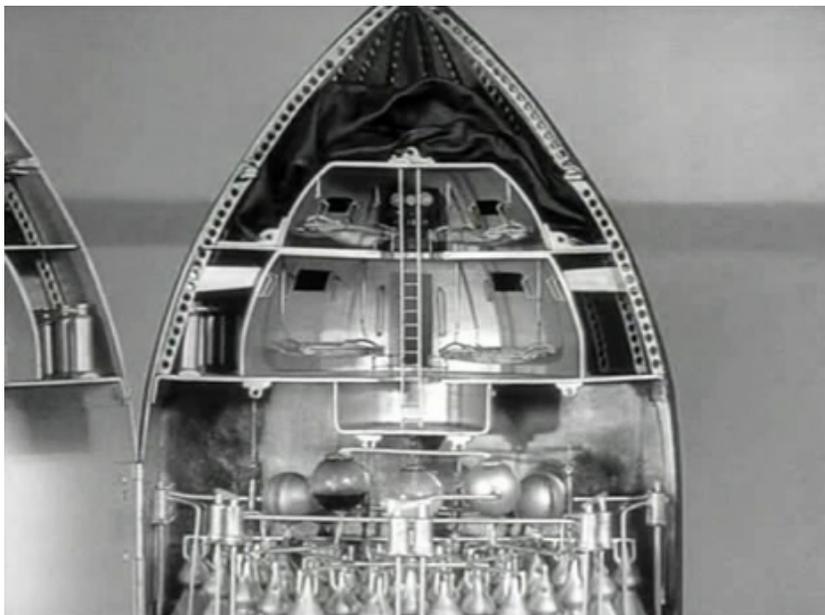


Figure 40: Model rocket used in *Frau im Mond*



Figure 41: Airship in *A Trip to the Planets*



Figure 42: Large Scale Rocket in *Frau im Mond*

3.3.3 Gender and Colonial Fantasy

While the excitable comic touting stowaway, Gustav's, exploratory spirit appears initially detached from the more material adult world, this is not the case; proudly possessing a stack of Mingo comic books in his satchel, Gustav is enthralled by popular colonialist fantasies. Analysing this scene, Luppia writes:

The Mingo comics featuring space travel which the young boy Gustav reads in the film (crucially absent from von Harbou's novel) further points to an engagement of modern technology that is less infused with Helius and Friede's ethos of noble suffering for a greater good than the idea of a popular hero, Captain Mingo of the skies, who takes his modern technology adventures to a new generation of readers embracing a popular mass culture (2011, p. 301).

Popular space comics, of which *Flash Gordon* is the most well-known, play a key role in the cultural history of spaceflight. In the preface to the collected *Flash Gordon* series, cartoonist and comic book artist, Al Williamson attests to the enduring appeal of these images in a discussion of *Flash Gordon's* cartoonist Alex Raymond:

Raymond wove that infatuation into his strip and created his science mythology: He anticipated developments in aeronautics, communications and military science and rendered them colourfully as spacecraft, telescreens, and radium-fueled defence systems. His speculation was close enough to what readers actually saw coming to fruition; *Flash Gordon* was fantastic but it was also a comfortable optimistic extension of the known world (2009, p. 12).

Yet the appeal of these comics extends beyond the fantasy of technology; sci-fi comics are not merely a harbinger of early adolescence, but also the product of adult,

male fantasies. Gustav's comic books are of the same variety as the 1933 American *Flash Gordon* comic series and the film instalments which followed. The enduring appeal of *Flash Gordon* is in part the result of its unabashed portrayal of Western, masculine domination and colonial sentiment; in the comic spreads, the blond, blue-eyed, all-American hero, Flash Gordon, is on a mission to mine Radium, defeat natives, and chart new land masses on planet Mongo. Another factor behind the enduring appeal of sci-fi comic books is the engagement of sexuality to entice viewers, which can be located for instance in the female bodies in tight clothes pressed against the emphatically defined torso of Flash Gordon. Williamson describes the gendered appeal of the women depicted by Alex Raymond within *Flash Gordon*:

His accomplished renderings of human figures, most notably those of graceful, supple young women, finished with a sensuous ink like that seems to caress their forms, are nothing short of erotic. While his figures and poses never became blatant or crass, and were no doubt accepted and admired by a large cross-section of Sunday-morning readers, it was undeniably adolescent males who were the most fundamentally affected by Raymond's skill and the human form (2009, p. 11).

Gustav's alignment with masculinity and frontier fantasies is demonstrated in a different manner in Thea von Harbou's novel, which conveys the boy's misogynistic outlook (whether this is meant to critique early 20th century gender stereotypes in Germany, merely to convey these stereotypes, or serves to reinforce them is not entirely clear):

He did not bother about the girl; although he was much impressed by the fact that Friede Velten did not put herself forward in any way and looked after the needs of the five men in this journey through space, quietly and without speaking much (1928, p. 102).

It is apparent that Gustav counts himself among the ‘five men’ in the crew and views Friede as a passive assistant. Friede's portrayal in the film is, by comparison, far more assertive and progressive. Despite protests for her safety, Frieda insists on accompanying the men on the journey; once aboard the spacecraft, Friede ventures into traditionally masculine territory, wearing a tie, a button-down, a belt, and slacks. Friede is both scientific and heroic – taking measurements for the ship’s log and using her arm to barricade the rocket door in order to keep Turner out of the ship. For Conrad however, Friede’s character merely perpetuates the role of a female mediator in sci-fi:

Women in *Frau im Mond* act as they are expected to act. On Earth, Friede is the passive love interest caught in a triangle between her fiancé, and his friend. In space, she assists men with practical help. On the Moon, her primary role is to intercede regularly between the arguing men in her love triangle. Finally, and most significantly, she conducts the lottery that decides which of the men will have to remain on the moon (2018, p. 38).

I interpret Friede’s mediating abilities in a more optimistic light; perhaps holding, rather than drawing, the straws is evidence that Friede’s choices in the film – such as journeying to the moon, breaking off her engagement to Windegger, and remaining with Helius, are not determined by another person, or left to fate, but rather are empowered choices. In venturing, in men's attire, to the moon, quite possibly never to return, rather than returning to Earth with Windegger, Friede could hardly be more removed from

stereotypical sci-fi images of the wife, mother, and home-maker, confined to the domestic sphere.

Despite the fact that the film was banned by the Nazis, *Frau im Mond* was apparently an inspiration to Werner von Braun's V-2 team, the film's insignia is painted on the side of the V-2 rockets (see Figure 43). The image on the rocket intentionally misconstrues the film's insignia in the feminist cinema character Friede, is transposed into a pornographic image of a nude woman in stockings seated by a rocket; much like the moon she is perched on, the figure of the female nude is framed as an object of ultra-masculine conquest. The reworking of this insignia therefore reveals more about the male fantasies shaping the production of V-2 rockets than it does about the progressive image of Friede.



Figure 43: Historisch-Technisches Museum *Frau im Mond* insignia on V-2

3.3.4 Race in *Frau im Mond*

A dichotomy of purity and evil through a black-and-white colour scheme is also evident in *Frau im Mond*; for instance, Turner is dressed from head to toe in black, signifying his corrupt nature (see Figure 44), while Friede, back on Earth, is always

shown in white dresses denoting purity (see Figures 45). More transparently, skin colour offers a direct indication of character in *Rocket to the Moon*. A detail which omitted in the film but is essential to the novel is Turner's colouration; Rogers and Rogers explain:

Turner is a very deceptive individual: he can disappear from locked rooms, he assumes as many disguises as Sherlock Holmes and his skin colour changes like a chameleon (1977, p. 7).



Figure 44: Turner in black

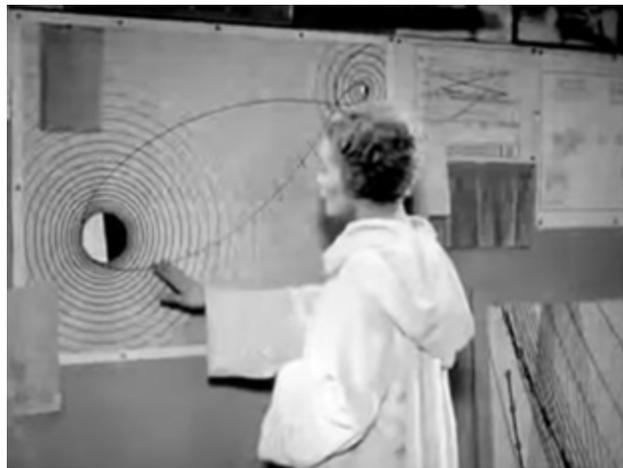


Figure 45: Friede in white

Rogers and Rogers add to this:

Furthermore, many of the colours he apparently assumes are goldlike, but in every instance, they are the colours of false gold, not the true colour of the pure metal (1977, p. 7).

Turner's character in the novel opposes all Aryan ideologies of bodily superiority; he is described as having a 'yellow-brown face,' an 'olive complexion', and his colour is furthermore described as 'thin, greenish ice over deep, muddy poisonous water.' His skin colour, which is cast as a false gold, is used to denote his low worth. Rogers and Rogers discuss the significance of Turner's name within the narrative: 'In German, Turner has two meanings, the usual one is a gymnast, but the colloquial meaning suggests a deceiver or trickster' (1977, p. 6). Turner's deceptive ability to change his skin colour makes him more of a threat than any ordinary enemy of colour; In *Rocket to the Moon*, Helius' description of Turner conveys an openly racist revulsion towards his ambiguous colouration:

The Sneak! I have never seen a face with such mixed traces of origin. He wasn't a Eurasian, or a half-breed, or least of all a mulatto, and yet he seemed to have a little of all of them (1928, p. 19).

3.3.5 Cosmic Liberation

While outer space was established primarily as masculine terrain before the 1920s, the interim between WWI and WWII extended the borders of space from white Euro-American men to a limited number of white Euro-American women, adolescents, and children. For instance, *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936) offers a

glimpse into the year 2036, where humanity has risen from decades of total warfare, banding together to create a habitable, underground metropolis lit by an artificial sun. In Wells' film, the multi-staged 'space gun' aimed at the Moon is regarded as a threat by a subpopulation of protesting Luddites. The film's ambiguous conflation of utopia and dystopia and the debates raised by the characters in *Things to Come* concerning scientific and technological acceleration speak to issues of warfare and eugenics, and also foreshadow real-world debates surrounding progress and space programme which continue in the present day. While calling into question the technological status quo, *Things to Come* defers to the Adam and Eve scenario of space travel similar to that invoked by *Himmelskibet* – with a young, strong, and promising European couple on a mission to reproduce, colonise, and promote Western ideals.

The plot of the early 20th century Soviet sci-fi film *Kosmicheskiy Reys* (Cosmic Voyage) (1936) borrows liberally from *Frau im Mond* right down to the stowaway boy, the female lead, and the damaged oxygen tanks. However, there are a few added twists which are reflective of the Soviet Union's movement to interest the entire nation – including children and women, in space technology, as well as promote the egalitarian values of the USSR. The more whimsical of the two films, *Kosmicheskiy Reys* shows not only a female assistant in space, Marina, and a stowaway boy, Andryusha, but also features 'The Young Astronomers' society consisting of boys and girls (the smallest of which looks no more than four-years-old) (see Figure 46) relaying a vision of space that is accessible to all. Marina, like Friede, appears liberated within the rocket ship – wearing

a spacesuit and floating freely in the ship, jovially declaring ‘What a wonderful feeling it is!’ (see Figure 47).



Figure 46: Young Astronomers Society



Figure 47: Marina liberated

3.3.6 A Cinematic Reality

Virilio cites, as a specific example of the intersection of war, outer space, and cinema, the 'Nostromo' spacecraft in *Alien* (1979): 'Like many cinema ships and vehicles before it, *Nostromo* in *Alien* contained a host of real features from World War Two battleships, tanks, and bombers' (1984, p. 64) including discarded panels and switches. Virilio surmises:

On screen, science-fiction vessels become bright and sonorous plastic, a kind of thorough technological mix which, as with real military equipment, was designed to give the effect of synthesis to a variety of more or less anachronistic components (1984, p. 65).

Quoting actor Hans Zischler, Virilio uses this observation to make the case that 'Film criticism no longer has any meaning, it is reality that has to be analysed in a cinematic way' (qtd. in Virilio 1984, p. 81). Taking Virilio's observations into consideration, it seems the reconstructive transcoding of existing technology into a futuristic space vessel, as viewed through the camera's selective lens, offers a renewed opportunity to investigate reality; thus sci-fi space vessels, apparently from the future, can also be regarded as transmuted images of past and present technological aspirations. The case studies, emerging from the first half of the twentieth century, are a bridge into the routine space operas which persist in the second half of the twentieth century. From the case studies so far, it is evident that America and Europe visited the Moon decades before the space race through colonial, cinematic fantasies, and that the realm of outer space was opened up to women, adolescents, and children, while still remaining exclusively white. This leads into

the next chapter, which explores the viewpoint of the alien 'Other,' examining the first instances of space travel from the perspective of non-white participants.

Chapter 4

A Black Planet: Afronauts and Decolonisation in Independent Films

4.1.1 Decolonising Tourism

So far, it is evident from the examination of selected case studies of early and pre-mid 20th century space films that fantasies of white masculinity involving conquests over new territories and domination over racialized and colonised alien ‘Others’ are pervasive in cinematic constructions of outer space in sci-fi and fantasy, where they may be communicated to spectators through what appears to be the discursive transcoding of socio-political issues. This chapter brings into focus the portrayal of American and European colonialism in science-fiction films discussed in previous chapters, by exploring this topic from a different perspective which emerged in sci-fi cinema primarily from the 1970s onwards – that of the racialized ‘Other.’ In particular, this chapter looks at *Space is the Place* and *The Brother From Another Planet*.

Using these works, this chapter employs a close-textual analysis of case studies involving marginalized, independent, experimental films in which the recurring motif of

the white, spacefaring traveller encountering subordinate, racialized aliens is intentionally reversed and critiqued in the process. The independent nature and the smaller budgets associated with these films allows for more risk-taking and therefore creates room for explicit, critical inquiry into the nature of race relations in the USA. In these films, it is by contrast the 'Other' who encounters and perceives the white colonialist figure, who is in turn constructed as the 'alien' in this power dynamic. This reversal is a form of 'decolonisation' – a term referring to a constructed response to colonialism. Film scholar Olivier Barlet describes the phenomenon of decolonisation in the case of African cinema, in instances where filmmakers attempt to break away from negative stereotypes involving black people which are embedded in American and European culture and which are also used to reinforce and justify colonial sentiment, including films and travelogues involving Africa which portray Africans as dirty and animalistic:

Colonial cinema fed the European audience's appetite for fantasy, escape and exoticism with picturesque, sensational material. An exotic approach is inevitably superior and reductive. Africa is merely a backdrop and the African is an animal (1996, p. 5).

An example of this is the sci-fi horror film *Son of Igagi* (1940), which is progressive in the sense that the protagonist is a wealthy, black, female doctor and the film has a black director and an all-black cast – these strides, however, seem diminished by the fact that the film contains a monster resembling a monkey brought back on a gold-mining from Africa, representing the 'missing link' between ape and humanity. Therefore, 'In order to

decolonise the screen, the African audience had to be offered a new vision of its own space' (Barlet, 1996, p. 39). Barlet (1996) explains how African filmmakers have attempted to convey representations of Africa which breakaway from prevalent, racist Euro-American constructs:

Colonialism has been a dispossession of space, a deprivation of identity. The aim was to reclaim the territory so that the audience could identify with it. By showing them images of home, the cinema helped them recover their cultural identity (p. 39).

The aim of decolonisation in the cinema is therefore to simultaneously examine and break away from habitual and destructive patterns in representation to foster fresh ways of looking and understanding. The selected cases studied in this chapter concern the decolonisation of 'Othered' bodies in science-fiction cinema, in particular, that of the African-American who, as the result of racist sentiment, has been deliberately written out of Euro-American discourses of film and literature. To bring light to this lost perspective, this chapter offers a close-textual analysis of depictions of African-American 'aliens' in cinema who offer new narrative perceptions of outer space – for instance, by arriving on Earth without preconceived notions of African history, or by escaping to decolonised zones in outer space. The films examined here are mainly independent films which, for the most part, been omitted from full-length studies and critical discussions of science-fiction, leaving a distorted picture of the historiography of race in cinema which perpetuates the notion of outer space as exclusively 'white' territory populated by

aggressive, racialized aliens who are, in many instances, captured, ‘tamed’ and even enslaved. Many examples in this chapter are reversals of the clichéd iconography of a white, masculine presence in outer space, furthering an understanding of thematic aspects space travel relating to colonialism and tourism in instances whereby the African-American male is depicted as a space ‘tourist’ uncovering the Universe from his own perspective, devising his own sources of technology.

The year 1977 sparked a resurgence of white colonial fantasies in science-fiction cinema beginning with George Lucas’ *Star Wars*, which modernized and popularized the long-standing parable of Western dominance and expansion over spaces ruled by dark forces as signified by the image of racialized aliens. In *Framing Blackness*, a study devoted to uncovering the African-American image in cinema, film historian Ed Guerrero delves into the symbolism structuring George Lucas’ *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977) film, underlining black/ white dichotomy framing *Star Wars*, which fosters an ideological return to conservatism in the post-Vietnam War Era:

But the stark realization of the possibility of a “final solution” to the earth’s color problem is emphasized in *Star Wars*, in which white people, particularly white males, are constructed as the sole and sovereign human norm, contrasted to “Wookies” and an assorted myriad of exotic creatures and humanoids, especially as depicted in the film’s memorable bar scene (1993, p. 117-118).

Not only does race figure as a prominent theme in such scenes, but Guerrero further contends that *Star Wars* is a symbolic parable for white domination:

Race figures in *Star Wars* as a Manichean allegory, with the construction of whiteness as good and most specifically associated with Princess Leia in her flowing white gown, as contrasted with the evil, symbolically concentrated in the black armour of the nefarious Darth Vader and his black space station, The Death Star (1993, p. 117).

Guerrero's suggestion that *Star Wars* is laden with racist and sexist undercurrents is predictable, considering that themes of white men exploring and conquering outer space have predominated since the earliest depictions of outer space on-screen beginning with Méliès' satirical constructions of European men gazing into space with telescopes and traveling to other planets. The villain in *Star Wars*, Darth Vader, can be read as an updated reconstruction of the threatening, oversexed, black Brute – a cinematic construction dating at least as far back as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1927):

Underscoring the racial quality of this polarity, not only is Darth Vader's armour black, but so is his menacing, sonorous voice, provided by James Earl Jones. The light-dark conflict expressed as a sexual threat to the purity and sanctity of the white woman is refigured yet again as white-clad, and white, Princess Leia is captured by the intensely black Dark Vader, who wields a phallic needle and threatens to penetrate her mind (Guerrero, 1993, p. 118).

The colonial fantasy perpetuated by the film seems to be echoed in Ronald Reagan's 1983 'Star Wars' initiative – a plan to shoot X-ray laser beams at incoming nuclear missiles. While Guerrero's reading of *Star Wars* as parable for black versus white, alongside his interpretation of Princess Leia as a helpless victim are oversimplified arguments which call for a more nuanced interpretation of these topics, it is essential to

point out that the case studies covered in this chapter deliberately elide *Star Wars* and other mainstream space films to focus on the far less popular but more unique case of the African-American cinematic space-wayfarer. Drawing on Ryan and Kellner's understanding of cinema as a metaphorical representation of existing social reality, this chapter homes in on the ideological significance of the African-American space traveller to describe the latent social and cultural function of this rarefied tradition within the expansive, metaphorical landscape of science-fiction cinema. The selected examples will be analysed to uncover three ways in which the radical restructuring of the symbolic signifiers of cinematic space travel and tourism (white males, rockets, racialized aliens, and NASA) are used to explore the socio-political transformations associated with African-American racialized identity.

The selected works are worth interrogating due to their opportune timing, overlapping with an accelerated period of change in NASA's space programme, which incorporated attempts to diversify the space programme, as well as a shift from rocket ships to reusable space shuttles. The enthusiasm generated by Gene Roddenberry's television series, *Star Trek* (1966-1969), with its ethnically diverse cast which includes the black female Lieutenant, Uhura, inspired Reagan's limited attempts at the 'democratization' and 'diversification' of the American astronaut programme during the Cold War era, an effort which was also intended to encourage women and minorities to pursue careers in science and mathematics. The selected case studies also stem from a significant historical turning-point evident in the increase in African-American

representation in popular culture, emerging amid the Black Arts movement, Black nationalist movements, affirmative action legislature, and the rising popularity of Blaxploitation cinema. Furthering an understanding of how the most important developments in technological and cultural history are represented in cinema using the trope of space travel, this chapter first outlines the historical underpinnings of the selected case studies and introduces examples which will be analysed and contextualised within a succession of sci-fi space films, to ask whether the films stemming from this time period reflect the sentiments of African-American towards the NASA programme, which remained exclusively white until Guion (Guy) Bluford – the first black astronaut – travelled to space in 1983.

4.1.2 NASA and Symbolism in Sci-Fi Cinema

With the understanding that film has the ability to transmit diverging perspectives, this chapter makes the case that the selected case studies offer insight into the cinematic, symbolic coding of black social reality in the USA, putting forward different perspectives concerning what African-Americans might do to advance within a repressive, predominantly white society, suggesting conflicting desires for escapism and integration, peaceful cohabitation and militarism, a mastery of the arts and a mastery of the sciences – even simultaneously, within the same film. Because the NASA logo is most often

synonymous with technological development and scientific progress in media and popular culture, it remains unsurprising that NASA is transcoded as a beacon of intellectual and ideological importance across science-fiction. In *NASA/Trek* (1997), a study on the relationship between NASA and *Star Trek*, media scholar Constance Penley articulates several important ways in which the popular television series *Star Trek* (1966-1969) has been reimagined in popular culture and has set the precedent for real-world developments in NASA's trajectory, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. With the underlying assertion that *Star Trek* has become one of the most enduring pop culture phenomena in prompting social transformation and encouraging NASA to align itself ideologically with the series' utopian aspiration of universal cooperation, Penley makes a convincing case for why NASA's appearance in the popular imagination of space is key in formulating a cohesive, public consciousness contributing to a symbolic understanding of technological development in its totality:

I start with the claim that “going into space” – both the actuality of it and the science-fiction realization – has become the prime metaphor through which we try to make sense of the world of science and technology and imagine a place for ourselves in it. The yearning to get a personal grip on that seemingly distant realm can be seen everywhere in popular culture and everyday life, if one only knows how to recognize it and, at least provisionally, accept it on its own terms (Penley, 1997, p. 5).

The desire for a shared understanding of technology and science, according to Penley has led to a ‘symbolic merging’ (1997, p. 16) of fact and science-fiction that offers clear evidence of discursive transcoding, whereby fiction becomes incorporated into reality,

shaping American national discourse as well as the trajectory of the NASA programme. *Star Trek* has inserted its dominant, utopian ideologies into NASA in a convergence of the real-world and science-fiction which Penley refers to as ‘NASA/Trek’ a ‘force’ that ‘shapes our popular and institutional imaginings about space exploration by humanizing our relation to science and technology’ (1997, p. 16).

Penley’s discussion of the ‘NASA/Trek’ phenomenon references the popular television series *Star Trek* in demonstrating this humanizing relationship between utopian trends in popular fictions and subsequent developments in NASA’s agenda, leaving a skewed understanding of NASA’s representation in science-fiction and popular science. It is crucial to point out that *Star Trek* is one fictional contribution out of a great many that have influenced the popular imagination and directed the trajectory of the space exploration, thus Penley’s insightful treatment of the topic remains restricted to the fields of television and fandom studies, leaving a gap in the critical understanding of NASA symbolism by drawing on what is perhaps the most utopian vision of the space programme on television, while neglecting to call attention to the equally important subject of NASA’s representation within film. The role that film plays in the popular imagination of space, race and the trajectory of the space programme is no less significant than that of television, yet NASA’s depiction within film is considerably less utopian than in *Star Trek*. The films examined in this chapter rewrite the utopian image of NASA and the associated cinematic symbolism used to transcode ‘real-world’ space travel, confronting issues such as ideological ambiguities and institutional prejudices in

race and gender as evinced by the ceremonial glorification of the white, male astronaut – portrayed in popular culture as the crowning glory of human endeavour.

Using the medium of film in a self-reflexive manner, the case studies in this chapter exist in reaction to a history of exclusively white cinematic astronaut figures in films spanning from early cinema until the 1970s. When imagined from an African-American perspective, cinematic space travel rejects and rewrites the traditional, white-washed American signifiers associated with scientific pursuit, and distances itself from the domineering ideological framework of NASA's narrative of space exploration. Rather than being a symbol of progress and achievement in the selected examples, NASA represents racial divide and is portrayed as an impediment to the upward mobility of people of colour. Furthermore, the case studies refigure the sci-fi symbolism associated with the white male astronaut, reconstructing him as the ultimate signifier of social inequality, at times, a direct threat to the African-American male. Countering images of space travel until the 1950s which portrayed space travel as an exclusively white, privileged endeavour, the black male 'astronaut' in the selected examples instead achieves upward mobility in a literal and/or figurative sense. Thus, the selected examples portray alternative means of transportation to outer space for African-Americans that can be achieved independently of NASA's impossibly selective astronaut programme, in which physical attributes including colour, size, strength, height, weight, gender, sight and sexuality have, for decades, determined who may become an astronaut. In a self-reflexive manner, black space travellers in science-fiction cinema are shown devising

inventive methods of space travel which arise in reaction to the highly restrictive parameters existing around space imagery in science-fiction cinema, alongside the historical erasure and diminishment of black skin from the genre of science-fiction, and from cinema more generally.

4.2 *Space is the Place* Summary

John Coney's film *Space is the Place* is an experimental film which is unprecedented due to a combination of factors – firstly, it is an art film which gives a voice to marginalized groups, particularly the African-American populace in Oakland, California. The film is a low-budget mash-up of the seemingly incompatible Afrofuturist and Blaxploitation genres. Because *Space is the Place* is an independent film, its experimental narrative and stylistic structure offer a dramatic departure from the formulaic plots offered by mainstream Hollywood. Hollywood minimises the presence of divisive subject matter (such as racism in America, government deception, wealth inequality, and the oppression of the working class) in favour of conspicuously flag-waving narratives such as *Independence Day*, which skim over problematic discourses, instead focusing on patriotism and the production of visually enticing spectacles and action sequences designed to appeal to families with children, in an effort to rake in profits at the box office and recoup many millions spent on production.

Hollywood films are known for extravagant sets and lengthy special effects sequences, recruiting repeatedly from the same pool of venerated 'Star' actors and actresses, who are overwhelmingly white. Independent films, crafted on considerably smaller budgets, are far more suited for recruiting ethnically diverse casts and generating creative and often heated subject matter, at the expense of reaching a smaller, more eclectic audience, and as a result are capable of raising awareness surrounding repressed societal issues.

Space is the Place is a collaboration between producer and art curator, Jim Newman, and one-time director, John Coney, a long-time California television producer. Newman conceived of the film specifically for the experimental art series 'Delexi', a collaborative effort conceived by Coney and Newman, in which musicians and artists including Andy Warhol and Frank Zappa created a series of films bringing experimental, art-house films to San Francisco TV stations in 1969. The idea initially arose from Newman's plans to film a Sun Ra live performance inside of a planetarium, an idea which eventually developed into a full-fledged film (Newman and Coney, 2003). The screenwriter hired on the production, Joshua Smith, shared with Ra an interest in the Blaxploitation genre, which was designed to appeal to African-American audiences, partly accounting for the film's thematically divergent subplot involving a black, pimp Overseer aligned with white, capitalist values. While the Blaxploitation genre which was popularized in the 1970s offered leading roles to African-Americans and incorporated primarily black casts, the genre is characterized by negative portrayals of African-Americans as oversexed pimps, gangsters, prostitutes, and drug addicts.

Space is the Place is scored and written in part by the noted African-American poet, teacher, musician, and philosopher, Sun Ra, leader of the theatrical jazz band, the Intergalactic Myth-Science Solar Arkestra,¹⁶ a revolving door of musicians known for glamorous space-age costumes that served as a visual entry into their performative and curiously non-traditional interpretation of jazz. The Arkestra's songs, consisting of bizarre tonalities and space-age themed lyrics are used to score the film. *Space is the Place* is an outer space-themed film representing a marginalized population; as the result of its limited commercial appeal, the film has never reached a large audience. As film scholar Jamie Sexton points out in a study of the film's reception over recent decades:

Considering that *Space is the Place* was so firmly based around an esoteric black mythology, and featured a dissonant soundtrack, it was perhaps no surprise that it was played only a few times in New York and San Francisco before disappearing (2006, p. 202).

Sexton's account of the film's reception does not however note its more perceptible influence overseas among art enthusiasts. In an interview, actor Ray Johnson, who plays the role of the cosmic Overseer recalls that during the film's premiere in a Hollywood palace in San Francisco 'Most people liked it because it was definitely different. It's about the most different movie you are ever going to see – the themes and the actions' (Phillips and Johnson, 2014, p. 38). Johnson further recalls:

After the premiere it really played in Europe. The Europeans really responded really well because of Sun Ra - they knew him in Europe. The

¹⁶ The band goes by dozens of variations of this name

Europeans, they always respond well to art that is different. And that was definitely different (2014, p. 38).

Space is the Place gradually fell into obscurity until it was re-released on video in 1997, and then in 2003 on DVD with restored scenes and colour. Sexton attributes the early dismissal of the film to poor acting and the interjection of ‘trashy’ subject matter, detracting from the film’s deeper meaning; ‘*Space is the Place* was certainly cheaply made, shows evidence of poor construction in places, and is also linked to exploitative content (elements of blaxploitation and sexploitation)’ (2006, p. 209). However, it is the film’s messiness, low-budget stylistic excesses and overall ‘trashy’ quality, as well as its connection to Sun Ra’s music and philosophy, and a growing academic interest in race relations that lead to the film’s unique status as ‘a cult film by proxy’ following Ra’s death in 1993: ‘This is a film that has gained its cult status primarily through its relation to other media, in this case music’ (Sexton, 2006, p.198). The cult status of the film means that it has found reception in audiences who are interested in viewing works which resist or oppose the dominant ideologies of class, sex, and race found in mainstream Hollywood, which recycles the same ‘stars’ and tend to avoid controversial discourses.

The premise of *Space is the Place* is as follows: a mystical African-American man (played by Sun Ra himself) returns from an intergalactic space colony founded for the liberation of black refugees from Earth. Ra visits a jazz club in 1943 Chicago, to play a card game called ‘End of the World’ against his enemy, the black pimp, Overseer. The long-standing opponents materialize in a surreal and timeless desertscape, alluding to the

medieval protagonist's drawn-out chess game against Death in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). Making a metaphorical connection between the fate of African-Americans and certain death, Ra and the Overseer draw cards to determine a series of events shaping the fate of humankind. Ra's winning hand grants him his wish – to return to the past and broadcast a live concert to listeners worldwide intended to alter the course of history. Ra's future-bound spacecraft descends in 1972, Los Angeles. To the people of Oakland, Ra proclaims himself the “alter-destiny” sharing the universal language of new music with Earth, offering an alternate future to the depressed African-American underclass traversing Oakland's impoverished cityscape.

Ra and his groupies set up an employment agency booth where Ra conducts interviews for his space agency, urging African-Americans to spare themselves from a future of unrelenting socioeconomic oppression. As his movement gains media attention, Ra is kidnapped by two FBI agents sent by NASA to assassinate him and put an end to African-American advancement into space, however he is freed from captivity by a group of black teens. While Ra survives the FBI's assassination attempt carried out during his performance, a black teenager attempting to protect Ra is killed by a stray bullet. This string of events prompts Ra to forcibly teleport the planet's African-American populace inside of his spaceship. As the spaceship leaves for the uncharted colony, the film ends with a shot of Earth bursting into flames.

4.2.1 Afronauts, or Alternative Astronauts

The character Sun Ra mysteriously resurfaces from another galaxy which exists in a future timeline, warning of the inevitable failure of tellurian institutions to design a world in which blacks ‘exist.’ Ra harnesses the vibrations of electronic music, rather than liquid fuel, to propel his spaceship, playing the electronic Moog synthesizer while his ‘Arkestra’ broadcasts lyrical refrains conceived from an alien perspective. Throughout the film’s duration, Ra tours Oakland’s decrepit streets, recounting human history from the perspective of a learned alien refugee. Stylistically, the piece imagines outer space in the manner of a B-rated sci-fi film, depicting a distant planet filled with exotic plants, alien creatures, bright colours, giant, floating bubbles, and cheaply-made costumes. In an interview, director John Coney (Coney and Newman, 2003) discusses the inspiration driving the film’s aesthetic qualities:

The special effects for this film were an homage to cheesy science-fiction features of the 50s and 60s – one of my favourite genres – Robert L. Lippert’s *Rocketship XM*, *Cat-Women from Outer Space*, that kind of material. So, in a sense, this film, besides the raw philosophy, is in part a satire of those films. But the genre happens to fit organically, directly with the Ra myth, so it is, I think, a wonderful marriage of style and form (Newman and Coney, 2003).

The beginning of the film echoes sci-fi visions of the 1950s and 1960s which defaulted to cheaply made costumes, miniaturized rocket ships taking off into the stars, and painted intergalactic landscapes with strange looking fauna. Satirizing sci-fi films of the 1950s and 1960s, *Space is the Place* opens with Ra walking through a surreal forest landscape

(see Figures 48-51) where he relays the history of the space colony in which he resides, which is host to an exclusively black faction that has broken away from a destroyed Earth as hinted by the lyrical refrain ‘it's after the end of the world, don't you know that yet?’ John Coney explains that the film's appearance was achieved by a team of technicians in San Francisco working with 16 mm film, adding:

The special effects for this film clearly were done on the cheap, but they were done by some very talented people. Making the spaceship land was done by the old blue screen technique where you shoot a background plate which is a moving scene, and then you shoot the model in front of a blue screen and then you make a number of strips of film that allow you to superimpose it without it being obvious. It's called the travelling matte process (Newman and Coney, 2003).



Figure 48: Conversing with Death



Figure 49: Exotic Plant Species



Figure 50: Trees



Figure 51: Intergalactic Forest

In the next scene, Ra is depicted floating through space in a relaxed pose, wearing a ‘spacesuit’ consisting of a shimmering silver, headdress and blue cloak, intended to be beautiful rather than functional (see Figure 52). Ra does not require a helmet or oxygen tank to breathe; instead he appears to be mummified, suspended in a cocoon-like wrapping. In this scene, Ra is unlike any white, sci-fi astronaut, resembling instead a corpse buried within the blackness of space, resting peacefully, nestled away from the inharmonic prison-like environment of Earth and its plethora of unbearable sound frequencies.



Figure 52: *Sun Ra Orbiting Space*

4.2.2 Black Death

Death, both literal and figurative, is invoked again in the film's opening scenes; Ra ominously refers to outer space as 'the endless void, the bottomless pit surrounding you.' Furthermore, a black-hooded figure donning a mirror instead of a face stalks Ra in his space colony as Ra converses with the figure (see Figure 53). This mirrored-figure is identical to the reflective Grim Reaper (see Figure 54) in Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), a surrealist short switching imperceptibly between reality and dream, where the hooded-figure, Death, represents an omniscient, knowing perspective determining one's temporal existence in a fluid reality – a theme that is echoed in Ra's distant perceptions of Earth as a planet with a changeable destiny. Because he has emerged from the future to alter the past, one might consider Ra not of this planet and therefore, dead already.



Figure 53: 'Death' 'haunting' Ra's colony



Figure 54: Reaper in *Meshes of the Afternoon*

The film's recurring theme of Egyptology mentally dredges up mummified corpses, hieroglyphic tablets, and the *Book of the Dead*, containing individuality tailored illustrations and spells intended to guide the deceased to paradise in the afterlife. For Ra, death and being born with black skin are one and the same – blackness points to erasure and to the 'dark side' – spirits, myths, disappearances, and other mysterious, often negative, paranormal happenings. Literature scholar, Andre M. Carrington, author of *Speculative Blackness* (2016) discusses the long-standing, historical relationship between the tropes of blackness and death in African-American literature and performance, drawing on Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) – a haunting story describing the apparition of a little girl who was killed by her mother, an escaped slave about to be recaptured, under the conviction that death would be 'safer' for her daughter than a lifetime of enslavement.¹⁷ Carrington argues that the connection between blackness and

¹⁷ A narrative based on the true story of the escaped civil war slave Margaret Garner

supernatural subject matter is expounded within narratives involving the psychology of loss across a range of African-American literature:

The persistence of haunting in culture provides the impetus for research into some of the dilemmas that characterize blackness, such as trauma, premature death, and diminished life changes (1987, p. 27).

Carrington elaborates on how birth, death, memory, and loss have been used to interrogate and articulate the 'black experience':

Haunted states and spaces of negation characterize these works, but the power of knowledge that is irreconcilable with everyday life also lends itself to tropes like ancestry, pregnancy, destiny, and prophecy, linking some of these speculative fictions of Blackness with mythology and utopia. They share a common reliance on the evidence of things not seen. These practices identify Blackness with a broader than normal scope of possibilities rather than a truncated range of meanings (1987, p. 27).

Space is the Place explores the historical associations between death and the 'black experience' of America, conflating 'black' skin with the elusive 'blackness' of outer space which conjures the absence of things, erasure, physical death, and ventures into unknown territory. Ra's relocation to space seems to suggest that blacks must willingly be subjected to a collective death of the Earthly ego, severing ties to a historical past by operating outside of the institutional forces that have historically marginalized them. To do so, it seems necessary to use one's outward blackness and its associated history of erasure from the media and other institutions to blend into the mysterious, inchoate 'blackness' of outer space.

4.2.3 Sounds of Space

Sun Ra's fanatical obsession with the power of music in the film seems to suggest that the most effective way to annihilate the ego and merge with space is to be catapulted to other worlds through sound – Ra's use of music as a solution to injustice suggests that artistic talent and the appreciation of music are the sources of inspiration African-Americans require to create and exist within an altered reality. In the 1970s Ra delivered a series of lectures at Berkeley entitled 'Black Man in the Cosmos'; one talk in the series, entitled 'The Power of Words' describes a bias against black people that remains evident in the English language and its associated documents, including the Constitution.¹⁸ To recognize the harmful impact of these subtle but influential leanings in language, Ra advocated for education in etymology, particularly in Ancient Egyptian texts to unearth these biased distortions. Director John Coney recalls that during the film's production, Ra 'wrote all of his own lines in the film' conferring his personal belief system (Newman and Coney, 2003). Ra's claim (in the film) to originate from a distant colony is an interesting biographical detail, considering that Ra maintained throughout his life the identity of a displaced, homesick alien, incarnating from the rings of Saturn. Echoing Ra's life as a jazz musician who experimented with new instruments

¹⁸ For instance, Ra contends that 'good' people implicates white citizens

in attempting to affect social change through new sounds and rhythms, Ra's performance in the film reflects a lifelong devotion to making music intended to inspire the African-American community to create a 'new planet':

Ra's interest in science-fiction was also linked to his belief that African-Americans, because they had been virtually written out of history, should be prepared to write themselves in the future. He thus stressed the importance of becoming proficient in a range of technologies, so that African-Americans could play a part in engineering their own futures, rather than letting whites construct them (Sexton, 2006, p. 5).

In alignment with Ra's personal philosophy, the film's proposed solution for economic and social inequality among blacks is a new technological mastery of space, where outer space can be accessed in new ways. Ra, in the production, explores the potential of outer space through the mastery of music, a competence allowing him to conduct his exploration of space independently of NASA. Ra's colony exists in reaction to a society where African-Americans are an underclass associated with crime, poverty, and militant movements which have interfered with the potential for prodigious music to be made on Earth: Ra says, at the beginning of the film:

The music is different here, the vibrations different. Not like Planet Earth. Planet Earth sounds of guns, anger, and frustration. There was no one to talk to on planet Earth to understand. We set up a colony for black people here... see what they can do with a planet all their own, without any white people.

4.2.4 Interspace and Decolonisation

Ra's colony similarly represents a space that is nascent in the imagination, drawing on the intangible nature of sound vibrations and their fleeting disappearance to convey an escape into the utopia of a distant galaxy. To achieve this level of freedom, such a space must necessarily be so far away that it is, both mentally and physically, imperceptible to those who desire to reach it. Ra's colony is an example of a decolonised sphere, existing to correct Earth's unjust social constructions. In the film, outer space takes on a new significance in comparison to films like *Star Wars*, becoming an expansive indicator of freedom and novelty, rather than a diminishing object of conquest; rather than describing new discoveries in space, Ra's vague conversations about outer space leave the subject full of mystery.

Ra's colony might be compared to the perilous 'zones' in Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979) from which mysterious objects and beings materialize, and as well as spaces such as the five-dimensional 'tesseract' and the distant, twin-Earths portrayed in Mike Cahill's *Another Earth* (2011), Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), and Alex Garland's *Annihilation* (2018). Inchoate space is, for some of the protagonists of these films, a hidden utopia, assuming the form of a restricted and remote area, that if reached, might grant the deepest desires of its visitors, unknown to even the visitors themselves. In seeming (paradoxically) impossible to reach and yet still attainable, these 'zones' further represent hope for individuals, particularly those coming from

economically or politically devastated areas and backgrounds, conjuring spaces that are politically uninhabited, and void of greed and corruption. Anthropology and African-American studies scholar John F. Szwed, author of the biographic account entitled *The Lives and Times of Sun Ra*, reflects on Afrofuturism's preoccupation with ancient civilizations, including Egypt which held a special significance for Ra:

Artistic creation involves the search for a zone, a space, in which to create, an area open to imagination and revelation. In this quest, the African-American artists find many spaces already occupied, closed down to them, and those still open restricted, tarnished, already interpreted – as when black artists find their work treated merely as “social,” as nothing more than “functional” or “political art.” One liberatory space still left to them is Ancient Egypt, since a partially and sketchily drawn history of the ancient world helps to keep it open (1998, p. 137).

Drawing on this notion of Ancient Egypt, Ra's colony of artistry is a positive incarnation of space's unlimited potential, remaining a utopian arena unfettered by the impurities of American culture. Ra assures his people that, with the protective vibrations of new sounds, they will exist in a peaceful realm without the constraints of racism and capitalism; ‘Everything you have ever desired but never have received will be yours in outer space.’

In metaphorically inhabiting this free and non-existent space, Ra's fantastic planet represents a *decolonised* space. The term decolonisation in its broadest sense speaks to a process of freeing thought-processes, public spaces, institutions, media outlets, and cinema from oppressive, colonial forces; in line with this, Ra's planet evades the

presumptions about African-Americans perpetuated in Euro-American media and culture. It is interesting to note that the real-life version of Sun Ra was a living testament to decolonisation on a personal level; Ra burned his birth certificate and social security card and was also relieved of his services to the army.¹⁹ Reflecting his philosophy of decolonisation, in the film Ra rejects the monetary system ‘we don’t really have salaries in our commission... we creators never receive anything by work’ – and further disavows the concept of time, explaining ‘we work on the other side of time.’

4.2.5 Black Space and Social Erasure

The notion of decolonisation imagined in *Space is the Place* constitutes an interesting reversal of a common premise anchoring a long history of sci-fi films depicting white characters relocating to segregationist colonies in space. This narrative trope is discussed at length by author and African-American studies scholar, Adilifu Nama in his analysis of the structured absence of black characters in science-fiction cinema which focuses on the social importance of the historic erasure of blacks in science-fiction. Nama cites *When Words Collide* (Rudolph Mate, 1951) as a straightforward example of this premise, in which a group of exclusively white characters obtain inside knowledge of Earth’s imminent collision with a star, and construct space

¹⁹ Recounted in a biographical work by Paul Youngquist (2016) where Ra expresses his religious and spiritual objections to war.

'arks' bound for the planet Bellus. Considering that blacks and other minority characters are omitted from the selection process framing all cinematic sci-fi futures in space up until the 1960s, Nama argues that, rather than sidestepping the issue of race, *When Worlds Collide* is in fact saturated with the imagery and ideology of Euro-American expansion and domination. I would extend Nama's argument to point out that this trend began much earlier than the 1950s, with films like *Le Voyage dans la Lune* and *Himmelskibet*. Nama's symbolic analysis of science-fiction films reveals that the deliberate erasure of African-American lives and interests from these technoscientific futures is integral to the visual portrayal of manifest destiny:

But what is overlooked is how such films also reflect a sublimated racial anxiety as the civil rights movement and the push for racial equality have gained momentum. Having only white Americans survive a planetary disaster reveals *When Worlds Collide* as a segregationist racial fantasy. At the same time, the film reflects the racial politics of segregation rooted in the rigid racial hierarchies of 1950s America (2006, p. 157).

The message of such narratives can be understood by filling in the unwritten implications, especially at the end of such films – non-whites who have been erased and ignored are presumably left to perish (or else have become extinct eons ago). Using a predominantly black cast, *Space is the Place* interjects new meanings into the antiquated tropes and symbols characterizing the sci-fi trope of space travel – in particular, the NASA program is subverted by Ra's own space programme serving the needs of African-Americans. A number from the Arkestra is broadcast through loudspeakers to

recruit participants, musically transposing the poetry of Sun Ra, ‘If you find the Earth boring, just the same old same thing, come on, sign up to Outer Spaceways Incorporated.’ The name ‘Outer Spaceways Inc.’ is used satirically, considering that the agency operates outside of corporate interests, serving as a foil to NASA’s agenda.

In *Space is the Place*, NASA symbolizes bigotry rather than a utopian future as evident when two, white, male undercover agents are sent by NASA to steal Ra’s new technology, assassinate Ra, and end his mission of back advancement. One of these agents sarcastically assures a black prostitute, shortly before physically assaulting her, ‘As a matter of fact, we got a programme right now to put a coon on the moon by June!’ This bigoted use of sarcasm, as well as the derogatory racial slur ‘coon’ suggests that NASA’s plans to send the first black astronaut to space in the 1980s operated under a thin veneer of equality, whereby blacks would be tolerated, rather than incorporated into a new and radically progressive vision of universal cooperation. In proposing and demonstrating new technology that is vastly superior to existing space technology (NASA only made it as far as the Moon while Sun Ra transcends space-time, emerging from another galaxy altogether) Ra’s alien nature, blackness and transcendent philosophy of music threaten NASA’s associated history of white, male privilege.

Ra’s ‘spacesuit’ is a far cry from the cumbersome, aseptic, white suit of the conventional astronaut figure, instead recalling mythical imagery of African princes and Egyptian pharaohs (see Figure 55). Donning a Sphinx headdress, Ra projects into the future the history of Ancient Egypt to corroborate his insistence that black people on

Earth 'are a myth' and 'do not exist,' making further references to the fact that African-Americans have historically been enslaved, stripped of rights (including the right to vote) and been excluded from various institutions, including NASA. Ra's gold and silver embellishments and elaborate, bright, patterned fabrics indicate that the black 'colonists' have achieved prosperity in space and tapped a fountain of knowledge within a budding intergalactic civilization. Invoking the sphinx, a mythical creature symbolically tied to ruthlessness, indicates that Ra is less benevolent than his soft-spoken demeanour would suggest; quietly outraged by the systematic forces of oppression, Ra is intent on carrying out his mission of forcefully teleporting African-Americans to space.

Sun Ra is perhaps the ultimate signifier of blackness as alienation; in person, Ra claimed to be a literal alien throughout his life: 'I'm not human. I've never been part of the planet. I've been isolated as a child away from it' (Ra quoted in Youngquist 2016, p. 8). Ra's alternative spaceship and costume, technology, and understanding of space offer a passageway to space for blacks, who have been historically excluded not only from NASA's astronaut programme but countless other educational and scientific institutions. Ra's ship (see Figure 56) in contrast to the white, phallic shuttles and rockets associated with NASA, is a decorative piece with a vibrant exterior coloured like a pair of bright luminescent eyes, in stark contrast to the cold and dead, mechanized image of a rocket. Sun Ra's vocabulary of space travel is a satirical play on scientific terminology, using inventive jargon including 'transmolecularization,' and 'isotope teleportation' to describe the notion of musical transport. Extending this satire, Ra's space endeavours require little

effort, compared to NASA's multi-billion-dollar feats that were underway in the 1970s, during the film's production. Solidifying the notion of Ra's agency as a foil to NASA, Ra's method of space travel is continually contrasted with NASA's techniques throughout the film's duration. As Sun Ra's ship lands in California two minutes past the scheduled arrival time, a newscaster of an all-black radio station comments, that Ra 'apparently is not quite as efficient as our own NASA people' – a statement that (despite being spoken by a black character) hints at a history of institutional prejudice towards blacks, where the discriminatory misuse of 'science' has resulted in eugenic notions that blacks are inferior at technology and academia. Further to this, the term 'efficient' is used here to connote productivity within the framework of market-oriented ideology. Sun Ra's extreme distaste for institutions is visibly apparent when he lands his spaceship directly beside the 'sector-5 government building' where Ra, presenting as an alternative world leader, reveals his plans 'for the salvation of the black race.'



Figure 55: Sun Ra's mythical space attire

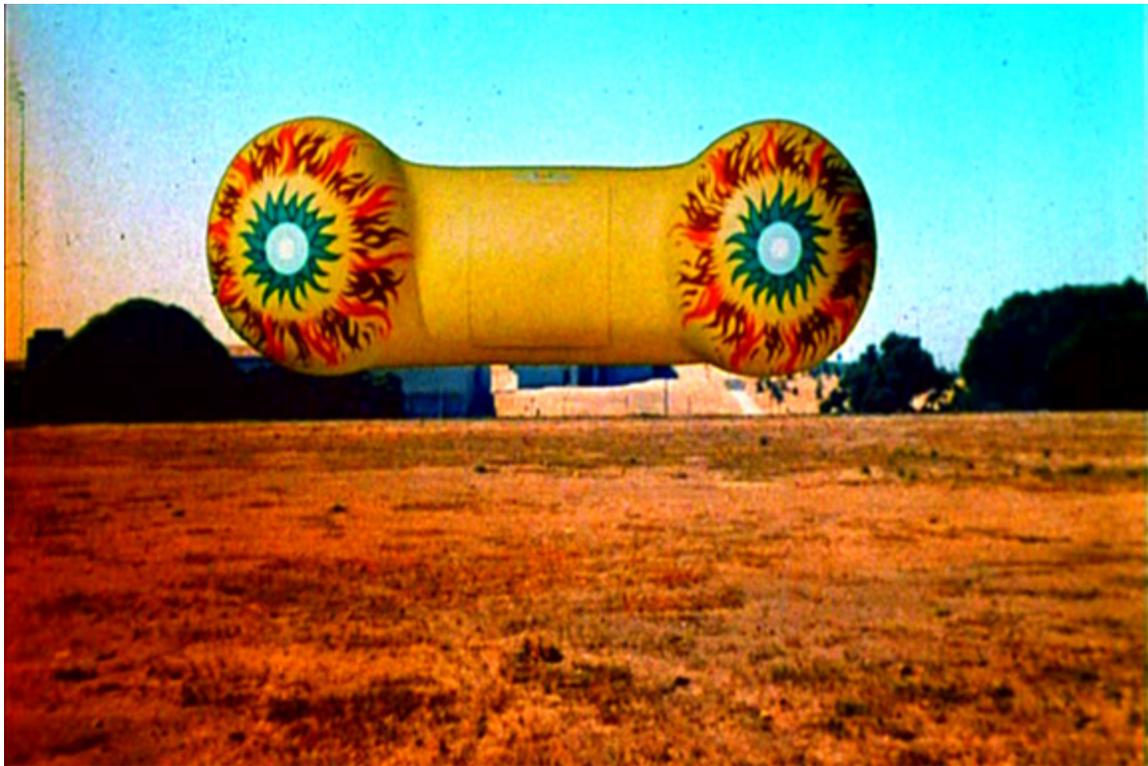


Figure 56: Sun Ra's spaceship

The film's focus on black interests indicates that while the Black Power Movement during the 1960s and 1970s did not result in the eradication of systemic prejudice, it did much to raise awareness to the topic of black representation in the arts and culture, particularly as these movements were transcoded to science-fiction cinema. Sci-fi worlds until the 1950s were characterized by the structured absence of African-Americans reflecting, for instance, the spatial organization of 1950s white suburbia. In his work entitled *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space* (2003) literature scholar De Witt Douglas Kilgore draws on examples of German futurism of the 1930s and 1940s, and popular science in America to explain that in science-fiction and scientific texts 'Euro-American men have been the dominant, and certainly the most visible players in the production of space futures' (2003, p. 16). Following from this observation, Kilgore poses the question:

By speaking off their own particular position within white European and American culture, are these writers talking only to themselves, imagining an expansion of their privileges literally over and above the rest of us? (2003, p. 16).

While Nama's discussion of sci-fi films of the 1950s suggests that this is precisely the case, Nama also observes that the tide turned during the 1960s, which might be regarded as a transitional period into the full-fledged Afrofuturism:

On the surface, the SF film renaissance of the time ostensibly ignored race, yet the acute racial turmoil of the late 1960s Black Power movement was having an impact on the genre. In the wake of insurgent black

nationalism and race riots, black characters were beginning to creep into the previously all-white worlds of the future (2008, p. 21).

As the first Afrofuturist film, *Space is the Place* stands out as a brave contrast to the trajectory of black representation in science-fiction where black characters are frequently expendable, subservient accessories to white survivalists, as in the case of the following examples:

Up to that point, black characters in SF cinema were habitually destined to die off quickly, as in *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *THX 1138* (1971), and *Soylent Green* (1973), or to perish, valiantly, sacrificing their lives for their white counterparts, as in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), *Alien* (1979), *Flash Gordon* (1980), and *The Terminator* (1984) (Nama, 2008, p. 33).

Adding to Nama's observations, the trend of black actors playing perilous, supporting roles to leading white characters has continued since the 1970s, for instance, in Laurence Fishburne's supporting role as Morpheus in *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999) and more recently his supporting role as the engineer, Gus, who is killed off in *Passengers* (2017). Considering the scarcity of leading, black characters in cinema, Sun Ra's space jazz, philosophy, and performance in *Space is the Place* puts forward a vision of space travel that is entirely different from anything that came before, marking the beginning of Afrofuturism in film long before the neologism was coined by author Mark Dery in 1993 to describe:

A literal and cultural aesthetic that uses tools and tropes of science-fiction, as well as references to African and Non-Western mythology, as a means

to analyse and confront the present-day issues faced by people of colour (p. 182).

Echoing Nama's observation that African-Americans have been written out of sci-fi cinema, Dery, in an article entitled 'Black to the Future' interviews several popular black science-fiction authors, beginning with the observation that blacks have also been excluded from science-fiction literature:

This is especially perplexing in light of the fact that African-Americans, in a very real sense, are the descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impossible force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers readily come to mind) (1994, p. 180).

Space is the Place fully realises the potential of 'the African-American experience' to generate a range of insightful, new science-fiction plots, constituting the first vision of a black future in space, where all the leading characters (and the majority of supporting cast) are black. To further this, *Space is the Place* also carves a future where black women are included in Sun Ra's musical space agency, including the Arkestra's lead singer June Tyson. Flipping American and Euro-centric science-fiction on its head, Ra, the black male lead, not only survives the film but also heroically rescues all the black people on Earth at the film's conclusion.

4.2.6 Afrofuturism Today

Elizabeth Hamilton (2017), a scholar of Afrofuturism, in an overview of contemporary, transnational Afrofuturist artwork, argues that the definition of ‘Afrofuturism’ remains fluid due to the explosion of the genre across the globe:

I contend that this resurgence is a response to current oppressive conditions, such as extrajudicial killings of black people in the United States and continued human rights disparities based on race around the world (p. 18).

Hamilton’s (2017) understanding of Afrofuturism furthers the broader definition of the term provided by Dery (1993), reflecting the technological developments of black people outside of America:

As the race to space for countries like Nigeria continues and the first South African-born astronaut will be launched into space, the term gets more popular, fascinatingly, through artists’ imaginings of the Afronaut (p. 18).

These developments indicate that Afrofuturism today is no longer centred on African-American experiences specifically, instead communicating the experiences of black people worldwide. These experiences are transcoded for instance, through the process of reverse-space tourism, where instead of travelling to space to gain a new perspective, the Afronaut explores Earth:

Human subjects in astronaut accoutrement are not travelling through deep space; they are navigating Earth utilizing technologies of survival needed to engage the problems associated with immigration, exile, colonialism, and the attendant xenophobia and racism (Hamilton, 2017, p. 18).

Citing an example of contemporary Afrofuturist artwork, Hamilton discusses the British-Nigerian artist Yinko Shonibare's piece 'Refugee Astronaut' (2016) (see Figure 57) explaining that spacesuits and associated technology of Afrofuturism relay contemporary discourses of alienation associated with black people appearing conspicuously out of place within white communities:

The astronaut figures are no different, but they speak to the sustained feelings of isolation and otherness that people of colour feel when traversing white spaces. The environments are sometimes hostile; so, the technologies they wear are a necessity (p. 20).



REFUGEE ASTRONAUT II 2016
Fibreglass mannequin, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, net, possessions, astronaut helmet, moon boots and steel baseplate
186 x 87 x 103 cm

Figure 57: Yinka Shonibare's 'Refugee Astronaut'

4.2.7 Afrofuturist Mythology

Space is the Place best portrays the disparity characterizing the community of Oakland in a scene where a pair of African-American teenage boys steal a pair of shoes from a black drunkard slumped underneath the doorway of the 'Youth Development Programme' (see Figure 58). The unconscious middle-aged, homeless man is, by virtue of this gesture, symbolically robbed of a future – furthermore, his placement under the

doorway of the Youth Development centre hints that the young men will encounter a similar fate.



Figure 58: Teenagers at the Youth Development Centre stealing shoes

Ra's message to black teenagers is elucidated in a dialogue transpiring in a rec room in Oakland's Youth Centre, where Ra, the self-proclaimed 'ambassador from the intergalactic regions of the Council of Outer Space' materializes from thin air. The teens regard Ra and his eccentric 'moon boots' with laughter and scorn, insisting Ra prove his claims. Paradoxically, Ra points out that nobody in the room exists: 'If you did, your people wouldn't be seeking equal rights. You're not real. If you were, you'd have some status among the nations of the world. So, we're both myths.' A young man wonders, 'Are there any Whiteys up there today?' to which Ra responds 'They're walking there

today. They take frequent trips to the moon. I noticed none of you are invited. How do you think you're going to exist?' The lack of black representation in NASA is, for Ra the most visibly telling sign of the erasure of the black community in society. The teenager's question is an allusion to blues singer, Gil Scott-Heron's, 1970 poem, 'Whitey on the Moon'²⁰ which serves as a political commentary, telling the story of a frustrated and alienated black man who struggles to pay hospital bills for his sister who has been bitten by a rat. The man is living in poverty despite paying taxes to put 'Whitey on the moon.' An excerpt reads:

Was all that money I made last year
(for Whitey on the moon?)
How come there ain't no money here?
(Hmm! Whitey's on the moon)
Y'know I just about had my fill
(of Whitey on the moon)
I think I'll send these doctor bills,
Airmail special
(to Whitey on the moon)

Gil Scott-Heron's poem and Coney's film both speak to the issue of skin colour and upward mobility in outer space, a trope that has been the subject of numerous sci-fi narratives such as Andrew Nicchol's *Gattaca* (1997), Neill Blomkamp's *Elysium* (2013), and Moten Tyldum's *Passengers* (2016), demonstrating that fictional accounts of space are preoccupied with the possibilities and limitations of race, gender, and bodily

20 The poem is also quoted more recently in the film *First Man* (2018), which relays the story of the perilous events leading up to the late Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 voyage

attributes. Rather than emphasizing the space voyage, such films instead focus on how the human genome (and its unravelling) has coincided with and even overtaken space travel in determining who ‘exists’ (both literally and metaphorically) in society. In *Space is the Place*, for instance, NASA’s deliberate exclusion of people of colour signifies the African-American’s status as an underclass citizen that would probably be left behind in a catastrophic event. Literature scholar Ramzi Fawaz locates this thematic subtext in his reading of the film, zeroing in on the film’s proposed post-capitalist ideology:

With this in mind, the film suggests that the downtrodden African-American figures that dot the landscape of Sun Ra’s Oakland are constructed by institutions like NASA as those who are socially unfit for space-travel. They compose a technological underclass who will be left behind to deal with the environmental devastation that remains in the wake of capitalism’s ravenous hunger for global resources (2012, p. 1108).

In *Space is the Place*, NASA actively pursues Ra; interviewing at Sun Ra’s ‘Cosmic Employment Agency’ a spy and former NASA engineer pleads with Sun Ra for a job, whispering that he is on the verge of welfare, with seven children to feed. Rawaz’s reading of this scene suggests that this inversion of the stereotypes coding white and black representation critiques media representations of African-Americans:

The engineer’s predicament is presented as a rather hilarious circumstance that reverses the demonized image of the relentlessly childbearing African-American welfare queen. Against this stereotype, the scene suggests that the very performance of the American Dream (marriage, children, a government job, patriotic anticommunism) by putatively white citizens is what produces the nation’s most debased subjects (2012, p. 1107).

In this scene, Ra uses his position as the leader of an alternative space programme and a 'reverse space tourist' to reverse the historical trend of white favouritism by rejecting the white man's request for employment specifically due to 'being of the particular race you are.' In a further, explicit reversal of the dichotomy of white and black in films like *When Words Collide*, Sun Ra takes off in his spaceship knowingly leaving the white inhabitants of the planet to perish while rescuing primarily black citizens. It might be argued that these scenes render the film's overarching ideology ambiguous, because rather than operating his agency beyond the existing, discriminatory corporate framework, Ra's reversal of discrimination further perpetuates its existence. I argue that what these scenes instead appear to be doing is making the casual racism in film and in the 'real world' appear alien by placing whites at the receiving end of discriminatory practices – an interesting and at times humorous strategy that is also utilized in director Desmond Nakano's film *White Man's Burden* (1995), which inverts racism and inequality struggles in America by depicting an impoverished white community that is subservient to a wealthy, black dominated society.

Sun Ra the Afronaut inverts the codified journey to outer space, travelling in reverse from his home planet to tour an estranged Earth. Ra's version of the space voyager is built around a variety of mythical images, invoking tribal culture and dress, communal living, African mysticism, Ancient Egypt, tales of spirits from other worlds, and aliens from the cosmos. *Space is the Place* set the precedent for a series of

Afrofuturist films which followed, such as the director Ngozi Onwurah's independent film *Welcome II the Terrordome* (1994) – about a civil war between gangsters residing in a segregated, black faction of society. This premise of the film is that Earth is an alien planet that is repopulated by Africans that were 'dragged onto a ship by angry strangers and dumped onto the shores of a distant planet' where, the narrator tells us, 'the colourless inhabitants resemble dying ghosts.' This notion of the black man captive at the fringes of the cosmos can also be located John Carpenter's sci-fi action thriller *Ghosts of Mars* (2001) where the rapper, Ice Cube, plays the role of the convicted murderer 'Desolation Williams,' a black man imprisoned and forgotten on a remote Martian outpost, whose name highlights his isolated status.

4.3 Summary of *The Brother from Another Planet*

Like *Space is the Place*, *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984) is a low-budget Afrofuturist film also concerning a black visitor from the cosmos. While this independent film was released for commercial distribution and has received more critical recognition than *Space is the Place*, the film has never achieved mainstream status. The piece, Guerrero points out, fits more into the filmic style, language, and tradition tagged as the 'American art film' (1993, p. 44). *The Brother from Another Planet*, due to the fact that it is an independent film, bravely interrogates issues of political and historical

significance including immigration and slavery, as well as inner-city issues, such as racism, poverty, broken households, and drugs. The film's acknowledgement of a fractured, urban society offers a departure from the nationalistic, and often, overly sugar-coated sentiments of mainstream Hollywood productions designed to appeal to mass audiences of adults and children alike. This art-house film was written, directed, and produced by the highly prolific, independent director, John Sayles, who has directed numerous works exploring race relations in the United States, including *Lone Star* (1996), *Sunshine State* (2002), and *Go for Sisters* (2013). The film's protagonist is the mute, anonymous 'Brother,' a runaway interplanetary slave with the outward appearance of a black man.

Setting the film in motion, Brother is ejected from the spaceship he is piloting, crash-landing in New York Bay, close to the Ellis Island Immigration Centre. Brother survives the crash, and climbs aboard a boat to Manhattan, staggering into Harlem wearing space-age tatters. Unable to converse, Brother contributes to the community through his gentle nature, willingness to listen, as well as his supernatural ability to 'heal' body parts and electrical appliances with just the touch of a hand. Brother is offered boarding in a cramped Harlem apartment by a white single-mother from Alabama, Randy Sue, where he watches television with her five-year-old biracial son 'Little Earl.' The diverse Harlem covers for Brother as he is pursued by alien bounty hunters who he evades, electing to become a permanent resident of Earth.

4.3.1 Reverse Space Tourism

The Brother from Another Planet represents a collaborative effort between a white director and a number of African-American actors and crew members, as can be surmised from author and film scholar Jack Ryan's account of Sayles' production of the film:

He wrote the script, based on a dream, in six days, and shot on location in Harlem in 24 days with a completely integrated cast and crew – black and white, experienced and novice, women and men. In addition to his production team and musical composer, Sayles employed a group of lesser known black actors from the local Frank Silvera Drama workshop (1998, p. 97).

This piece made a marginal gain in the box office, bringing in \$4 million, compared to its initial budget of \$250,000. Yet as Ryan points out, the film received lacklustre reviews from critics partly, it seems, due to the ambiguity of being conceived from an African-American perspective but written and produced by a white film-maker. Ryan argues that its resistance to being pigeonholed remains one of the film's strengths, writing positively of the final scene where Brother looks out across the wired fence of a prisoning school-yard examining a sign that reads 'Harlem plays the best ball in the country.'

Like everything else in this wonderful film, there is a contradictory impulse at work here, an ambiguity that blunts a completely happy ending. It is a reminder that The Brother's struggle never ends (1998. p. 114).

It is this deliberately ambiguous nature of the film which lends it to many convincing interpretations. For instance, Ryan argues that Brother's short dreadlocks and the soundtrack's repetition of steel drums were, at the time, a reference to new restrictions on Afro-Caribbean immigration under the Reagan administration:

Because the sound of the steel drums is so distinctive, Sayle's choice to use the instrument has significance. When he started making *The Brother*, the State Department had begun to crack down on illegal immigrants arriving from the Caribbean, particularly Cuba and Haiti, a policy the Reagan administration toughened before the film was ready for distribution (1998, p. 112).

In his reading of *The Brother from Another Planet*, Guerrero makes the case that Brother's experience of Harlem is an 'allegory for the historical situation of a runaway slave' (1998, p. 52), whereby the experience of slavery in America is inscribed in the economic and social oppression evident that can be glimpsed in the on-location shots of Harlem:

If the location of slavery is displaced onto another planet, it is also transfigured and existent here on earth, in contemporary New York City. The setting and visual terrain of the film make it clear that the Black inner-city which the Brother must negotiate, is as unfree, socially and racially stratified and dangerous as any plantation, if not more so (1997, p. 55).

While the film makes explicit references to the Underground Railroad, Guerrero's comparison between the slave plantation and 1980s Harlem risks

marginalizing the emotional weight and physical severity of plantation life. Furthermore, there is nothing in the film to suggest that Harlem is more racially stratified than the plantation (in fact, Brother is guided and protected by an integrated community of whites, blacks, and Hispanics). Guerrero's reading thereby condenses 1980s Harlem life into a more modern expression of enslavement, indicating that Brother has inadvertently substituted one heinous form of captivity for another. This is not the case; Harlem, for Brother is obviously a preferable alternative to remaining on his home planet, as evinced by a number of other escaped slaves which Brother encounters at the end of the film, who have chosen Harlem as a suitable residence in the cosmic quest for liberation. Director John Sayles explains in an interview that the film is not intended to portray Harlem in a negative light, to the contrary:

I think with Brother... that feeling of the sweetness of the community was something that I think has always been there and that it is an unfortunate thing about the iconography of places like Harlem...people think Harlem, they think dangerous community, when it is such a diverse community and there are certainly dangerous things, but it's a place where people live and work and go to school and go to church, and that was probably the most important thing about the community that I wanted to get across (YouTube, 2012).

In line with this, a significant portion of the film is devoted to Brother's experience of the sights and sounds of the city. I contend that while, as authors have pointed out, Brother's situation certainly overlaps with those of immigrants and runaway slaves, Brother's experiences, (mainly based around misconceptions and

misunderstandings) also invoke the related experiences of immigration and tourism (see Figure 59), for instance, visiting the Ellis Island immigration centre, viewing the NYC skyline and the Statue of Liberty, getting lost, mistaking currency, tasting local food, watching passers-by, ‘conversing’ with locals, wandering aimlessly down 125th street, gazing at store fronts and newspaper stands, listening to music and foreign tongues, riding the subway, looking at graffiti, visiting bars, stores, and the Schomburg Institute museum exhibition, and even having the extra-terrestrial equivalent of a vacation fling with the beautiful jazz singer, Malvern.



Figure 59: Brother ‘touring’ Harlem

Brother's displacement to an exotic new planet adds a layer of Afrofuturist complexity to the runaway slave allegory as his quest entails frequently misunderstanding the strange customs of a novel, interplanetary culture. Therefore, Brother can be regarded as a 'reverse' space tourist discovering Earth, inverting through his estranged perspective the codes of conduct associated with the 'locals'. This brand of cosmic wanderlust is the premise of a relatively small but diverse group of films involving confused, curious and enthused temporary or semi-permanent visitors from space such as *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, *E.T.* (1982), John Carpenter's *Starman* (1984), Steve Barron's *Coneheads* (1993) and Werner Herzog's *The Wild Blue Yonder* (1995).²¹ The figure of the reverse space tourist is a science-fiction strategy which distances spectators, using the figure of the alien disguised as human to subversively prompt reflection on a set of socio-political circumstances existing at the specific location and time associated with the film's production.

The narrative focuses on Brother's discovery of Harlem – portrayed as a point of fascination due to its liveliness and diversity – and revulsion, due to drugs, racism, and gang violence. 'Touring' is Brother's preferred method of uncovering his new surroundings as he discovers and even emulates local 'customs,' such as sitting at Odell's, 'drinking' liquor, and listening to jazz. Highlighting the importance of location to the production, Sayles, in an interview, suggests that the film-making experience itself was

21 See Chapter 6 for further discussion of reverse space tourism

like a tour, where the on-location portrayal of Harlem also included the authentic reactions of city dwellers:

And some of that is the idea that a real place is a character and you find some of that character when you go up there. The first scene we're on 125th street... I figured people aren't going to stop and watch us on 125th street... they got stuff to do. So, I sprinkled our extras who had various things to say in various languages with the real people. Quite honestly, Joe Morton, in his outer space clothes, he just looked like another intoxicated crazy New Yorker to people, and they would just give him a look and walk by (YouTube, 2013).

While Ra and Brother have both arrived from space, Brother comes to explore Harlem while Ra is the source of information about space and the future, devoting his Earthly mission to uplifting the nation's African-American populace. Brother appears to be precisely the sort of downtrodden black urban dweller that Sun Ra is attempting to relocate to space. Considering the liberal strides taken in *The Brother from Another Planet* including the use of a primarily black cast and an integrated production team, it seems contradictory that the resounding solution to social alienation proposed by the film is to assimilate as quietly and covertly as possible by presenting as a model minority. Therefore, despite the striking similarities between the first two case studies in this chapter the underlying messages are quite different – while Ra advocates for the advancement of African-Americans by moving to another part of the solar system and becoming alien, Brother's approach is to subordinate his extra-terrestrial powers in favour of becoming human. In doing so, Brother conceals his three-toed foot, his physic

abilities, his ability to regenerate body parts, and his removable eyeball, which can scan and record like a surveillance camera. Brother attempts to conceal his bodily differences except to his confidante (perhaps the only Earthling he relates to) – the equally tight-lipped, five-year-old ‘Little Earl’ whose guileless nature renders him as vexed and alienated as Brother.

Afrofuturism is used by Sayles to convey feelings of alienation and to comment on discrimination, immigration, and slavery, although the transcoding process is at times, rather didactic, such as in the scene where Brother is emotionally affected at the Schomburg exhibition where a guide spells out how Harriet Tubman’s transported slaves to New York, drawing a parallel between Brother and the slaves who escape from the south to a more educated, and liberal North. Brother’s life takes a turn for the better in Harlem, however, despite the fact that he is ‘free’ there are still a number of impediments to self-actualization, as explained by media scholar Janani Subramanian in a reading of the film describing how capitalism alienated Harlemites, especially as a result of attempts to gentrify inner-city neighbourhoods in the lower East side during the Reagan era. Subramanian notes that Brother is met with a series of obstacles:

Everything he attempts - buying fruit, finding a job, meeting a woman, and looking for shelter - is marked by the inaccessibility that stems from his muteness and his alien-ness, offering a poignant representation of the actual conditions of New York’s poor and disenfranchised neighbourhoods in the 1980s (2010, p. 40).

Brother's lack of a voice further is a further cause of alienation, leaving his feelings open to countless interpretations - an ambiguity that Guerrero argues is one of the film's weaknesses:

One of Brother's subtitle limitations has to do with the unconscious way the film plays into dominant cultural perceptions of slaves' alleged silence or inability to speak or make their case in history. In this sense, Brother's voice and the possibility of his vocalizing claims for self-representation, justice, and freedom are eradicated, and he comes across as a silent, exotic other, a common figure in the movie industry (1993, p. 47).

Film reviewer Steve Jenkins speculates that Brother's passively functions in a tactic which shifts the focus to the real focus of the film – the community members:

In fact, the Brother's alien status remains somewhat arbitrary: for much of the time, he functions merely as a conveniently silent sounding board, enabling other characters to present themselves, their attitudes and their problems in a style often close to documentary direct address (1984, p. 331).

Brother however is not as silent as Guerrero (1993) and Jenkins (1984) suggest, asserting himself by finding work, 'falling in love,' confronting a drug dealer, and freeing a dog. Brother's multitude of experiences suggest that the boundaries between alienation, immigration, tourism, and colonialism are blurred, bringing to mind another independent film during the same year, *Stranger than Paradise* (1984), where discourses of immigration, alienation, and tourism also overlap. In Jim Jarmusch's absurdist comedy a young immigrant, Eva, relocates from Hungary to the USA. Eva, initially very confused, becomes acclimated as she discovers life in New York City, moves to Cleveland, and then

travels to Florida as a tourist seeking adventure. In Jarmusch's subsequent film, *Down By the Law* (1986) an Italian immigrant's alienation is exacerbated by being locked up in a New Orleans jail with a culture of its own. Like *The Brother from Another Planet*, Spike Lee's short film entitled *Jesus, Children of America* (2005) portrays urban alienation and the African-American experience in New York, with isolating shots of street corners, a playground, the interior of an apartment, and a public school to tell a fictional story of a girl, Blanca, born with HIV to drug-addicted parents who becomes an outcast in her community. Blanca is further alienated by her comparatively light skin, which she is both teased and envied for; like Brother, Blanca ultimately finds solace – this time in the form of a youth support group.

Signalling the progression of his slow but successful integration into Harlem society, Brother sports clothing that previously belonged to the landlord Randy Sue's estranged husband and assumes the role of a surrogate father-figure to 'Little Earl.' Furthering its assimilationist imperative, the film advocates for cooperation between whites and blacks in Brother's alliance with Randy Sue, who is quick to offer him food, clothing, and temporary boarding. This scene provides a temporary, simplified symbolic resolution to socioeconomic disparity, racial divide, and the alienation of blacks in America through the image of peaceful cohabitation between black and whites. Furthering the image of this, Randy Sue remains on good terms with Little Earl's grandmother, cooking her dinner and referring to her as 'Mama,' carrying on as normal despite the fact that her husband (Little Earl's father) abandoned the family.

4.3.2 Outer Space Symbolism in *The Brother from Another Planet*

The Brother from Another Planet begins inside of a spaceship that crash-lands beside a landscape that is steeped in symbolism, beginning with Brother's first encounters with Ellis Island, where the statue of liberty can be glimpsed in the background. In the Harlem bar Brother wanders into, a black man, Fly, is preoccupied with an arcade game called 'Astro-Chase,' moaning to the bartender, Odell, that his spaceship has been shot down due to the machine being broken. The image of the arcade game in the process of breakdown seems to suggest that the rinky-dink spaceship game is as close as the black community of 1980s Harlem society can hope to get to outer space. Odell's bar is saturated with the sounds of 'outer space' as a series of electronic laser beam beeps emanating from the arcade game drowns out conversation. Though the arcade game is a prominent thread in the film, discussions of the film have not addressed the thematic significance of this. I argue that there lurks a hidden metaphorical discussion concerning black presence in space that is facilitated by the game, which becomes a central point of interest in the bar. Odell continues the discussion of 'Astro-Chase' 'a spaceship doesn't have to get hit by nothin' to crash... some of them get internal malfunctions.' While seated at a table, listening to this conversation Brother's expression reads as impatient, appearing frustrated by the black community's lack of vocabulary to articulate outer space phenomena. The fact that the shoddy outer space game as well as

an assortment of electronic appliances owned by the community remain in a continuous state of disrepair emphasizes symbolically the disconnect between the black community and social and technological advancement.

An elderly black man sitting at the bar, Walter, speculates ominously: ‘They say it won’t be long before all ‘em satellites they sent up there years back all be crashing back to Earth, their insides wear out up there... things go haywire’ (unnerving Brother who is attempting to conceal his own recent ‘crashing’ down to Earth’). Fly offers a simpler explanation: ‘C’mon man, they just get tired...’ (perhaps also a hint that Brother became ‘tired’ of the lifetime of enslavement which prompted him to relocate). This badly misinformed discussion communicates that the Harlem community’s education of space technology is minimal, in stark contrast with Brother’s superior knowledge of space-aged technology. Despite his secrecy, Brother’s vast knowledge of technology becomes evident when, to the amazement of the characters at Odell’s, Brother revives the arcade game merely by touching it. Furthermore, Brother offers subtle hints of his advanced understanding of space which seem to benefit the community. For instance, later in the film, a teenaged girl also playing ‘Astro-Chase’ complains that the game (consisting of spaceships drifting through galaxies and blowing up planets) is too slow, even on maximum difficulty. For the teenager, the game is a source of frustration, a parable for her humdrum existence in Harlem, where life for eager and intelligent young people is stuck on ‘easy-mode’ due to a lack of new and exciting challenges – even the game’s name, ‘Astro-Chase’, seems to connote chasing after an impossible dream, or perhaps an

impossible future in space. To the young woman's surprise and delight, Brother mysteriously speeds up the space game – a seemingly insignificant action which symbolically jump starts a new hope for opportunities for blacks to enter into and excel in the technological arena of outer space.

It is interesting to note several strong parallels between the protagonists in the first two case studies. Sun Ra and his cinematic counterpart, Brother, make the journey to space in reverse, touring large, densely populated cities in degenerative states from the outside perspective of the alien ‘Other.’ In both, the lead character is a black, male Afronaut, sharing in the ideological premise that all African-Americans males existing in a white-dominated society are ‘aliens,’ ‘touring’ and drifting aimlessly through the promises and attractions of a white-washed world, always observing from the estranged, fringes of society while never quite belonging. For both Afronaut protagonists, sound and music (particularly jazz) play a critical role in gaining access to restricted space. Ra bemoans the violent sounds and vibrations exuded by a weary, dying Earth, meanwhile Brother appears to be constantly, visibly-shaken by Harlem’s explosive soundscape, retreating in doorways and corners from blasting music, shouting, arguments, and a multitude of languages. Furthermore, Ra and Brother share supernatural hearing abilities which allow them to understand and access rarefied ‘space;’ Brother can hear the voices of ‘ghosts,’ including the whispers of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, the screams of a woman being run over at the Times

Square subway station and the sound of a man being shot at a barstool, while Ra can access and reproduce musical harmonies from distant regions of space. Ra and Brother are both constantly pursued by mysterious, white conspirators sent to capture them. However, the two Afronauts share one insurmountable difference; for Ra, moving to decolonised regions in space is the path to freedom, while for Brother, Harlem is the last stop – suggesting that African-Americans should remain in the inner-city, seeking opportunities to excel without disturbing the existing cultural framework.

Two African-American space travellers can be located in another instance of space tourism in the cinema – Ken Finkleman’s *Airplane II: The Sequel* – a comedy piggybacking on the success of its predecessor, Jim Abraham’s more well-known disaster film satire *Airplane!* (1980). In contrast to previous case studies, this film belongs to neither the Afrofuturist nor art-house film categories and contains no progressive elements; *Airplane II* can instead be classified as a mainstream comedy which defers to clichéd sexist and racist slapstick punchlines. The black characters in the film recall the ‘black minstrels’ portrayed in Segundo do Chomons *Les Luniatiques*, serving unfortunate reinforcement of some of the worst stereotypes of the African-American character as subhuman or ‘alien,’ with its depressing regression to highly offensive, stereotyped images of male African-American characters as inarticulate lazy, intellectually inferior ‘black buffoons’ – to cite a caricature that is commonly associated with African-American actor Stepin Fetchit who played a number of ‘black buffoon’ roles in the 1930s. The common caricature of the lethargic and

inept black man is also prevalent throughout Robert Townsend's *The Meteor Man* (1993) – a comedy with a predominantly black cast about an African-American man who develops superpowers after coming in contact with a meteor that lands on Earth, and subsequently uses those powers to end gang violence in his community. In *Airplane II: The Sequel* passengers embark on a lunar shuttle voyaging to the moon, carrying temporary visitors, and families looking to relocate permanently. Two African-American 'Soul Brothers,' Scott, are seated aboard the Lunar Shuttle (see Figure 60). Their reasons for venturing into space are left vague though their suits link them to the blaxploitation Pimp figures, indicating involvement in a shady lunar colony enterprise. The 'Soul Brothers' speak incomprehensibly, imitating 'jive' for satirical purposes, while their speech is translated by subtitles on-screen. The interior of commercial 'space-liner' satirizes the 1980s space shuttle which was similar in appearance to an airplane. Further linking the experience of commercial flight with space travel, the spaceport shops, lounge, and security clearance are arranged in the fashion of an ordinary airport, with the very notable exceptions of advertisements for trips to Saturn and Jupiter, and a selection of bombs for sale in the gift shop.



Figure 60: 'Soul Brothers' in *Airplane II: The Sequel*

The spacecraft in *Airplane II: The Sequel* appears like an ordinary airplane (see Figure 61), a gesture which points to the virility with which technology appears visibly outmoded.



Figure 61: Pan Universe Spaceliner parked on the Moon

The film's depiction of the space shuttle testifies to a stagnation of creative process in consumer culture, reflecting a dwindling enthusiasm for space travel in the transition from rocket to the space shuttle. Journalist, and space enthusiast, Samira Ahmed in an opinion piece for *The Independent*, offers an insightful explanation behind her shrinking enthusiasm for space exploration, recalling that as a child, space travel was an enthralling prospect offering an escape route for a hopeful generation of young people threatened with imminent nuclear holocaust. Today, Ahmed argues, the dream of space travel is overshadowed by the hollow but more alluring dream of consumerism, where (like with practically everything else nowadays) one can now pay their way into space:

The best hope an 11-year-old today has of making it into space is to become a big shot in the city and save up \$200,000 for a ride on Virgin Galactic's spacecraft. It's like we're back in the pre-Skytrain age (2001, par 18).

Ahmed (2001) speculates as to why the shuttle was the beginning of an era of shrinking enthusiasm:

The name "Shuttle" suggested a mundane public transport system, like Freddie Laker's SkyTrain, which had just brought affordable trans-Atlantic air tickets to travel-hungry Britain. Perhaps therein lay the seeds of its doom, marketing-wise. For all the 1970s loveliness of its white curved wings, it was just a plane. Piggybacking on a jumbo jet infantilised it. Applying some amateur psychoanalysis, might the orbiter's domestic shape – like an iron – have made it in the public subconscious "weak" and "female" compared to the phallic rockets upon which it relied? Within a year it had been lampooned in *Airplane II* (2001, par 10).

Airplane II: The Sequel's predictions that space tourism will result in little more than an updated commercial airliner seems prescient, considering that Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipOne and SpaceShipTwo²² private experimental spacecrafts are reusable launch vehicles resembling airplanes. In *Airplane II: The Sequel*, passengers appear inconvenienced by the journey to space, complaining frequently without glancing out the window. The act of viewing the Earth from above the atmosphere is projected into the future as a commonplace experience reflecting the manner in which many contemporary airline travellers are jaded by the inconveniences of airline travel. Thus, what is most notable about the film's depiction of space tourism is the manner in which outer space shifted to the background, satirizing Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where the dehydrated food resembles in-flight meals, seemingly mundane outer space flight-attendants wait on passengers, and the characters interactions appear more robotic than the philosophical, emotive HAL 9000. Furthermore, while in *Space is the Place* and *The Brother from Another Planet* space travel functions as an allegory through which to explore the dynamics of social inequality, *Airplane II: The Sequel* is instead a mainstream rejoinder of these works which is regressive in its satirical approach to Afrofuturist fantasies of social progress stemming from the same era. Putting the paradoxes of capitalism on display, particularly rapidly evolving new technologies as contrasted with the growing drudgery associated with the manufacturing, acquisition and use of these, the xenophobic and technophobic vision of *Airplane II: The Sequel* indicates that the capitalist model of space tourism, which is only just beginning, is

²² SpaceShipTwo crashed during testing and killed a pilot

subjected to the same class-based biases inherent to all forms of tourism. The film's overtly racist sentiment furthermore is a reminder that technological progress, at times, inversely correlates with democracy or social progress and may even exacerbate institutional prejudice as it is perpetuated further into outer space.

4.3.3 Diversifying NASA

As the films in this chapter demonstrate, the relationship between NASA and real-world space development implicates film as much as television. This is not to say that *Star Trek* was not a critical turning-point for African-American representation in the space program. In 1966, the first African-American Lt. Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) appeared in *Star Trek*, broadcasting to television the dream of democratic space travel. Penley observes the direct consequences of this selection: 'And NASA actually hired Nichelle Nichols at one point in the late seventies to help recruit women and minorities into the astronaut corps' (1997, p. 19). Sally Ride became the first female astronaut to travel to space in 1983, and shortly after NASA incorporated two African-American astronauts. Despite these steps towards inclusiveness, the utopian notion of democratic space travel for all ended abruptly in 1986 with the death of Christa McAuliffe, the first passenger citizen — a significant moment in the cultural history of space-flight that signalled the end of Reagan's 'civilian in space programme' which sought to bring two to three outstanding citizens into space per year. To return momentarily to earlier case studies in the thesis, including *Le Voyage dans La Lune*

and *Frau im Mond*, it becomes evident that the dangers of space exploration, which include exploding space vessels and a lack of foresight, have been envisioned and predicted by cinema since the early 20th century.

In post mid-century representations of space, film and television seem to diverge into distinct avenues. While *Star Trek's* Enterprise crew, standing in for NASA, is depicted in a glamorous light, films stemming from the same period portray the space program as a glorified cover for government conspiracies. The 1970s-1980s offer many interesting variations on the trope of space travel which are overwhelmingly pessimistic, including Douglass Trumbull's *Silent Running* (1972), *Stalker*, *Dark Star*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Peter Hyam's *Capricorn 1* (1977), *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Alien*, *Starman* (1984), and *Enemy Mine* (1985) Such examples are outlooks into the potential pitfalls of space exploration — corporatocracy and related government conspiracies and cover-ups, boredom, psychosis, separation anxiety, internal malfunctions, and a lack of overarching purpose.

The science-fiction images of Sun Ra and Brother travelling through space share an interesting historical parallel with the 'Black Star Line' steamships that constituted the world's first transport system with an all-black crew, intended to unify and uplift black people across the world. The Black Star Line was founded in 1919 by the highly influential Jamaican political activist, publisher, and entrepreneur Marcus Garvey, whose philosophy linked transportation to the Back-to-Africa movement, with the goal of eventually bringing black people by boat to a brand-new country in Africa. Aside from conceiving of the (short-lived) Black Star Line enterprise, Garvey was also the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association which was a spiritual and cultural movement for democracy of

black people that overlapped with the Harlem Renaissance. For Garvey the Black Star Line signified the celebration of black pride, achievement, and ambition.

There has been a recent resurgence in Afrofuturist themes evident in film and television since issues of race and immigration have come to the fore in the United States and Europe, where the promulgation of overtly racist rhetoric has been established as a mainstream media phenomenon. For instance, Jordan Peele's science-fiction horror film *Get Out* (2017) envisions a modernized form of enslavement using technological control asserted over black bodies through a surgical procedure. Both *Space is the Place* and *Brother from Another Planet* share similarities with Adirley Queirós' Brazilian Afrofuturist film *Branco Sai, Preto Fica* (White Out Black In) (2015), about two black men injured in a police attack²³ who recount their traumatic experiences in an interview to an intergalactic detective from the future. The theme of trauma and violence inflicted on black bodies is further addressed in an episode of the British and American TV Series collaboration *Black Mirror* (Charlie Brooker, 2011-2019) entitled *White Bear* (2013), involving a young black mother named Victoria who murders her daughter; Victoria's memory is wiped, and she is placed in front of an audience, forced to relive the ordeal on a daily basis through media clips, despite not being able to remember her crime. A more recent *Black Mirror* episode entitled *Black Museum* (2017) is about an African-American prisoner (hinted to be innocent) whose consciousness is transferred to a digital avatar following his execution; the man's digitized consciousness is then placed behind glass in an exhibition, where eager white visitors come to pull a lever to

²³ *Branco Sai, Preto Fica* is partly based on real-world events that occurred during a police raid in Brazil in 1986, when white people were asked to leave a nightclub before the black people inside were attacked

electrocute him for entertainment (2017), some even bribing the museum staff to stay after hours to inflict torture.

Several important trends emerge in observing films involving people of colour travelling to outer space as well as traversing urban, rural, and unfamiliar spaces. In such films, these characters may be literal astronauts and/or metaphorical astronauts, uncovering previously inaccessible spaces by devising both physical and psychological means of protection to keep their bodies safe from imminent danger. Despite such attempts at self-preservation, it is evident that the black space traveller is nonetheless killed off quickly in many sci-fi narratives, such as in the case of the African-American astronaut Romilly in *Interstellar*, who says and does little throughout the film before dying in a mysterious explosion; Romilly's death is then glossed over in the narrative and never mourned, meanwhile the death of a white astronaut, Edmund (who is never shown on-screen) is mentioned several times and Edmund's grave is even shown at the end of the film. While some of these unconventional astronauts are relatively passive figures, others constitute a rebellious bunch, making no attempt to interject themselves into space using the conventional astronaut pathway. Furthermore, science-fiction characters of colour are portrayed as tourists, aliens, slaves, and immigrants (or some combination thereof) isolated at the fringes of a white-dominated society, alienated by differences in history, speech, and appearance – able to glimpse high society while never being part of the action. Lacking the proper education, purity, and wealth associated with being an astronaut, these space travellers are instead admitted to space by other means, in reaction to a history of being denied admission to space, both in the 'real world' and in cinema.

Chapter 5

Brave New Simulation: Cinema and Space Tourism in the New Millennium

5.1 Perception in the Postmodern Era

This chapter builds on previous chapters' assessments of technological and social change as evident within science-fiction cinema representations of space, in order to evaluate what the allegory of space tourism reveals about the notion of progress. The films *Interstellar* and *WALL-E* — both stemming from the post-9/11 era — will be highlighted in this chapter. The new millennium is characterised by a revolution in the technology sector; the convergence of formerly distinct media forms (cinema, television, and video games), the widespread presence of social media, as well as the proliferation of 3D, CGI and digital motion-capture technologies in cinema, as media consumers seek entertainment²⁴ within a variety of flat-screen, simulated 'worlds.' The structure and

²⁴ As defined in section 5.1.1

organization of space in *WALL-E* and *Interstellar* can be read as an interrogation of the physical, temporal, and psychological stresses of a postmodern lifestyle — an idea which will be developed further in this chapter.

Modernity and postmodernity might be regarded as two related phases impacting the public's perception of time and space, unveiling time and space as fluid concepts channelled by new media and technology forms. While modernity, as has been discussed, offered newly budding inventions and spectacles divulging a fresh perspective on the mysterious qualities of time and space, the current postmodern climate is described in far less optimistic terms, characterized by anthropology scholar David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1980) by a sense of confusion and disconnectedness. Harvey's notion of postmodernism echoes Toffler's idea of future shock, which describes an inability to comprehend a kaleidoscopic stream of changing mediascapes, landscapes, and ideologies.²⁵ Harvey contends: 'Postmodernism swims, and even wallows in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is' (1980, p. 44). Like Toffler, Harvey decries a chaotic fragmentation of perception brought about by a superfluity of information, leading to the estranging sense of being thrust into a perpetually disconnected series of events. One of the consequences of this, Harvey continues, is that: 'There is in postmodernism, little overt attempt to sustain continuity of values, beliefs, or even disbeliefs' (p. 56).

²⁵ For more on 'future shock' refer to section 5.2.1

I would counter this with the assertion that because the postmodern is characterised by an influx of information, there is a demonstrable effort to sustain a sense of continuity by patterning this information into a continuous, historical narrative. Newspapers, television, and the Internet double as forms of media and entertainment, contributing to a widely accepted political narrative which impresses upon shared nationalist sentiments of (for instance) ‘America’ as a purportedly democratic ‘free country,’ to cite an idea promulgated in mainstream media through televisions, smartphones, and radio programs which are shared by participants in the postmodern era. Living and operating within this narrative of America gives people the ability to relate to one another as citizens of a shared culture. Elections, crises, war and social movements (while all subject to exhaustive debate) serve an important function as topics of discussion between families, neighbours, co-workers, and friends, often interpreted as a sequential thread of related events, as will be demonstrated within the case studies.

5.1.1 On Simulations and Entertainment

Before delving into postmodern case studies of cinematic space tourism, it is necessary to first define the terms ‘simulation’ and ‘entertainment’ as they are employed in this chapter. I use the word simulation in reference to philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), in which Baudrillard compares real

symptoms of an illness to simulated symptoms. Though the two categories would, on a surface level, seem to overlap producing the same observable results only the real illnesses can, in theory, be treated by the standards of contemporary medicine. Baudrillard stresses the difficulties in separating the simulated from the 'real' or base reality (in other words that which created the simulation) and emphasizes that, rather than being distinct from one another, there are seemingly infinite degrees of overlap between the two. He likens this to a thought experiment involving a bank robbery — while someone may intend to plan a 'simulated' robbery (without bullets or a real hostage) — real codes, including the arrival of police and the reactions of the bank patrons and employees would interfere with the process; because there can still exist varying degrees of overlap between the real and the simulated, it seems impossible to draw a precise distinction between the two.

I would group the various forms of entertainment stemming from illuminated projections, including the cinema and video games, within the category which Baudrillard defines as 'hologram':

The TV studio transforms you into holographic characters; one has the impression of being materialized into space by the light of projectors, like translucent characters who pass through the masses (that of millions of TV viewers) exactly as your real hand passes through the unreal hologram without encountering any resistance — but not without consequences: having passed through the hologram has rendered your hand unreal as well (p. 72).

By being reconstructed in the form of lights and colours and projected from the screen, the body appears to the viewer as a simulated image. The appeal of the simulated world of entertainment is that it offers something (potentially) better than the present. While entertainment is difficult to condense into a single definition, Dyer proposes that pleasurable sensations, ideas, and images lie at the core of consumer enjoyment:

Entertainment offers the image of ‘something better’ to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don’t provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, in the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized (2001, p. 20).

It follows then that the more entertainment that is consumed by a population, the further that population has moved into state of simulation, due to their constant engagement with that simulation, which substitutes for the ‘base reality’ constituting the physical world and enveloping the senses. In the postmodern era, which is host to considerably more modes of entertainment than ever before, it follows that humanity is plunging into simulations, particularly those of a holographic nature, at breakneck speed. I would add that in order for something to function as entertainment, the simulated reality need not appear ‘better’ (more appealing) than the status quo, it only needs to be *different* in some sense, offering an alternative model of what the world might look like. Dyer, in *Only Entertainment*, attempts to deconstruct the term entertainment into its constituent categories, explaining that while entertainment does not model utopia, instead: ‘It

presents head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it is organized' (p. 21) in generating the pleasurable feelings associated with entertainment.

However, the parameters entertainment needn't be so constricted; science-fiction visions of dystopia and utopia have proven equally entertaining, moreover entertainment can simultaneously offer *both* the feeling and construction of utopia or dystopia. For instance, *Avatar* begins with a vision of dystopian, militarized future, counteracting this with the organisation of utopia through the naturalistic Na'vi world, which offers a sensory glimpse into an imagined distant planet. The American military in *Avatar* is clearly presented as a harbinger of destruction, meanwhile, the Na'vi have a spiritual and sensual connection with the natural world, presenting an alternative, harmonious model of society which contrasts sharply with the modern American paradigm of corporate greed.

Despite being a contemporary Hollywood film, *Avatar* puts forward the same parable of interplanetary resource extraction dating back to *Frau im Mond*,²⁶ indicating that while cinematic technology has advanced, colonialist sentiment persists within cinematic outer space-themed narratives. With the theme of resource extraction coming full circle in marking the early stages of a new era, it is evident that the new millennium offers a critical point of reflection in science-fiction cinema, reflecting a time-period steeped in postmodernism influence, through which the collective Euro-American fantasy of colonial expeditions has since been reimagined on-screen.

²⁶ See Chapter 3 for further discussion of *Frau im Mond*

5.1.2 New Directions in Space Tourism

Film scholar, Jan Mair, in a discussion of the invasion and defeat of the racialized, alien ‘Other’ who descends upon the White House in Roland Emmerich’s *Independence Day* (1996), writes:

The lure of Armageddon and Judgement Day is the credence it gives to visions of mystic, religious philosophies, and all forms of certainty. The millennium is the moment to contemplate that humanity might have taken a wrong turning, thus ushering in its own destruction. Or, humanity might have allowed its righteous defences to fall into decay, making it an easy target for the lurking menace of unreconstructed evil (2002, p. 48).

Mair also observes that the defeat of the ‘Other’ in *Independence Day* is emblematic of the issues that the new millennium faces, noting that the year 2000 represents what is simultaneously a fresh start and a regression to the white, Western parable of Manifest Destiny:

The end of the millennium has not only brought us paranormal madness. It has also returned us to the beginning, to the days before feminism, before the recovery of the non-Western history, identity and futures began, before the Western representations of the Other and the notion of Otherness were deconstructed and shown to be imperialist in nature – to the days when men were mostly white and did what had to be done (2002, p. 48).

I add to Mair's observations that a further reason the start of the new millennium represents a 'moment' of significant transformation is due to two major collective traumas – the long chain of events which began on 9/11 (including the American war on terror, the invasion of Afghanistan, and the securitization of borders) and the early stages of global warming – which has led to increasingly unpredictable and perilous weather patterns and migration, among countless other effects. While incorporating a number of literary and filmic examples of contemporary space tourism, this chapter focuses primarily on two case studies which are particularly emblematic of these collective traumas – *WALL-E* and *Interstellar* – in evaluating new trends in the portrayal of space tourism with regard to climate change, digital animation, simulated planetary environments, and consumerism. *WALL-E* and *Interstellar* represent two especially pessimistic portrayals of space tourism emerging from Hollywood, where the voyage to space reveals Earth as an estranged, dying planet.

In formulating these observations, I refer to Ballard's and Westfahl's discussions of the history of the spaceship as an allegory in literature and science-fiction film, to make the case that futuristic space habitats and spacecrafts are allegories for contemporary media landscapes, conferring the detrimental impacts of simulated mediascapes on physical mobility and interpersonal relationships on a microcosmic level. Furthering this, I examine the implications of the science-fiction spaceship as a politicized model of the American corporation and consumer culture. These observations will open a broader discussion concerning how controlled environments in outer space

put forward an allegory for the paradoxical situation of seeking pleasure from consumer products and digital simulations (such as digital animation and CGI) in light of the subsequent disappointment stemming from wish-fulfilment.

5.1.3 Consuming Disaster

An insightful awareness of environmental destruction in the present day emerges in *Time Magazine's* melancholy reality docu-series, *A Year in Space* (2015), offering glimpses into American astronaut Scott Kelly's 340-day space journey, undertaken in preparation for NASA's upcoming manned missions to Mars.²⁷ The series features a recurring cast comprised of Kelly's girlfriend, daughters, twin brother (astronaut Mark Kelly)²⁸ and father²⁹ transpires partly on Earth, as Kelly undergoes preparations for his journey. Also documented are Kelly's two weeks sterilized in confined isolation inside of a Kazakhstani laboratory, where he bids his family farewell from behind plated glass. Later, Kelly and two accompanying astronauts steer their spaceship (which Kelly compares to a submarine navy vessel) to outer space, where their 150 billion dollar,

27 The date of these missions is yet to be determined, but a report conducted by the Science and Technology Policy Institute estimates suggest this could transpire by the late 2030s

28 Utilised by NASA as the control for the experiment

29 Growing increasingly concerned having two astronaut sons making a total of eight space missions between them

6-bedroom space station awaits them. Like many disillusioned tourists, Kelly experiences his share of disappointments; spreading red paste on his vacuum sealed fajita wrap there is a sense of stagnation, as he refers to Mars as a ‘dream deferred. Kelly’s year in space is also a test of endurance; encased in his spacesuit, Kelly was exposed to some of the most significant risks associated with climate change – radiation from high ozone levels, inhospitable temperatures, and supply shortages (learning three separate deliveries of food and materials exploded on their way up into atmosphere). While Kelly stood aboard the ISS gazing down on Earth through the window below his feet, his experience, in some ways, paralleled that of the people below, who were also experiencing one of the most significant tests of endurance in recent history during their year on Earth, as 2015 proved simultaneously to be the hottest and wettest on record so far. While media reports provide isolated accounts of weather events, vistas of the planet from space offer a more comprehensive picture which astronauts are in the best position to observe; asked about human impact the planet from his vantage point in space, one statement in particular from Scott Kelly’s first press conference back on Earth emphasises the impact of global warming on Earth’s changing surface:

You could see a lot of pollution, over parts of Asia that’s almost continuous... you can’t really see the ground very well... those fires over California over the summer... that smoke was pretty extensive ... noticing weather systems in areas where you’re not normally used to seeing them. But the predominant thing is, you just notice how thin the atmosphere is, how fragile it looks (*Time*, 2016).

With this in mind, the primary reasons driving cinematic sci-fi escapades from Earth after the year 2000 are manifold; firstly, there is a sense of the century-old, ultra-masculine fantasy of exploring and colonising virgin terrain and exerting control over foreign bodies to control the threat posed by ‘alien’ bodies and immigration. Contemporary science-fiction also interjects the newer threats of environmental catastrophe, overproduction, and toxic landscapes, which make this exodus a matter of urgency. Recalling the sci-fi exodus to outer space during the interwar period, and again during the Cold War, the post 9/11 American perspective of recent history has similarly prompted visions of escaping from a prolonged state of war and threats of annihilation.

These threats are explored in *Interstellar* which can be better understood in conjunction with American director Ken Burns’ four-hour long PBS docu-series *The Dust Bowl* (2012) – containing interviews that are, at various points, spliced into *Interstellar*. Burns informs viewers that the decade long Dust Bowl, spanning throughout the 1930s, resulted from ‘the greatest man-made catastrophe in American history superimposed over the greatest economic cataclysm in world history – the Great Depression’ (PBS, 2012). The eerie subversion of interview footage originating from Burns’ assemblage of material gathered in remembrance of the ‘dirty thirties’ contributes to Nolan’s realist depiction of the desertification of the Earth, corroborating *Interstellar*’s thematic focus on the threatened extinction of humankind. Dust Bowl survivors recollect their childhoods throughout Burns’ documentary – a time which signified for devout Christians a day of reckoning as they witnessed ‘black blizzards’ wafting across skies,

generating enough electricity to short-circuited electrical systems (PBS, 2012). Interviewees recall hearing grandparents speculate that this was the wrath of God in retribution for eroding the topsoil of the Great Plains during the ‘Great Plow-Up.’ Further attesting to what amounted to a doomsday scenario for millions, Burns’ interviewees also recall that birds fled in a mass exodus while ‘plagues’ of starving jackrabbits and locusts descended upon the land. Invoking fearful religious speculations concerning the new Millennium, elderly survivors in Burns’ documentary ominously forewarn of a second Dust Bowl which environmentalists predict will transpire in the coming decades.

Recalling director Roland Emmerich’s ecospectacles *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) (in which a father braves a new Ice Age in to reunite with his stranded son) along with Emmerich’s subsequent work, *2012* (2009) (in which a solar flare raises Earth’s temperature leading the Mayan prophecies to come to fruition), *Interstellar* lends itself to a wave of Hollywood ‘Greenbusters’ (existing within a long history of eco sci-fi cinema) consisting of ecocinema disaster narratives projecting through science-fiction the ramifications of climate change. Ken Burns, whose diverse body of documentaries cover a number of chapters in American history including Prohibition and the Civil War, equates the Dust Bowl with Hollywood disaster narratives, describing the Dust Bowl as ‘a real disaster film’ (PBS, 2012). *Interstellar* is a disaster film set during an unspecified point in the future, where only residual traces of technology exist, including dusty laptops and the occasional Indian surveillance drone. The sets, costume design, and rolling dust clouds in *Interstellar’s* rustic landscape are reminiscent of the moments of quiet

desperation captured by photographers Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein, hired to bring imagery of the Dust Bowl to the public.

5.2 Summary of *Interstellar*

Interstellar's hardened characters live under continual threat of suffocation, periodically taking refuge from dust storms in rickety wooden farmhouses. NASA pilot and engineer-turned-farmer, Cooper lives in one such house with his inquisitive 10-year-old daughter Murphy and 15-year-old son Tom along with Cooper's elderly father-in-law, who wearily recalls life with six billion people on the planet. Invoking Dust Bowl imagery, along with a host of catastrophic man-made spectacles, including China's Red Dust storms (observable from space) as well as the Great Smog of '52, *Interstellar's* characters rely on cloth masks as a safeguard against dust pneumonia caused by the regular onslaughts of dust (signalled periodically by sirens). Retreating into what feels more like a defeated past than a buoyant science-fiction future, the space and military programs have been disassembled to conserve resources and embrace agrarianism in a last-ditch effort to revive the dying planet, and new graduates are relegated to essential 'caretaking' roles. Like Roosevelt's New Deal, which was received with controversy,³⁰ the policies in *Interstellar* are a subject of debate, dividing those in favour of

³⁰ With some accusing the program of being socialist and thereby Anti-American

rehabilitating the planet, and pioneers, like Cooper, believing that NASA should be reinstated to find humanity a new home in space. These clashes come to the fore when the local public school vehemently insists on a dystopian curriculum enforcing the notion that moon landings were falsified, thereby directing wandering young imaginations away from the stars.

In the midst of this chaos, Murphy discovers a ‘ghost’ behind the bookshelves in her bedroom, collecting records of evidence to present to Cooper. Murphy’s ‘ghost’ communicates a set of coordinates, delivering Murphy and Cooper to an underground NASA facility where, driven into hiding, NASA engineers busy away in pursuit of a habitable planet on the far side of a celestial wormhole. Believing that Cooper has been fated by mysterious forces to pilot the mission, NASA requests that Cooper pilot the mission – a risky adventure paralleling the decision to take off to California during the Dust Bowl. *Interstellar’s* multi-layered complexity and moral ambiguity are consistent with Nolan’s collection of puzzle films – narratives which, film theorist Gary Bettinson explains, serve to ‘align the protagonist and viewer’ (2008, p. 151) so that they share in the same pace of narrative revelation. Such films, Bettinson further explains: ‘organize narrative suspense around a central enigma, repress crucial story information, provoke inaccurate hypotheses, and equivocate about the objectivity of narrative action’ (2008, p. 151). Repeated viewings may provoke new insights as the spectator attempts to fill in narrative gaps, however, the ambiguity of the puzzle film means lingering holes in the storyline may never be negotiated fully.

Unresolved, joyless endings are characteristic of Nolan's body of work, as observed by theorist Fran Pheasant-Kelly (2015) in an essay identifying Nolan's primary tropes – mental instability, grief, guilt, the post-9/11 zeitgeist and its relevance to masculinity identity in crisis. In accordance with these, *Interstellar* focuses on Cooper's deteriorating mental state during an increasingly turbulent space mission. As Cooper ventures further into space, Murphy is fixated on the notion that Cooper has abandoned Earth, and sequences of destruction on Earth reveal a world heading further into decline as people die of dust pneumonia and families take off following the spread of wildfire. As time passes, the steady disintegration of Cooper and Murphy's relationship (along with the space mission) torments Cooper, who glimpses through video condensed visions of time on Earth (where decades have passed within a matter of hours for Cooper), witnessing a series of major life events in a matter of minutes.

On Earth, Murphy devotes her life to solving the 'gravity problem,' to allow for the safe transport of humanity into space. Due to relativity, Murphy grows older than her father and devises a plan to save the planet by solving the gravity equation. Meanwhile, Cooper remains young in space, exploring potentially habitable environments. After the trauma resulting from these distortions of space and time lead Cooper to experience a pathological breakdown, Cooper is mysteriously rescued from a tesseract in space and reunited with Murphy, who is waiting for Cooper in a state of cryogenic preservation. On Murphy's deathbed it is revealed that communication through the tesseract allowed Cooper to send critical information to Murphy, allowing her to solve the gravity problem

and create a terraformed, cylindrical habitation in space. 'Cooper Station' is however a disappointing simulation of a perfectly manicured American suburb, revealing an anticlimactic glimpse of exclusively white youth playing baseball.

The abrupt killing of the black astronaut Romilly and subsequent images of the cylindrical suburbia in space hosting an all-white population suggests that tellurian sentiments of racist divide that once plagued Earth have been perpetuated in space. The ending of *Interstellar* predictably contradicts the progressive strides made by the presence of the female scientist Murphy, reinforcing the familiar image of the white male conquest of outer space dating back to the earliest depictions of space in cinema. While it was Murphy, whose persistence in solving the mystery of her 'ghost' saved humanity, the name Cooper station (named after Murphy Cooper) also implicates Cooper, whose mission was flawed from the start. In retrospect, Cooper made no grand contribution to the mission other than getting lost in space and making the decision to squander valuable time and resources visiting an uninhabitable planet. Cooper emerges as the hero, however, when on her deathbed, Murphy urges Cooper to explore Edmund's planet, imploring him to come to the rescue of astronaut Amelia Brand, who is depicted as a weak, emotionally volatile character throughout the film, doting on her lost love while stranded, alone, in space.

The exclusively white, terraformed, simulated existence that is Cooper's station is strikingly similar to the white colony in *Elysium's* (Neil Blomkamp, 2013) spaceport; *Elysium* in contrast addresses racial division deliberately and explicitly, functioning as a

parable for the US / Mexico border division. In the film, people of colour are left behind on earth where they are impoverished and enslaved, meanwhile, the white population enjoys a privileged life aboard the space station with access to a futuristic device that can heal virtually any illness. It is interesting to note in both films the same delaying tactic presiding over the first hour and a half of *Frau im Mond*, offering elongated glimpses of ‘ordinary’ life on Earth. In preparation for these space expeditions, protagonists become entangled debates shedding insight into a range of political and economic issues. While *Elysium* draws attention to issues of race, it comes as no surprise that the main character, Max DeCosta (Matt Damon), whose surname codes him as Latino, is played by a white actor, who emerges as the hero of the film.

5.2.1 Capitalism and Forms of Shock

In my view, overtly pessimistic space films such as *Interstellar* serve the important purpose of inoculating viewers against the phenomenon of ‘future shock’ described by Futurologist Alvin Toffler who observes a ‘clash of speeds’ occurring ‘between the old, lumbering mass system and the new diversity, flexibility and acceleration demanded of institutions built on knowledge’ (2013 p. 126) as the dilemma most affecting humankind today. Future shock is the temporal and spatial equivalent of culture shock, denoting the ‘the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in

individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time' (p. 4). In his article *Future as a Way of Life*, Toffler describes future-shock as a bona fide disease, psychological in origin:

I believe that the malaise, mass neurosis, irrationality, and free-floating violence already apparent in contemporary life are merely a foretaste of what may lie ahead unless we come to understand and treat this psychological disease (1965, p. 451).

A similar shock-related phenomenon is described by environmental scholar Stephen Schneider, who speculates:

The typical projections of global warming over the next century – an increased of 2-6 degrees C (3.6-3.8 degrees F) in average temperature – mean the world's climate will be changing at ten to sixty times its natural speed. Ten times is the best possible case... But even ten times is an almost unimaginable acceleration, it's as if we were driving down a highway at sixty miles per hour and suddenly the accelerator got stuck and the brake didn't work and we were doing six hundred miles an hour. If climate change were to be sixty times as fast it would hardly matter – it probably wouldn't be any more impossible to drive the car at 3,600 m.p.h. (Schneider 1976, cited in McKibben 1989, p. 123).

Naomi Klein also describes different variations of shock, comparing the use of electric shock therapy as a mode of torture with the political strategy of launching a psychological attack against the individual, throwing the individual into a state of constant bombardment and confusion. While the individual is focused on self-preservation, Klein argues, culture is uprooted by multinational corporations that are installed, such as those put into place in Chile, Iraq, and Louisiana during times of crisis.

Demonstrating WALL-E's shock in being propelled to space and uncovering a manufactured indoor consumer environment, *WALL-E* alludes to the film *Silent Running* which also invokes the displacement of humankind, pollution, and climate change in an environment where plants are no longer sustainable on Earth. WALL-E physically resembles *Silent Running's* benevolent, non-verbal service drones, and in both narratives the space station operates as an extension of the American municipality, whereby mobile, domed habitations span the size of cities.

The image of a planet knocked out of orbit is a visually captivating allegory of a state of shock in science-fiction; in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) a twin planet hurdles nearer to Earth, to the comfort of a manic depressive and the horror of her sister, invoking the voyeuristic fascination with catastrophic images of Earth faced with imminent disaster. Films such as *Melancholia* and *Another Earth* use the allegory of a planet propelled out of orbit in pointing to brief moments of contemplation and clarity within a profoundly disturbed collective psychological state. In cinema, human responses to climate change also manifest as mystery illnesses and afflictions. In a discussion of mental illness as an allegory for disaster in ecocinema, author Briohny Doyle makes the case that:

Take Shelter and *Melancholia* present schizophrenia and depression respectively as reasonable mental responses to specific conditions of their protagonists' lives at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a time characterized by economic as well as political and environmental instability in North America as evidenced by the global financial crisis and Hurricane Katrina (2013, p. 23).

Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) reflects on the devastation in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, depicting a post climate change environment ('The Bathtub') in Louisiana – where a radical reversal of perspective is necessary for survival in new climate zones ('when an animal gets sick here, you plug it into the wall'). Environmentalist Bill McKibben, in his prescient book on climate change, surmises that human survival will depend on our ability to reconstruct our own environment:

The problem is that nature, the independent force that has surrounded us since our earliest days, cannot coexist with our numbers and habits. We may well be able to create a world that can support our numbers and our habits, but it will be an artificial world, a space station' (1989, p. 144).

Imagery of space stations as controlled environments in science-fiction indicate lifestyle changes that must transpire (for those privileged enough to afford it) as the climate continues to transform. In Ridley Scott's *The Martian* (2015), apocalypse is experienced as a way of life. The '31-sols' mission in *The Martian* (2015) is directed at terraforming the planet, evidenced by the presence of an on-board botanist, Mark Watney. Mars is a curious site of ecological experimentation in the film, which references NASA's recent endeavours to grow food on Martian-like soil. Terraforming a sustainable environment on Mars is proposed as the solution to crisis, as Watney constructs solar panels and implements astute practices of sourcing heat and water. Imagery of Watney in his spacesuit digging into the rusty Martian soil could just as easily signify a post-global warming era on Earth where the crops have been obliterated. Projecting the intensity of

unexpected weather patterns, the disaster in *The Martian* assumes the form of a large-scale dust storm, which puzzles the crew who never before conceived of an event of such magnitude. As the storm threatens the spacesuit, breeches in the spacesuit signal deathly exposure. It is interesting to note the atypical-looking spacesuit in the film, fitted like an exoskeleton, with apparatuses for regulating the internal environment thereby giving the astronaut the appearance of a Martian – an indication that Watney has morphed into an alien to adapt. Furthermore, the removal of this symbolically rich spacesuit emphasizes human fragility; in one scene Watney is revealed as naked, pale, and bleeding as he extracts shrapnel embedded in his skin.

5.3 Space Tourism in *WALL-E*

WALL-E is a science-fiction animation characterized by a sombreness uncharacteristic of its production company, Pixar Animation Studios, becoming a box office success that has redefined the notion and intent of the Pixar animated feature film. Geography scholar Ian Graham Ronald Shaw, writing on the construction of the animated world within *WALL-E* observes:

Even if the movie is aimed principally at children, this is perhaps Pixar's darkest and most mature of all releases – and not because of its ability to incorporate adult humour as *Shrek* and its ilk have done (2010, p. 392).

WALL-E's dystopian plot is far more composite and adult-oriented than the typical, child-friendly Pixar animation, delineating the history of a fictional space tourist agency run by the megacorporation B 'N L Star-liners' advertising a five-year vacation excursion for passengers wishing to embark on a leisurely cruise to space while the hazy, garbage-engulfed Earth is tidied by a class of trash compacting robots during the aborted 'operation clean-up' mission. *WALL-E* is the most unconventional production of director Andrew Stanton, whose previous collaborations include more upbeat and child-friendly Pixar animations: *Toy Story* (John Lasseter, 1995), *A Bug's Life*, (Andrew Stanton, 1998), *Monsters Inc.* (Pete Docter, 2001), *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton, 2003), and *Cars* (John Lasseter, 2006). A number of Pixar animations – *Finding Nemo*, *Finding Dory* (Andrew Stanton, 2016) and *Cars* in particular evince Stanton's propensity towards blending ecocinematic and technological devices. The 'space tourists' inhabiting the 'Axiom' have inadvertently become permanent fixtures aboard the luxury starliner, due to post-apocalyptic conditions rendering the charred landscape devoid of life (see Figure 62) except for the sentient robot, WALL-E, and his endearing cockroach companion. The 'Axiom' has hosted six generations of American 'passengers,' evolving grotesque, balloon-like corpuses, bulbous, infantile faces, and floppy, truncated extremities. This science-fiction animation is set seven hundred years into the future, opening with a series of long takes portraying a garbage-laden planet reminiscent of the grimy 'Arcadia 234' in Paul Anderson's vision *Soldier* (1998) where garbage is hauled in transit across the solar

system by ‘waste disposal ships,’ delivering military waste to a presumably uninhabitable planet (see Figure 63). *WALL-E*’s depiction of an Earth smothered by garbage parallels an image from Mike Judge’s satirical film *Idiocracy* (2006) which refers to the ‘great garbage avalanche of 2505.’ In both situations the ‘corporatocracy’ is not only the catalyst for the annihilation of nature and civilization, but is also a replacement for the environment, formulating its own culture and cityscape; in *WALL-E* the planet was evidently dominated by the Buy ‘n Large Corporation, while in *Idiocracy* Costco is the size of a city and has its own law school.



Figure 62: New York Skyline in WALL-E



Figure 63: Arcadia 234 in *Soldier*

Visiting the theme of overproduction appearing in films such *Koyaanisqatsi* (Ron Fricke, 1982) and *Powaqqatsi* (Godfrey Reggio, 1988), while drawing from a host of science-fiction films including *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Silent Running*, and Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* (1997), *WALL-E* is distinctive within the framework of Andrew Stanton's more orthodox Pixar animations, portraying both terrestrial junk and space junk as media forms that offer insight into societal failure. *WALL-E* utilizes the concept of 'space tourism' both ironically and counterintuitively, highlighting the similarities between ordinary people in the domestic sphere and astronauts on prolonged missions in space, thereby subversively situating the viewer within a functional model of the present. In this way, *WALL-E* evinces Hollywood's ability to convey and critique contemporary American consumer culture, capitalizing on the space vehicle's displacement in both

space and time to estrange the viewer by adapting the present day into a novel, touristic experience.

Film scholar Richard Bégin, in an article noting the trend towards using CGI to represent cinematic disasters, argues that CGI cannot comment on reality because ‘Computer-generated imagery refers only to itself; it has no exterior. As such, computer-generated imagery does not represent’ (2014, p. 384). Bégin continues:

Consequently, digital technology does in fact originate a reality, but it is one that preserves of the actual scene of the event or the devastation nothing more than the economy of its emotional resonance and variations (2014, p. 384).

Discussing both *WALL-E* and the animated rag-doll, ‘9,’ in Shane Aker’s film ‘9’ (2009), Bégin speculates that animated characters are separated from externalized reality:

As they are the product of their generated environment, 9 and Wall e cannot call on memory, or indeed evoke some ineffable outside and, as a result, enable the actualization of an image of the disaster that would express the fundamental sense of loss (2014, p. 385).

Bégin’s dismissal of the potential for the virtual image of disaster to reference contemporary policy and his insistence that ‘this generated reality leaves no room for the political dimension inherent in actualization’ (2014, p. 383) risks missing the most important and subversive political dimensions in digitally animated and CGI films. I maintain that even animated film cannot exist in total isolation from the external reality from which it emerges. *WALL-E* leaves a vivid trail of information directly referencing

political events, including George Bush's televised speeches. Furthermore, *WALL-E* refers to the outside world through numerous references to other films, including older films intended to appeal to parents and grandparents. While most Pixar animations draw from a range of other Disney animations, *WALL-E* engages with a much broader cinematic history, paying homage to Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936), whose large expressive eyes and optimistic tenacity while working on an assembly line is invoked by *WALL-E*. The film is also peppered with iconic references to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and *Alien*, using Sigourney Weaver's voice for the robotic computer system 'Auto', whose steering wheel bears a physical resemblance to HAL 9000's omniscient red eye (see Figures 64-65). Like HAL 9000, Auto is a sentient simulation of a human who is fearful of 'death' (being disconnected), attempting to manipulate the crew to prevent himself from winding among the rubbish heaps teeming with discarded technologies. *WALL-E* furthermore borrows from *2001: A Space Odyssey's* soundtrack invoking the 'Dawn of Man' scene with Strauss' 'Also Sprach Zarathustra' (1896), when the Captain takes his 'first steps' and issues the order to return to Earth. Furthermore, Strauss II's 'The Blue Danube' (1866) plays as the Captain issues a 'status report.' *WALL-E* also resembles the wordless, coin-operated, trash-collecting robot, 'The Cooker' situated on the Moon in Nick Park's *Wallace and Gromit* (1989 - Present) animation *A Grand Day Out* (1989) (see Figures 66-67) in which an animated man and his dog build a rocket and travel to space.

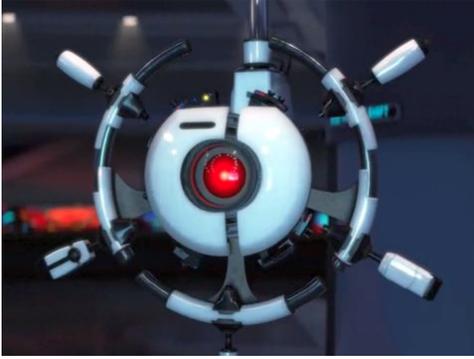


Figure 64: 'Auto'

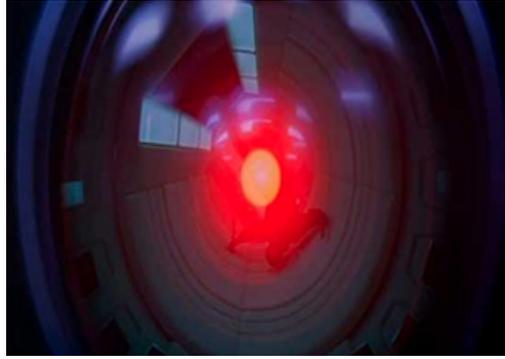


Figure: 65: 'HAL 9000'



Figure 66: 'WALL-E'

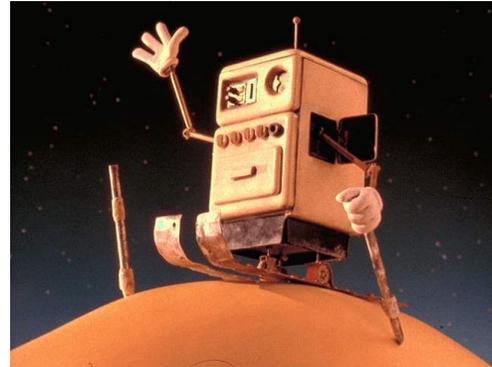


Figure 67: Cooker Robot

5.3.1 The Spaceship as Allegory

WALL-E's aptly named spaceship the 'Axiom,' a term which invokes a figurative model for establishing a self-evident principle or 'truth', suggests that the ship is a model for American social structure. In a study of space vehicles in film and literature, author and science-fiction reviewer Gary Westfahl catalogues the types of science-fiction space vehicles. The genre has long been preoccupied with the prototypical 'spaceship' which

Westfahl explains, is ‘parked in a permanent position or orbit to serve as space stations’ (1996, p. 34). Meanwhile the ‘space station’ represents: ‘an artificial structure designed to remain permanently in the vacuum of outer space, either in a fixed position or fixed orbit, and designed for permanent human habitation’ (Westfahl, 1996, p. 34). Sci-fi also incorporates vehicles more explicitly suited for migration and colonisation including ‘space stations which are transformed into spaceships’ (p. 34) in addition to generational ‘starships’ defined as:

vessels which take hundreds of years and several generations to reach another star... most residents will spend their entire lives in space and these enclosures will maintain a sense of travelling and have as their goal an eventual landing on a planet (Westfahl, 1996, p. 35).

While Westfahl offers a range of other distinctions including the inhabited asteroid, the domed vessel in *WALL-E* is closest to the ‘flying city’, defined as:

large, inhabited platforms within a planet’s atmosphere...despite their similarities to space stations, these communities are not truly isolated from the planet’s surface and lack contact with the environment of space (1996, p. 35).

The encapsulated bubble-world habitation in *WALL-E* is comparable to the large-scale Valley Forge (designed to preserve plant life on Earth) in *Silent Running* and more recently, to the gargantuan ‘Avalon’ in *Passengers*, which is reminiscent of the spaceship designed to ‘ferry a small number of humans to another inhabitable world’ (Nama, 2008, p. 14) in *When Worlds Collide*. In *Passengers*, a group of 5,000 future colonists from

various social classes (mainly white), dissatisfied with life on Earth, elect to take a 160-year journey to space preserved in a state of cryogenic hibernation. *WALL-E*'s 'passengers' are descendants entombed in 'space tourist' limbo, the excursion having become permanent. As captives on a perpetual vacation (some relaxing on hover-chairs beside an artificial beach lit with a pale blue virtual, domed sky) the dream of a permanent vacation, like the concept of a simulated reality itself, is revealed as a disappointment. The portrayal of the space tourists also makes the point that many Americans are accustomed to a life of convenience, with easy access to food, transportation, and comfort.

The majority of the tourists are portrayed with white skin, including Axiom's key characters, John and Mary (passengers) and Shelby Forthright (Buy n' Large's CEO and President). There are also a minority of (what appear to be) African-American characters with skin of varying shades of brown. Because the Axiom is the 'crown jewel' of the B 'n L fleet, it logically follows that this substratum exemplifies the descendants of the wealthiest American citizens. This mode of accommodation and transport are further evidence of affluence, as are the activities passengers are engaged in (women converse in parlours, babies are deposited at 'all-day care' and men circle around on hover chairs playing virtual ball games). Aboard the Axiom passengers abide by a rigid social code, communicating through video chat, playing virtual games, slurping oversized beverages, and calling on service bots for menial tasks.

In considering ‘The Axiom’s’ relationship with space tourism and the present, it is useful to contextualize the treatment of the spaceship within the science-fiction genre, where it has made the leap from literature to film. In a speech entitled ‘Science-Fiction Cannot Be Immune from Change,’ Ballard, who used and advocated for an avant-garde approach to science-fiction literature, argued in 1969 (months before Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the Moon) that although spaceships served historically a literary device for writers attempting to convey the future, the subject’s imaginative possibility has been exhausted due to its potential as a symbol for the future having been transmuted into the iconography of progress under the Kennedy administration:

The writers are searching for a new metaphor for the future. The spaceship and interplanetary travel, was the most magnificent possible metaphor for the future when it was first conceived – let's say 100 years ago, not to go back too far – or in its great heyday of modern American science-fiction... The metaphor of the spaceship isn't any longer a valid metaphor for the present because it is simply an image of the past. I mean, the iconography of space travel, that ringed planet, the spaceship that looks something like that microphone, the notion that the future was anything with a fin on it – this is something that has gone out.

Ballard’s fictional accounts of space travel including ‘Memories of a Space Age’ (1988), ‘Thirteen to Centaurus’ (1962) and those involving space tourism more explicitly such as ‘Passport to Eternity’ (1963) and ‘Tomorrow is a Million Years’ (1966), proved ground-breaking, flipping the spaceship’s association with progress on its head. Analysing the spaceship in Ballard’s work, science-fiction editor and critic David Pringle (1979) explains ‘when space capsules appear, they are invariably wrecked, grounded, or

trapped in an endless orbit' (p. 33). Within such works, the future is conveyed not through spaceships but through the exploration of Earthly landscapes, to implore the surroundings and technology, turning the notion of space tourism towards Earth, to uncover an alien planet littered with outmoded technological artefacts and ruins. Counterintuitively, it is not the functionality but the very decrepitness of space technology comprising Ballard's metaphor of the future. In *WALL-E* the effect is similar, as the spaceship's presence critiques the overproduction and overemphasis on space technology and its failure to serve any meaningful purpose for ordinary people. Within Ballard's novel *Memories of the Space Age* (1988) the NASA site in Florida is described as a graveyard of space technology. Much of this anthology is preoccupied with abandoned runways, gantries, and ramshackled space vehicles (including rocket prototypes and capsules suspended in orbit and buried aircrafts) portraying space travel as the forbidden fruit through which humanity taken a great and terrible leap forward. As the result of witnessing the space age unfold on television or even partaking first-hand as engineers and astronauts, Ballard's characters are disposed to 'fugue,' or space-time illnesses rendering them physically incapacitated with terminal diseases with symptoms overlapping with cancer, Alzheimer's, and radiation sickness – conveyed with a cold, clinical detachment as part of the avant-garde approach reflective of Ballard's training as a medical student in psychiatry.

Coming from the perspective of a science-fiction author and critic, Westfahl, (1996) attributes the 'failure' of spacecraft to serve as a metaphor for the future in

literature not from overuse or from the actualization of the fantasy of spaceflight, but instead from a shortfall of creative insight:

Considering the limitless possibilities for creating absolutely any environment at all in a space station, one finds it truly depressing to see, again and again, the neat lawns and gently sloping landscapes of a suburb in the American Midwest. And considering the innumerable ways in which a space habitat will irrevocably change human nature, one finds it truly incredible to hear claims that such habitats will in fact function as the perfect environment for the rebirth of old cultures, particularly those of good old-fashioned rugged individualism and the American frontier. Treating a miniature, artificial world with infinite capacity for strangeness, writers stubbornly think in the most conventional ways imaginable (p. 165).

The space vehicle seems to be approaching its imaginative limits in Hollywood science-fiction is continuously churning out depictions of space stations which resemble aseptic living spaces or suburban neighbourhoods, as in the cases of *Moon* (Duncan Jones, 2009), *Interstellar*, *Gravity* (2013), *Elysium*, *The Martian*, *Passengers*, *The Space Between Us* (Peter Chelsom, 2017) in the last decade alone. Using the strategy of politicized production design described by cinema scholar David Desser (1999) as ‘a way of imagining through visual space the contemporary conflicts surrounding issues of class, race, and gender’ (p. 84) spacecrafts have been implemented to portray the present, representing government funded agencies, commercial endeavours, military bases, cities and domestic habitations. Yet, Ballard (1969) notes the potential for surrealism and beauty to emerge within the composition of sci-fi space vehicle in cinema:

One thing about *2001* that I liked was that the spaceships there did not look like the sort of paper darts of classical science-fiction. They looked like early Paolozzi sculptures – they have no aerodynamic forms, but are almost icons from inner space – and this was one of the good things about this movie.

2001: A Space Odyssey, alluded to in *WALL-E*, is a non-verbal mediation on physical space, relying on imagery, music, and sound rather than dialogue or voice-over – at times, omitting dialogue altogether in favour of displaying moving lips. This is paralleled by WALL-E's inability to vocalize – a tactic which estranges the spectator, focusing the attention on CGI production design. Within the spaceship's interior, the intensive focus on screens and adverts delivers a scathing criticism of globalization and the postmodern mediascape, alongside the contemporary state of manufacturing and industry.

5.3.2 A Simulated Future

In *WALL-E*, Earth is brimming with heaps of compacted junk mounded into skyscrapers by trash-compacting robots designated to clean up a planet ravaged by the Buy 'N Large 'ultrastore' – a megacorporation that is a futuristic version of Walmart or Costco, comprised of warehouses spanning the length of city blocks, dominating the cityscape. While the inert robotic carcasses of the moribund, outmoded series of 'waste-allocating-litter-load' trash-clearing compactors dot the landscape, WALL-E remains sentient, inexplicably hard at work. The Buy 'N Large corporate logo, which is

representative of the American consumer economy is plastered on the faded currency and dated newspapers strewn on the ground, as well as gas stations, banks, fast food places, and the transit system. Dated Buy 'n Large jingles ricochet from old advertisements to the tune of cloying melodies from Gene Kelly's musical *Hello, Dolly!* (1969), contrasting sharply with the dead and melancholy landscape. In a series of ghostly, holographic advertisements which are activated as WALL-E treads over the platform of the ruined downtown transport terminal, a voice echoes from generations ago: 'Too much garbage in your face? There's plenty of space out in space. B n' L Starliners leaving each day... we'll clean up the mess while you're away.' Later animated apparition of Shelby Forthright, the ineloquent B 'N L CEO and President (whose physical resemblance to George Bush is striking) advertises a cruise to space, declaring: Space is the final fun-tier!'

This scene transcodes the post 9/11 era under the Bush administration, with the space tourists embodying feelings of apathy that emerged towards the end of Bush's presidency in 2008, coinciding with the year *WALL-E* premiered in theatres. Because he is described both as the CEO and as 'Mr. President' in a news bulletin, Forthright's presence links corporate interests with the government, imperialism, and expansion. Michelle Yates (2015) notes that the Forthright's message to 'stay the course' is a 'jab at former President George W. Bush's 'stay the course' policy in Iraq' (p. 526). I would add also that the film is a commentary on Bush's urging of Americans, in the same speech, to go shopping following the events of 9/11. Yates (2015) finds the film ineffective, arguing

that it is ‘powerful in its failure to understand and critique the roots of ecological crisis’ due to its failure to put forward ‘alternatives to both compulsory heterosexuality and capitalism’ (p. 541). Rather than didactically spewing reasonable alternatives, *WALL-E* extrapolates from the early 21st century, speculating on what the future may look like should the current model remain unchanged. The film’s unconvincing ending, whereupon the passengers return to Earth to plant gardens feebly proposes an alternative merely to offer a passable, Hollywood-worthy ending. In failing to observe the subversive use of such tactics, Yates (2015) neglects to appreciate *WALL-E*’s scathing critique of the ‘stay the course’ message, undermined by imagery of alienated, degenerated beings. The film suggests that it is impossible to rely on film as a guide to the future, as *WALL-E* will likely end up in trash heaps, much like the discarded *Hello, Dolly!* VHS tape collected by *WALL-E*.

In delineating a history of advertising whereby a human colony has been transplanted aboard the luxury starliner, ‘the jewel of the B&L fleet,’ the film hints that while similar colonies have been established in space this is the most lavish and exorbitant touristic experience offered. Advertised as a luxury cruise, a hologram depicts a fleet of Star-liners departing for space with beaming, muscular young men, women, and children (mainly white) aboard the spacecraft. Passengers are also depicted swimming and playing golf – with ‘all-access hover-chairs’ so ‘even grandma can join the fun.’ In this advert are thin, mainly white, three-dimensional’ (more realistic looking) people in playsuits, playing golf by a window overlooking the cosmos (see Figure 68). Also

advertised are a crew of ‘fully automated’ robots offering massages, ‘non-stop entertainment,’ and ‘fine dining.’ As is typical of ads, the reality does not live up to these promises. Here, the film self-reflexively plays on the nebulous nature of reality and simulations, offering holograms of what look three-dimensional people as advertisements; therefore, within the film, a variety of depictions of humans operate at different levels of removal from ‘reality.’



Figure 68: Holographic advertisement for the Axiom

In the film’s second half, WALL-E makes his way into outer space with EVE, a sleek, technologically sophisticated love interest doubling as an extraterrestrial vegetation evaluator sent by the Axiom on an excursion to detect life for ‘operation recolonise.’ Having stumbled upon a small, lime-green sapling, WALL-E is accidentally catapulted into the sky and blasted into space atop a rocket with EVE. Upon entering

the space station, WALL-E is stricken by his first encounter with ‘humans.’ Far from the sprightly, three-dimensional characters in *Hello, Dolly!*, WALL-E’s coveted reference point to pre-apocalyptic conditions, the disappointingly inert humans within are like a cinematic representation of Jack Vance’s short science-fiction novel *Abercrombie Station* (1952), describing a space colony where a ‘globular’ figure is a prized asset, allowing one to inflate handsomely and comfortably veer off into zero gravity: ‘I’m among my own people, the round ones, and I’ve never had a wrinkle on my face. I’m fine and full-blown, and I wouldn’t trade with any of them below’ (p. 24). *WALL-E*’s passengers are, in contrast, disempowered by their rotundity, developing in the presence of ‘micro-gravity’ osteoporotic bodily frames marked by degenerated spinal columns alongside augmented legs, smaller skulls and oblique bodies, as depicted in the X-rays within a video where the CEO dismissively illustrates the effects of space on the body. This gradual devolution of the body is also linked with the transformation of the human figure into an animation, which can be traced to the row of portraits of captains lining the Axiom’s wall, each appearing progressively larger and more cartoonish (see Figure 69).



Figure 69: Portraits displaying a lineage of Axiom captains

While animation may have evolved these characters in any direction, the decision to render them in the most inert, impotent form imaginable is a self-reflexive comment on the inherently flat and deadened nature of animation; in her analysis of *WALL-E* film theorist Vivian Sobchack highlights the uncanniness of the animated image, explaining the humans in *WALL-E* remain suspended permanently between life and death through the use of animation whereby:

a sense of generational mortality remains, however; and, as in the computer-generated *WALL-E*, it [cinema] metaphorically compounds the end of the human being - that is, of human presence and animation – with the ‘death of photochemical cinema (2016, p. 379).

Furthermore in *WALL-E*, ‘the loss of photochemical ‘cinema,’ representing the loss of the ‘real’ is conflated with ‘the loss of terrestrial human life’ (Sobchack, 2016, p.

379). Space tourism implicates a distancing from nature, with the space tourist sharing the bodily characteristics of the homebody, office-dweller, couch potato, and even the astronaut aboard the space station (see Figures 70-71).



Figure 70: Axiom passenger



Figure 71: Scott Kelly

The productive energy consumed by the screen is time-consuming and emotionally draining, fostering the neglect of the body. *WALL-E* suggests in the 21st century, where Westerners are fixated upon screens and integrate the visual economy within nearly every aspect of domestic living, the world appears to be closing in, becoming flatter and more animated, at once progressively more artificial and paradoxically, more convincing in terms of the amount of pixelated information conveyed by digital imagery. While *WALL-E* is highly emotive, the humans in the film have simplified facial expressions. This lack of emotiveness alienates the spectator, detracting from the appreciation of the film and drawing attention to what is

instead lacking. Sobchack's nostalgia for analogue cinema speaks to WALL-E's yearning for the cinematic world of *Hello, Dolly!*:

My preference in animated films has always been for those that visibly labour. For me, Willis O'Brien's animated model King Kong with its jerky attempts, its laborious struggle to achieve both 'movement and liveliness' far surpasses Peter Jackson's effortless and computer-graphically rendered King Kong (2016, p. 390).

Self-reflexively linking animation with superficiality, animated Axiom passenger, Mary, complains about virtual dating, unable to find someone who isn't 'so superficial.' Thus, WALL-E portrays spectatorship and animation in an ironic light, highlighting the parallels with the shortcomings of animation in providing sustained satisfaction.

Ronald Shaw notes the parallels between the passenger's degenerated physiques and the 'atonic worlds' described by French philosopher Alain Badiou:

The Axiom is a prescient illustration of an atonic world: a place where the transcendental is obeyed unthinkingly. It is a place where the only real decision one gets to make is whether to purchase the red or blue bodysuit and the most pressing existential dilemma is whether to sample the latest Buy 'n Large Smoothie. It is the same place where a giant mega-corporation decides every facet of existence [...] The fact that within the atonic world of the Axiom spaceship the passengers are themselves *visibly* atonic (incapable of walking due to generations of stress-free living and atrophied muscles) is really a poetic exaggeration of the politically alienated society Badiou is so scornful of (2010, p. 397).

Badiou's description of atonic worlds is characterized by alienation and futility:

An atonic world is a world without any points. The notion of atony can be linked to that of an isolate, thus producing the formal truth of a manifest contemporary condition: the obsession with communication and horror the horror of solitude imply atony (2019, p. 421)

WALL-E's atonic world results in the passengers' comically rotund bodies and red and blue coloured playsuits rendering people undivided and undifferentiated, exposed to the same media and existing within a uniform capitalist culture.

5.3.3 Depicting the Attention Economy

In the manner in which the ruined metropolis in *WALL-E* is a representation of catastrophic overconsumption, the animated space station projects the anhedonia characterizing the atonic, internalized worlds of the characters. Within the technologized sphere of the space station, this internal trauma and frustration is expressed by the inability to interact with the 'real' inside a simulated environment. *WALL-E* portrays within the manufactured landscape a bright, continuous stream of that which Ballard refers to in a speech delivered in a 1969 symposium in Rio de Janeiro as advertising's 'visual fictions' – 'we are trapped in a maze of fiction – politically-conducted mass

advertising, the immense range of consumer goods iconography that is pouring out.’ The signifiers of today’s visual fictions are spelled out in *WALL-E* with candy-coloured pink, purple, blue, red, and yellow neon lights; a massive banner atop the Axiom’s entry point reads ‘Welcome to the Economy’ with bright, flashing signs instructing the passengers to ‘Buy,’ ‘Eat,’ ‘Live,’ and ‘Shop.’ Meanwhile, Buy and Large’s lulling, incessant customer announcements satirically promise ‘everything you need to be happy.’

The Axiom’s assengers are addicted to screens, where social transactions are mediated through purchases. Jonathan Beller, a scholar of English and visual studies, conceives of a concept called the ‘attention economy’ operating by harnessing attention into labour through redirecting one’s productive energy towards the screen. Though Westerners are immersed in these processes, it is only recently that users are becoming aware of the attention economy’s lasting impressions on social transactions. Beller puts forth examples of companies providing users with free access to digital services, while surreptitiously gathering personal data with the intent of selling this to other such companies in a Byzantine exchange:

Like Google’s “Adsense,” which auctions searchable terms to the highest advertising bids, Root Markets’ business plan to securitize attention is among the emerging strategies for the computerized parsing, bundling, and re-marketing of attention - taken together, these various strategies for the capture of attention mark a significant mutation in the conceptualization, character, and monetization of what Marx called “productive” labor (labor that produces capital for its capitalist). The rise of the internet along with the market valuation of internet companies allows us to grasp this simple fact: as with previous if still extant labor markets, the commodity being sold in capitalist media is productive power itself (2006, par 3).

The space tourists are immersed within intangible services propelling the spaceship's visual economy – thus the spaceship is a symbol of stagnated mobility, as productive energy is squandered. Beller stresses that the visual labour transpiring within the attention economy is akin to physical labour. WALL-E appears at odds with the attention economy, remaining disinterested in advertising (POV shots reveal his robotic eyes view the world in black-and-white), appearing as perplexed as Chaplin enveloped within his own black-and-white industrial 'environment,' indifferent to its temptations and to the rigid social codes embodying the assembly line procedures. WALL-E's indifference and childlike naiveté are a foil for the automated assembly line of passengers; while pointing out its parallels between the visual economy and the industrial assembly line processes, the film emphasizes the primary difference – in *WALL-E*, humans are the product, manoeuvring in hoverchairs along the assembly line, subjected to intensive, uniform social conditioning.

In Pixar narratives including *Toy Story*, *Toy Story 2* (John Lasseter, 1999), *Toy Story 3* (Lee Unkrich, 2010), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), *Cars* and *Cars 2* (2006, 2011), the overlap between living beings and products demonstrates that animation is suited to anthropomorphized machines in a satirical exchange where humans appear flat and inexpressive while products are highly emotive, encoded as 'real.' In *Toy Story*, *Monsters Inc.*, and *WALL-E*, humans are relegated to the background, and the case of *Cars* absent altogether – a sardonic reflection upon the notion that capitalism may run

independently of human beings (and more effectively). In *Monsters Inc.*, children are perceived as a threat to the factory's internal workings, leaving the monsters terrified. In Pixar animations, social hierarchy is conveyed by class divides within products; in *CARS*, the rusty older models face discrimination. The robot *WALL-E* is laid in stark contrast to the smoother, glossier EVE, who has the more alluring physique of an Apple product. In *WALL-E*, Pixar paradoxically utilises the commercial value placed on the appearance of products including toys and vehicles to comment on the nature of social hierarchy and social mobility associated with ownership, conveying a nostalgia for a time before machines.

Cinema's space tourists are subjected to intensive social engineering within the experimental, closed community of the space station, social hierarchies may be studied at close range. Class divisions are evident within vehicles of mobility are evident in *Star Trek* (1966-1969), *Airplane!*, *Airplane II: The Sequel*, *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon-ho, 2013), and *Passengers* – examples where captains are required to make snap judgements and weighty decisions concerning the fate of the passengers onboard. *WALL-E*'s vehicle constitutes a unique reversal of this familiar paradigm due to the Captain's inability to decide, hinting that the ship's autonomous 'visual economy' has been running irrespectively of the leader for some time. As author Sean Mattie observes in his reading of the dynamics of humans and machines in the 'Axiom':

Piloting a ship is a common metaphor for the difficulty and importance of ruling, yet both piloting and ruling have become, like all functions on the Axiom, technical and automatic, and thus unnecessary for any human being to perform (2014, p. 14).

Machines and humans are conflated throughout *WALL-E* coexisting in that which Mattie (2014) describes in passing as ‘political equilibrium’ (p. 17). I would further this notion that the politicized sphere has rendered the passengers indifferent and equally ineffective in extending this to American politics. While the film references Bush, the election of Donald Trump is equally relevant – a businessman with no government experience operates as a litmus test for the notion that in the face of a self-governing process, the heart of which is situated in economics, the necessity for a decisive and ethical political leader is diminished or rendered obsolete as goals of the leader are indistinguishable from corporate interests.

5.3.4 The Spacecraft and Social Engineering

WALL-E shares a number of similarities with author and composer S.P. Somtow’s ‘Mallworld’ (1981) – a collection of short stories transpiring in a shopping mall planet consisting of a ‘thirty-kilometre-long shopping centre that floats in the loneliness between the asteroids and Jupiter’ (p. 43). Here, space approaches the upper limits of commercialization; the planet has not only ‘everything, from robots to Rice Krispies – but a range of other increasingly absurd products, including a line of fully refundable,

brightly coloured genetically engineered babies breastfed by chimps, and a range of ‘suicide parlours’: ‘Credit bad? Better dead than in the red! Low cost suicide plans! Lay-away available!’ Through science-fiction, the displacement of the shopping mall to the cosmos contributes another layer of strangeness to the phenomenon of compulsive shopping. In this novel, entire floors of the mall remain abandoned and derelict, inhabited by outlaws, vampires, ex-cons and other foils to the economic system. In science-fiction, the commercialization of outer space mockingly suggests that anything may be assimilated into the economy, so long as it is marketed properly.

Cultural studies scholar Michelle Yates characterizes *WALL-E* as an ‘Edenic recovery narrative’ which ‘concerns the loss of a rich and pristine garden of natural delight and our desire to recover that loss’ (2015, p. 529). Yates draws upon the work of sociologist Andrew Szasz, pointing out that in today’s market, nature is up for purchase; shopping for Eden is a means of seeking protection at an individual or family level:

The closer a person can get to filling their home with every conceivable natural, organic, or non-toxic alternative, the higher the apparent likelihood of protection [...] As with bottled water and organic food, here, too, a class gradient is the inevitable corollary of a consumer orientation to risk (Szasz, 2007, p. 166).

The potential for individuals to purchase safety diverts collective action on a mass scale, as exemplified in *WALL-E* where small groups of individuals seek isolated refuge in space. *WALL-E* doesn’t explicitly address the fate of the remainder of the human population; as there are no ethnic groups or nationalities other than white Americans and

a few African-Americans it is significant that the majority of humankind in remains ‘missing’ – presumably unable to afford protection (or else omitted from the narrative due to the prejudices of the film-makers and Pixar). Historically, Szasz argues, consumer practices have extended the longevity of affluent, white Americans through movements such as the relocation from inner cities to gated communities within the suburbs and from suburbs to underground fallout shelters. Extending Szasz’s notion of ‘inverted quarantine’ *WALL-E* portrays the allegory of space tourism as a guide for shopping our way to safety where the Axiom is a means for affluent Americans to escape the toxic threats of capitalist culture, while conditions worsen for the majority. The portrayal of oblivious passengers implies that participants within this process are not explicitly aware of this process; the actions of the passengers result from following ‘directives’ – defined by Anne F. Howey as ‘what one has been programmed to do’ (2010, p. 46). Howey argues the film’s use of service robots who follow orders is a foil for the behaviour of the ‘Axiom’s’ passengers: ‘the robots’ inclinations to follow their directives mimics the consumer practices of the humans depicted within the film’ (2010, p. 46).

5.3.5 Space junk Vs. Junk-Space

Space travel has become increasingly hazardous in recent times due to an estimated 7,000 tons of space junk orbiting the Earth, posing threats for astronauts and requiring additional machinery for ‘vacuuming’ space (Osbourne, 2016). *WALL-E* is the

first science-fiction film displaying a swirling ocean of Space Junk obstructing the normally utopic opening shot of Earth from space (see Figure 72). Humorously putting forth more space crafts as the solution to a planet overfilled with junk, the film invites viewers to reflect on the direct relationship between space junk and its conceptual inverse, 'Junk-space' – a term coined by the Dutch architect and urban theorist Rem Koolhaas, whose unconventional, futuristic looking designs and pessimistic views on the nature of globalization have been the source of controversy throughout his prolific career. For instance, in his manifesto on Junk-space, Koolhaas grimly contemplates the appearance of 21st century cityscapes:

If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, Junk-Space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet. The built (more about the latter) product of modernization is not modern architecture, but Junkspace. Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout (2002, p. 175).

I side with Koolhaas' dark conceptualization that Junkspace is the inevitable result of technological progress that will eventually take over the planet, serving as an important reminder that what is thought of as 'progress' (whether it be colonialism, eugenics, rocket missiles, mass production, or space tourism) today may signify the downfall of tomorrow. WALL-E, the robot is an investigator of Junk-space and a gleaner of discarded objects of cultural significance including light bulbs, radios, televisions, and most notably VHS tapes including *Hello, Dolly!* (1969), through which WALL-E relays the loss of analogue

cinema in favour of a proliferation of animated works. Analogue cinema, as represented by the exhaustively cheerful musical *Hello, Dolly!* is not necessarily portrayed as desirable; the profoundly optimistic song 'Put on Your Sunday Clothes' is about the late 1960s, when mass consumerism and the spread of urban developments represented an exciting possibility for Americans.

WALL-E is an ironic figure, he is at once discarded junk and a mysteriously self-aware robot. Unlike the majority of sentient robots in science-fiction WALL-E is unequivocally endearing. WALL-E's character physically resembles *E.T.* - a space tourist that explores Earth by relating to objects which he develops a fascination with as well as a sensitivity to (the refrigerator, toys, and hospital equipment). Like *E.T.* who imitates the family to learn human values such as love and kinship, WALL-E also attempts to 'learn' how to be human, imitating the characters in *Hello-Dolly*. While both *E.T.* and WALL-E yearn to return 'home,' for *E.T.* this signifies his home planet, and for WALL-E this signifies a return to a time when the planet was once thriving.

In suggesting that junk can have a powerful influence on those who encounter it, *WALL-E's* portrayal of 'junk' as a mysterious object of inquiry encourages the viewer to consider their own relationship with cinema and with consumer practices. This goal seems somewhat idealistic however; Koolhaus also indicates that Junkspace is perhaps too overwhelming and too prolific to grasp or even notice, presented as an undifferentiated mass (much like the heaping towers of compacted trash in *WALL-E*):

Junkspace is beyond measure, beyond code... Because it cannot be grasped, Junkspace cannot be remembered. It is flamboyant yet unmemorable, like a screen saver; its refusal to freeze ensures instant amnesia (2002, p. 177).



Figure 72: A barrier of space junk in *WALL-E*

Analysing recent depictions of garbage heaps in cinema, media theorist Tina Kendall agrees that trash normally goes unexamined: ‘is the kind of matter we frequently take to be at the antipodes of human life: dead, inert, disguising, and without value, meaning, or agency of any kind’ (2012, p. 48). Yet, considered through the cinematic lens, junk may become artful and even beautiful, a ‘vibrant and effectively charged medium through which we might rethink the relationship between people and things’ (Kendall, 2012, p. 47). Cinematic depictions of trash encourage viewers to consider their relationship to the material world; Kendall proposes that films therefore may be ‘ethical

to the extent that they contribute new sensibilities and invite new ways of thinking and feeling about trash and about the human subjects who form relations with it' (p. 47). Considered as a primary source of information, junk becomes a living museum, revealing a lifetime of social exchanges and a rapidly changing systems of values, codified in the form of brand names and discarded products. For instance, propelled aboard a rocket, WALL-E becomes entangled with Sputnik, glimpsing discarded rovers beside an abandoned American flag planted on the lunar surface. As WALL-E glides by, a shot reveals an advertisement on the Moon for a 'B&L Outlet Mall: Coming Soon' (see Figure 73).



Figure 73: Outlet Mall advertised on the Moon

The 'Axiom' in *WALL-E* can be likened to portrayal of the space station in J.G. Ballard's short story 'Thirteen to Centaurus' (1962), a narrative which highlights the

connection between space travellers and ordinary citizens when a teenager, Abel, gradually becomes aware that the ‘spaceship’ he is residing in is not situated in outer space, but is instead is an experimental colony stationed on Earth. Meanwhile an onboard psychologist explains the social engineering built into the experiment is far more important than the mechanical. Depicted in Peter Potters’ (1965) BBC2 television adaptation of Ballard’s ‘Thirteen to Centaurus,’ (created as part of a science-fiction anthology consisting of dramatized short stories entitled ‘Out of the Unknown’) is a shot of the crew on revolving carousel of exercise machines listening to the message ‘there is no other world but this’ repeated in an endless loop, programming inhabitants to believe they are on an interstellar journey to Alpha Centauri, Earth’s nearest star. The subjects are victims of ‘conditioning blocks’ or blocks on thoughts, in addition to ‘directives’ consisting of programmed instructions relayed by audio tracks. The onboard psychologist recommends that the ‘passengers’ are never to be removed from the spacecraft, suggesting that if they awake from social engineering they would be unable to ‘return’ to the outside world. *WALL-E*’s ‘space tourists’ on the other hand bravely attempt to transition back to Earth; their desire to return signifies that even if the fantasy of holidays in space comes to fruition, life in space would be like living inside an animated dream – flat and unfulfilling.

There have been various experiments conducted involving closed bubble communities within experimental space-dome simulations such as Hawaii’s ‘Mars Colony’ – designed to mimic the conditions of a space station on Mars as a means of

studying the effects of living in close quarters with other individuals. The notion of the space station as an experimental, enclosed community situated on Earth is the premise of T.C. Boyle's *The Terranauts* (2016) – a work of fiction that links the rigorous selection process for the participants of the closed community to the astronaut selection process, examining the internal conflicts within the closed communities. The premise is loosely based on the 'failed' (and controversial) 'Biosphere 2' experiment in Arizona in which eight individuals lived for two years enclosed in glass. The idea of the closed biosphere is satirized in Jason Bloom's comedy *Bio-Dome* (1996), where two foolhardy young men are accidentally sealed inside the 'Bio-Dome' with a crew of scientists. Bubble domes are becoming a necessity in some areas of the world today; for instance, due to air pollution requiring the use of masks with canister filters, smaller, artificial 'bubble domes' are being constructed in Beijing for children to play in (The Guardian, 2015).

5.3.6 Impediments to Space Travel

Once deep space is finally reached, there remains the nagging question of what ought to be done with it. *Dark Star* provides a satirical vision of crew succumbing to listlessness in deep space, engaged in a vague mission which involves blowing up planets arbitrarily deemed 'unstable.' In design scholar Jack Ingram's discussion of planned

obsolescence, he writes ‘the personnel lack a total engagement with the task’ (2009, p. 209) adding:

It provides reflections on the way in which technology at first magical and wondrous, so quickly becomes commonplace and even dull, and how new objects become part of old practices, and the new lives alongside residual old technology (2009, p. 209).

The tedious side to technology is linked in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Gravity* with Dr. Ryan Stone’s loss of volition as she grows increasingly unhinged during a basic maintenance mission gone awry, trekking across space untethered, before becoming stranded in China’s abandoned space station. Jameson emphasises the isolation inherent to space travel, pointing out: ‘David Bowie’s wonderful song “Major Tom, about an astronaut lost spinning around in his “tin can,” might serve as the background music for this sadness of the loss of earth (2008, p. 174). In the same way music about space in popular culture leads listeners to reflect on the nature of space exploration, contemporary science-fiction visions of outer space allow viewers to think about and preemptively mourn the loss of the planet. By conceiving of space travel through animation and identifying with protagonists in popular film and literature, it may be possible to contemplate the limitations of animation and social engineering, as well as comprehend the imaginative limits underlying fantasies of space tourism.

Chapter 6

Space Tourist (2019):

A Developmental Approach to Research

6.1 Designing an Experimental Space Film

This chapter relays my experience with film-making as an interactive, hands-on methodological approach to research. My practice-based research project consists of an experimental short film entitled *Space Tourist*, intended to supplement the discussions pertaining to film theory and literature in the dissertation, in order to further examine the relationship between space tourism in science-fiction and moments of cultural crisis and transformation. In the process incorporating pressing contemporary social issues into *Space Tourist*, I focus primarily on four key areas which are pertinent today: the development of privatized, commercial space tourism, social alienation, a cultural obsession with technological innovation, and the imminent threat of global warming. The second aim of my practice-based research approach is to convey a scholarly, historical body of knowledge concerning space travel in the cinema by first compiling a wide range of research materials invoking this subject matter, and then alluding to and borrowing techniques from the literature and film sources I have drawn from as guiding influences.

In doing so, I also attempt an experimental approach to film-making utilizing a variety of elements and techniques from works spanning from the earliest examples of space tourism in cinema until the contemporary, thereby compiling dozens of the observed strategies into a single film, creating an approach that has not yet been utilised in the creation of sci-fi films pertaining to outer space travel. The cross-disciplinary approach used to construct this film joins together film theory, science-fiction literary theory, sociological studies of tourism, and close-textual analysis of case studies involving cinematic depictions of space tourism.

In an introduction to a collection of essays pertaining to research and design, author and art scholar, Christopher Frayling, advocates for a more up-to-date definition of ‘research,’ noting the negative connotations associated with the use of the word ‘research’ to describe artistic endeavors. Frayling notes that Pablo Picasso for instance, has firmly denied that the gathering of reference materials to create artwork constitutes a mode of research, reasoning that the end goal of painting is to produce works of art, rather than to convey information. Frayling attempts to dispel long-standing assumptions like these which suggest that research involves retracing existing knowledge, advocating for the inclusion of applied modes of investigation through art and design to constricted notions of research prevailing today. My practice-based approach of film-making most closely aligns with the research method Frayling categorizes as ‘developmental work,’ describing a subcategory of research through art and design:

For example, customizing a piece of technology to do something no one has considered before, and communicating the results. A result example: the Canon colour photocopier at the Royal College of Art, successfully used by some postgraduate illustration students, who have both exhibited and written up the results (1993, p. 5).

My developmental approach in this section contrasts with the process of close textual analysis used in previous chapters to make inferences about a film by examining its contextual roots; instead, I transcode social movements and political issues which concern the vast majority of people around the globe today to structure a sci-fi narrative where these points of contention are transposed into the metaphorical vista of outer space. The multifaceted process of designing and executing a film has led me to reflect on the research, in an effort to understand how moments of social transformation figure into production design and the editing process. Using voice-over, narrative, set design, and sound design, my practice-based approach represents an attempt to portray the looks and sounds of outer space from the perspective of an astronaut travelling through the isolating realms of inner and outer space.

6.1.1 Capturing the ‘Tourist Gaze’

Engaging in the process of film-making becomes a way to observe and record the tourist gaze at work through the camera’s ‘eye.’ While McLuhan regards the camera and other media forms as operative extensions of the human central nervous system,

film-maker Dziga Vertov sees the camera as an entity perceiving a world independent of human thought. Vertov offers enthusiastic first-person accounts written from the perspective of the camera, using the term 'kino-eye' to describe the camera as a self-aware and involved participant within the film-making process, interrogating its own technologically inscribed agency, which includes the ability to structure sequences, conquer time and space, and unify people within the frame:

Kino-eye plunges into the seeming chaos of life to find life in itself the response to an assigned theme. To find the resultant force amongst the million phenomena related to the given theme. To edit; to wrest, through the camera, whatever is most typical, most useful, from life; to organize the films pieces wrested from life into a meaningful rhythmic visual order, a meaningful phrase, an essence of "I see" (1984, p. 88).

Vertov's statement is framed around the notion that the camera's mere presence intervenes with the film-making process in unexpected ways; in shooting on-location travelogues and documentary films, the film-maker relays the tourist gaze through the camera, which in turn, subverts the tourist gaze by recording the encounter. The director is in the unique position to observe the social dynamics that come to play when the tourist gaze becomes an interactive mode of reception, due to the presence of the camera and reactions to it. An example of this phenomenon can be located in one scene in *The Brother from Another Planet*, when an on-location shot tracks Brother staggering down 125th Street in Harlem, causing pedestrians, interspersed throughout the film shoot to stop and stare with perplexed expressions. Applying the Vertov's concept of the

Kino-Eye to this process leads me to infer that these heightened social exchanges are not only formulated between the observed and film-maker, but also between the observed and the camera's eye. HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, who physically resembles a flashing eye, constantly scanning, recording, and interacting with those around him is a technophobia-inducing image of the anthropomorphized Kino-Eye and its mediating effects on social interaction, particularly when Bowman and Poole grow suspicious of HAL 9000 and attempt to hide away to converse privately.

A small but perhaps significant insight regarding the camera's influence on social exchange can be gleaned from the series of Lumière shorts of workers leaving the factory, where labourers have been directed by the Lumière brothers to ignore the camera, as is strikingly evident in the consistent, deliberate avoidance of the camera that is discernible in these early shorts. The very need to instruct the workers to look away from the camera is evidence that an awareness of the camera's influence on behaviour was apparent even from early demonstrations of the cinematic apparatus. In contrast, in other on-location Lumière shorts documenting crowded sidewalks and urban streets full of pedestrians, a keen recognition of the interplay between the camera, film-maker, the observed, and the final product is evident when men, women, and children playfully interact with the camera, attempting to alter the final product by attracting (or even deliberately averting) the camera's mediating gaze.

As Urry and Larson do not elaborate on what specifically happens within the intersection of foreigners and natives where the tourist gaze is concerned, this

practice-based piece, shot mostly on-location, attempts to visually capture the mutual gaze between the tourist and the observed. This provides a modern perspective to contrast with Lumière's on-location shots which become all-the-more fascinating due to bystanders peering at the camera, subversively returning the camera's gaze by smiling, waving, frowning, or staring with vexed expressions. I would add to Urry and Larson's discussion of the tourist gaze that first and foremost, there exists a point where the observed must make a decision about whether to engage with or ignore the camera. With the camera's interjecting presence, people going on with their daily routines appear to be jolted into a heightened self-awareness, and therefore many travelogues leave the impression that it is really the film-maker who is on display, wandering through crowds of people who subversively return the film-maker's gaze.

Furthermore, this practice-based approach applies the theory of discursive transcoding to interrogate the 'dark side' of the tourist gaze, which represents one of the most culturally significant issues raised by Urry and Larson. Climate change, which is a result of numerous factors including a steep rise in vehicle production and the rapid expansion of mass tourism industries is an ideal subject matter for the genre of science-fiction, constituting a pressing issue that is both uncomfortable and controversial, which is therefore ignored, to some degree, in daily life. As pointed out in the previous chapter, science-fiction films such as *The Martian*, *WALL-E*, and *Passengers* tend to visit the threat of environmental degradation and human extinction in a meaningful way and then gloss over these issues at the end, keeping in line with a cheerfully packaged

national fantasy of Western power and domination, and the commercial imperatives of Hollywood film. One intention in making *Space Tourist* is to use an experimental, independent approach in order to subvert Hollywood's satisfactory endings and instead reach a darker and more realistic conclusion, where the dangers of climate change result in misery and death, rather than an exciting future in space. In portraying disaster, I draw inspiration from images of desolation in *WALL-E*, *The Wild Blue Yonder*, and *Interstellar* as well a range of disaster-related films such as *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971), *The World the Flesh and the Devil* (Ranald MacDougall, 1959), and *Ferngully: The Last Rainforest* (Bill Kroyer, 1992). A realistic consideration of the dark side of tourism is of critical importance due to the fact that tourism is associated with a far lower quality of life for those inhabiting the fragile tourist locations, where the effects of climate change tend to be more devastating and immediate. Therefore, I attempt to convey the dark side of *both* terrestrial tourism and commercial space tourism in this short film by estranging viewers from the concept of a familiar 'touristic experience,' rendering the tourist experience 'alien' to prompt discourse surrounding the social and environmental impact of tourism and associated industries.

6.1.2 Space Films as Encounters

As previously noted, film is a mode of touristic encounters, as expounded by McLuhan, who regards film as transport media, noting that film equipment incorporates within in a technological microcosm of advances in mobility:

The wheel, that began as extended feet, took a great evolutionary step into the movie theatre. By an enormous speed-up of assembly-line movements, the movie camera rolls up the real world on a spool, to be unrolled and translated later onto the screen (1964, p. 181).

McLuhan observes that cinema and celluloid film are intrinsically mobile technology forms which not only capture and relay motion, but also consist of moving components. Film's emphasis on movement is the basis for spectacular encounters; for instance, in a BBC panel discussion discussing early viewing experiences of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Christopher Nolan nostalgically compares his first time viewing the film with a sojourn to distant planets:

I saw *2001* when I was very young, I saw it when I was seven years old. I knew nothing about Kubrick or anybody else. I didn't know what a director was, I didn't know anything about it, other than it was about space and about spaceships. But what I really remember at that age is this profound sense of the screen opening up and taking me to other worlds that I could only imagine (BBC, 2014).

Nolan's early recollection captures the poignant emotional component of the space film as a mysterious encounter which seems to deliver the spectator elsewhere. An equally compelling anecdote concerning the reception of *2001: A Space Odyssey* is offered by

Keir Dullea, who plays the role of David Bowman in the film, regarding the reaction of a young man attending a screening of the film in 1968:

I am told that during a year-long run of that film in SF that at some matinee, somebody, during the voyage through time and space, ran down the centre aisle screaming 'It's God!' and then jumped right up on the stage and ran through the screen (2015, BBC).

This colourful image of the spectator misinterpreting the situation, running through the centre aisle and bursting through the cinema screen is a remark on the oddly compelling nature of the cinematic encounter – a notion which is strengthened by early cinema's anecdotes of audiences fleeing down the centre aisle and hiding under seats from the threat of oncoming trains crashing through the screen. In these situations, cinema, perhaps inadvertently, confuses and transgresses experiential boundaries, creating uncertainty regarding what is real and imagined. In fact, this confusion between an exterior layer of lived reality and the imagined world within the screen is a recurring trope in outer space films, particularly in movies that portray 'reverse-space tourism' narratives of aliens travelling to explore Earth. Reverse space tourists are often addicted to screens such as the humanoid alien Mork in the ABC TV series *Mork and Mindy* (Antony W. Marshall, 1978-1982) whose knowledge of Earth is based on watching American broadcasting, Thomas in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, who is fixated on watching multiple television screens at once, Brother, who is glued to the evening news, and the humanoid extraterrestrial, Brad, trapped on Earth in Werner Herzog's *The Wild*

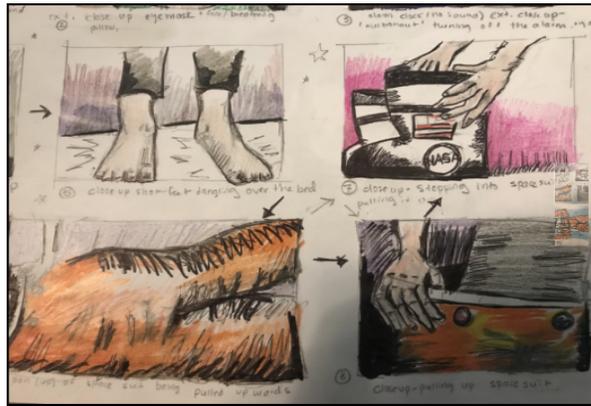
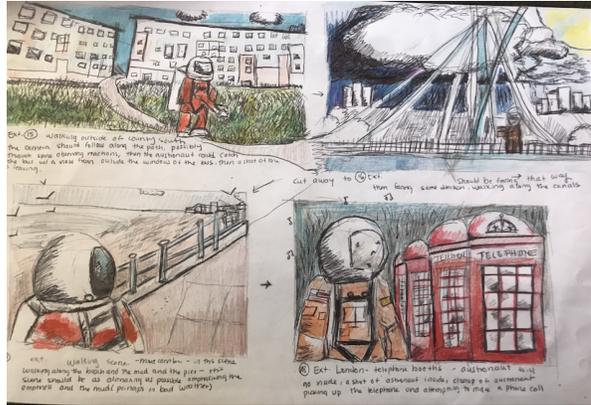
Blue Yonder who interpolates documentary footage into fictional accounts of a small-scale alien invasion, creatively reinterpreting historic outer-space related events such as the Roswell incident. Oddball TV and film junkie figures such as Thomas and Brad serve a critical and self-reflexive function, remarking on the uncanny intimacy spectators feel with cinematic and televisual encounters.

One possible reason that cinema is repeatedly conflated with reality by audiences lies in the fact that any successful production design deliberately creates a sustained illusion. Frayling points out in discussing the neglected domain of production design in film studies: ‘One aspect of this is studying a kind of reality that is greater than reality, and exactly how does that process work?’ Frayling describes production design as a ‘technical accomplishment’ that remains mysterious, understated, and undefined, advocating for scholars to contribute to this gap in knowledge by gathering accounts from the manifold artists, set decorators, craftspeople and technicians who are largely forgotten in film studies, a field which Frayling notes, tends to focus solely on the director as auteur. Adding to an understanding of how social change is transcoded into the production design of sci-fi space films, I have outlined and documented some of the processes that went into designing a short film.

6.1.3 Production Design

Space Tourist employs a self-reflexive approach toward the film-making process, in an effort to represent and discursively transcode my immediate environment and everyday social encounters, as well as some of the prominent social issues of the present today. In writing the part of an alien, I emulate reverse-space tourist encounters by turning the camera frequently on strangers in public and by filming the main character wandering into public spaces, as a means of representing chance encounters between the astronaut and the alien ‘Other.’ Reverse space tourism in cinema subversively formulates commentary on sociopolitical transformation during the time and place of the film’s making. Therefore, it is not entirely surprising that the vast majority of extraterrestrial space tourists from the cosmos appear more-or-less disguised in human form, and consequently appear to spectators much like ordinary (if not deranged) individuals going about their everyday lives. Keeping with this idea, I decided that the protagonist in *Space Tourist* should be an alien from another planet who appears physically human. Since production design is essential to any film, offering innumerable details concerning the narrative and helping to situate spectators and build character profiles, I used storyboarding to envision how specific shots of the film should appear (see Figures 73-77).

Figures 73-77: Storyboard Samples



Within the film, I have montaged music, sounds, symbols, images, and editing techniques derived from a variety of films which convey or comment on the ‘tourist gaze.’ Drawing inspiration from Herzog’s estranged humanoid alien in the *Wild Blue Yonder* and from the psychiatric patient claiming to be a displaced alien named ‘Prot’ in Iain Softley’s *K-PAX*, I attempted to provoke feelings of alienation and estrangement by deliberately misinterpreting tourist landmarks, as well as using incongruent or jarring colours, sounds, filters, and camera angles in the editing phase. In designing the apocalyptic second half of the film, I draw from J.G. Ballard’s anthology entitled *Memories of the Space Age* which imparts a vision of a futuristic Cape Kennedy reduced to archaic technological ruins, written mainly from the fictional perspective of old, bitter, dead (or dying) astronauts. To represent this idea of a landscape filled with discarded, decrepit technological ruins, I filmed on-location at Miller Farms in Colorado where there is a collection of old WWII aircrafts and damaged vehicles which serve as tourist attractions. These vehicles, which are partially buried in sand and left for children to play on were an ideal subject for conveying a sense of space flight as an archaic technological endeavour. Miller Farms is also home to a small collection of emergency escape pods normally for boats and submarines, which have been used to create the impression of a landing site for alien space crafts in the film (see Figures 78-79).

Figures 78-79 : Escape pods at Miller Farms - before and after



Another key literary influence is the genre referred to as ‘Midwest surrealism’ used in Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* as well as Bradbury’s anthologies ‘*R is for Rocket*’ (1960) and ‘*S is for Space*’ (1966) which employ simple, poetic descriptions of planetary environments resembling Earth. The film’s visual style was further influenced by the alienating landscapes and shifts from black-and-white to colour in *Stalker*, which correspond with the inner words of the characters visiting a perilous location where aliens have evidently taken a brief tour of Earth and discarded mysterious trash before setting off again. *Stalker* shifts from sepia tones (primarily in interior spaces invoking the internal life of characters) to colour (primarily used to represent exterior spaces invoking the ‘Zone’ as well as dreamscapes). In representing interior spaces, including the inside of the spaceship, I use mainly black-and-white to convey a sense of the astronaut’s entrapment within monotonous technologically constructed environments. I have also incorporated the long, slow camera pans that give *Stalker* a dreamlike quality.

Reverse space tourist narratives include comedies such the *Visit To A Small Planet* (1960), *Mork & Mindy*, *Starman*, *Coneheads*, and *K-Pax* (2001) – all of which feature bizarre humanoid aliens who awkwardly acclimate to Earth through a series of

mishaps. Oftentimes, these comical alien astronaut figures are socially awkward and inhibited, unable to express complex emotions or follow social norms; one of the big challenges for the reverse space tourist is therefore learning to formulate passable emotional responses over time. In *Starman*, the protagonist, Jenny, realises that her deceased husband who has been mysteriously resurrected is not the man she once knew, but an alien, a fact that is apparent to Jenny when Starman fails to recognize her or respond to her emotionally. Ironically, Starman seems to shed this estranged, emotionless perspective over the course of time, growing increasingly fond of Jenny. Keeping with this theme of the space tourist's emotional development, the voice-over narration in *Space Tourist* starts off deliberately in monotone, gradually becoming more charged as the narrative progresses, and the protagonist becomes increasingly involved and intrigued with life on Earth during these tours.

6.1.4 Spacesuits, Feminism, and Protective Mechanisms

The orange NASA suit within *Space Tourist* worn by the main character, who is female, is used as an allusion to the orange NASA space suits worn in 2016 by comedian and actress Amy Schumer and some of her female companions at the women's march in Washington D.C.. While Schumer uses the spacesuit to draw attention to women's issues, including the exclusion of women from the astronaut programme in the past, she also wears the spacesuit to highlight other issues concerning women, including the election of

Trump, sexual violence, and gun violence (Mackleden, 2017). While wearing the same spacesuit during an interview with astrophysicist and television presenter, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Schumer (2016) uses humor to make the serious point that women require added forms of safety in society, linking the spacesuit to the protection of female bodies against the threat of an unknown future:

You don't know what's going to happen when you meet you [Neil deGrasse Tyson], you know? Did you see *Arrival*? She didn't know that she was doing that. I came ready. Just so you know, when *Arrival* happens, I'm the girl you call (Lawrence, 2016).

Schumer references Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival* (2016) which has a strong female protagonist, Dr. Louise Banks (Amy Adams), who successfully deciphers an alien language and secures the perilous, distant future of humanity. While the strides in female representation signified by strong female protagonists in outer space related films like *Gravity* (to a lesser extent), *Interstellar*, *Arrival*, *Hidden Figures* (Theodore Melfi, 2016) and *Annihilation* (Alex Garland 2018) are hopeful, both cinema and NASA have a long way to go when it comes to gender equality; Schumer's use of the space suit takes on a new significance more recently, in light of the fact that NASA cancelled the first all-female spacewalk scheduled to take place in 2019, citing issues with the space suit sizes – a sign, I argue, evincing that despite being admitted into space, women still face new forms of discrimination in the space programme as well as in the workplace.



Figure 80: Amy Schumer and companions at the Women's March

The image of the spacesuit is perhaps the most significant marker of endurance in science-fiction cinema, signifying the uniquely human ability to transcend natural physical laws by obliterating the invisible barriers of time and space. Tracing the history of films involving spacesuits, Westfahl attests that spacesuits are evidence of 'human strength and durability, proving that people have mastered technology so they can survive in adverse conditions' (2012, p. 4), also allowing humans to 'make themselves larger and stronger' (2012, p. 4). Furthermore, the presence of a spacesuit signals 'humans will be profoundly challenged and fundamentally altered by space' (Westfahl, 2012, p. 4). The cinematic spacesuit is furthermore an equalizing force not only when it comes to race, as in the case of the Afonaut figure, but also in terms of gender. In her study of the female astronaut in cinema, humanities scholar Marie Lathers describes Ripley's transformation in *Alien*, whereby putting on the spacesuit negates the distracting issues of gender and

sexuality: ‘When Ripley strips to her panties, she becomes a ‘woman’ (sexy and vulnerable); with her suit and helmet on, she is ready to destroy the alien – she becomes *astronaut*’ (2010, p. 16).

The spacesuit and in particular the space helmet are used to signify alienation in sci-fi film. Drawing this out in *Space Tourist*, I use a digital fish-eye effect to blur the edges of the screen, giving the impression of seeing through a space helmet in order to express the sense of separation between the astronaut and her walled-off external surroundings. This concept of the space helmet as safe, protected space that separates the astronaut from outside threats is partly inspired by the recent drama *Wonder* (Stephen Chbosky, 2017), about a grade school-aged space-enthusiast, Auggie, who wears a space helmet in the classroom and in public places to conceal a significant facial deformity. As Auggie learns to live with his differences, he spends less time with his helmet on, signalling his slow acclimation into the ‘alien’ environment around him (see Figure 81). My film mimics this strategy when the alien gradually removes the helmet as she begins to identify with and acclimate to life on Earth. I decided to work exclusively with female actresses in order to add a unique dimension to the piece, as the vast majority of tour guides, space tourists, scientists, and astronauts in sci-fi films are portrayed by male leads. Considering the historical shortfall of celebrated female directors and the omission of women from leading roles in cinematic narratives, I speculate that the ‘novelty’ of a female astronaut’s perspective, especially a woman who is not American, offers a useful device in further alienating the viewer from familiar depictions of cinematic astronauts.



Figure 81: Auggie Concealed by Helmet

6.1.5 Sound Design

One aspect of the outer space film that has not been discussed at length but is an integral part of the cinematic gaze is the audiovisual aspect of sound design. The sound design in *2001: A Space Odyssey* is a particularly important point of reference in recreating the sounds of outer space in the cinema because the film offers new ways of experiencing outer space through sound. Discussing the seemingly incongruous use of Victorian Romantic music to frame space travel in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, physicist Brian Cox speculates the juxtaposition of outer space and classical music enhances the film's theme of technological advancement:

It's impossible to imagine it without Strauss now. What I think is wonderful about it, is that it is obviously a balletic celebration of the technology... seems to be a perfect celebration of human ingenuity. For me, it's an intensely optimistic film. I think if you had had some kind of sinister, strange, spacey music with it, it wouldn't have been as celebratory as it is with Strauss (2014, BBC).

Frayling also describes the sound design in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which de-emphasizes dialogue, as something radically different from any other epic film:

This was long, long stretches without any dialogue, and lots and lots of music... It was almost like going to a visual concert, you just went with the flow and it dared to be slow. I mean space movies were usually fast, things whizzed, you know all these V-2 rockets sort of whizzing across – *Destination Moon* and everything – we were used to that. This was incredibly slow, the pace of it. So you just let it wash over you, it was that sort of experience, I think (2014, BBC).

I further speculate that the use of these emotional ballets offers a humanizing outlook on technology much in the same way that HAL 9000 offers an emotional component to an exceedingly mundane trip in space. To achieve this effect within *Space Tourist*, I draw from the use of classical ballet in *2001: A Space Odyssey* using Strauss' *The Blue Danube Waltz* (1966) during the museum scene, and Tchaikovsky's *Waltz of the Flowers* (1892) for the sequence in which the capsule drifts through space. In the scene filmed inside the spaceship, the verbal communications between astronauts has been pulled directly from the recorded 1969 transcript between Neil Armstrong and 'Houston' in order to reference and make use of the actual sounds of astronauts interacting with a

home base. I also recreate an impression of the culturally significant televised footage of the lunar landing by using blurred and grainy images accompanied by a scratchy picture and distorted sound in the sequences of the film taking place in and around subways. To convey the sounds inside of the spaceship, I draw from *2001: A Space Odyssey* in its use of sound effects that resemble metallic, droning noises, motors, and factory sounds. In many cases throughout the film, sound effects are slowed down significantly, such as in the case of the subway train pulling into the station. Lastly, incorporating the alienating, space-age themed music of Sun Ra's Solar Arkestra, I include Sun Ra's version of 'Strange in Paradise' (1953) during the landing sequence and Sun Ra's 'Dance of the Cosmo Aliens' (1978) into the film's closing credits.

6.2 Narrative Influences

Rather than remaining limited to films portraying outer space tourism, I have broadened my investigation to include films about tourism that do not actually take place in outer space, but which nonetheless convey an alien perspective. One of the primary goals in creating this film was to create the impression of spaces which do not exist. While space tourism is an option for a privileged few, conveying a genuine space tourist experience was not a commercially viable option. To compensate for this, my work draws from a category of documentary essay films which prove helpful in transforming images of 'familiar' landscapes, monuments, artworks, and sites of cultural importance to

provoke feelings of estrangement. In the written narrative, I draw from Chantal Akerman's avant-garde documentary essay film *News from Home* (1977) which powerfully conveys an alienating experience of life in Manhattan using voice-over which accompanies footage of ordinary people and unglorified scenes of everyday life (subway car interiors, subway platforms, people walking and standing on the streets, cars, empty/desolate areas and buildings). The on-location shooting in New York references Akerman's long takes of buildings and pedestrians in NYC, and is shot from some of the same streets and subway stations.

Furthermore, I allude to Chris Marker's *Level Five* (1997) where Laura, a video game creator, examines archived historical images on the Internet to imagine WWII, looking at Okinawa scenery where landscapes are vividly transformed using bright blue and purple filters to render an idyllic vision of Okinawa before it was devastated during WWII. These images inspired the colouration of the film's opening scenes which inscribe cool blue and purple hues to similarly relay an idyllic vision of a world before catastrophe. Other poetic accounts of tourist sites by Chris Marker, including *Sunless* (1983), *Grin Without a Cat* (1977), *The Lovely Month of May* (1963) (created from black-and-white imagery of Paris that I have attempted to reproduce in the present day) were points of reference, inspiring the montage sequences of *Space Tourist*.

The film's closing scenes portraying a post-apocalyptic landscape were inspired by scenery in Herzog's desolate depictions of landscapes in *Encounters at The End of the World* (2007), as well as Herzog's shots of desolate post Gulf-War landscapes in *Lessons*

of *Darkness* (1992) and the fictional desert planet 'Uxmal' in *Fata Morgana* (Werner Herzog, 1971) which captures mirages and long-shots of destroyed war equipment. In observing how Herzog regularly transforms earthly landscapes into scenic 'alien' landscapes that resemble other planets using music, jarring noises, and filters, I attempt to achieve a similar effect, filming in desolate locations such as Morecambe Bay, Yellowstone National park, and Paint Mines Interpretive Park (see Figures 82, 83, and 84). I was particularly struck by Herzog's long traveling shots in *Fata Morgana*, focused on discarded automobiles, desolate, run-down buildings, as well as abandoned machinery. Herzog's landscapes of desolation demonstrate how barren places have a strong and mutable emotional component relaying stories of mass-destruction. Attempting to replicate this strategy, I drove to desolate locations and filmed these as the car was moving, and later cut the footage together. I then applied filters with warm red, orange, and yellow colour tones. I also had the actress explore these locations without any specific direction and filmed this process, adding a spontaneous element to the film.



Figure 82: Morecambe Beach



Figure 83: Yellowstone National Park



Figure 84: Paint Mines Interpretive Park

Early travelogues and travel-related fictional narratives examined as evidence of constructed fictions include Méliès' fictional narrative *Conquest of the Pole* (1912), Burton Holmes travel films from the 1920s, Robert J. Flaherty's fictional documentary *Nanook of the North* (Robert J. Flaherty, 1922), U.S. Navy travelogues from the 1930s and 1940s, and early travelogues of Yellowstone National Park (another on-location point of reference within the film). Examining travelogues is a useful method of observing how

tours are packaged, as these tend to follow a familiar stylistic pattern, beginning with long takes and accompanying background information which often *misinterprets* customs, ceremonies, and routine aspects of daily life. To correspond with these, the deliberate misinterpretation of the geography and history of cultural icons (the Pyramids, the Sphinx, the Eiffel Tower, skyscrapers and works of art) was attempted (see Figures 85, 86, and 87) using the wrong location, offering the wrong explanations, shooting with odd angles as well as changing the colour schemes and adding dissolves.



Figure 85: The Louvre



Figure 86: 'The Sphinx' (Imitation)

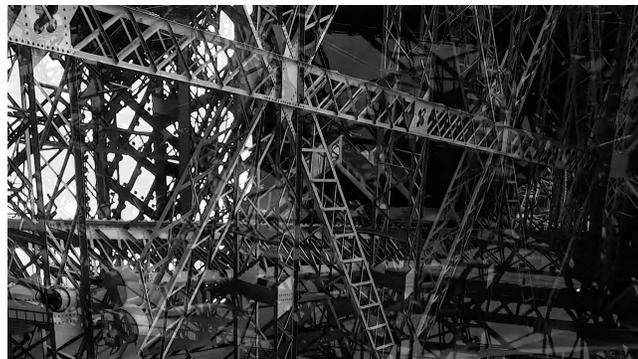


Figure 87: The Eiffel Tower

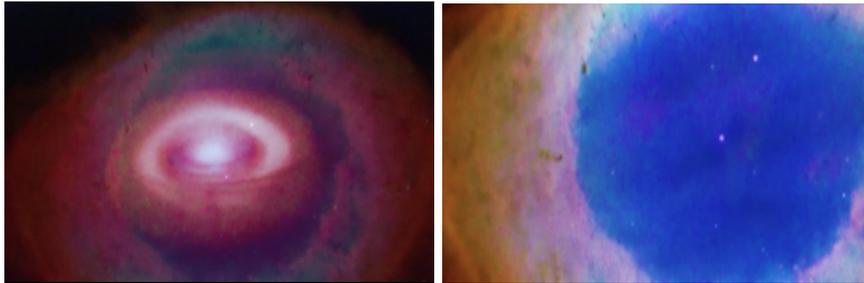
6.2.1 Film Allusions and Editing Techniques

Incorporating the knowledge I gathered on Hollywood space films centred on space tourism, which incorporate actual images of outer space, I have attempted a degree of scientific realism by stitching together and editing footage of Earth and space gathered from the ISS and by the Hubble Space Telescope, made available for public use on the NASA website. My practice-based approach also utilizes digital editing to recreate some of the techniques used to portray space tourism by early film-makers. Using a variety of digital colour filters, I allude to Méliès' brightly coloured, hand-tinted landscapes. Furthermore, in joining landscapes together, I attempt to recreate Méliès' frequent use of dissolves between landscapes to create the impression of vast and continuous, imaginary spaces. In writing the film's narrative, I draw inspiration from Méliès' critique and satire orientated around academic and scientific institutions by portraying a confused, incompetent astronaut using a kaleidoscope in place of a telescope, and a globe to navigate Earth.

The colourful wormhole depicted in *Space Tourist* (see Figures 86-87) is an allusion to the 'Star Gate' Sequence in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* which was shot with slit-scan photography, and signifies a cult of spiritualism transpiring in the 1960s. Kubrick's Star Gate sequence is unique in its use of psychedelic imagery (consisting of neon multi-coloured lights in abstract forms) accompanied by nebula-like formations and jolting, metallically synthesized sounds. The Star Gate sequence is

referenced in my depiction of the spaceship going through the wormhole, which allows the astronaut to travel long distances quickly within the narrative. I attempted to create an incomprehensible blur of light and colour by adapting NASA footage in Premiere Pro to make stars and galaxies appear in bright colours, also using a form of ‘double exposure’ (made with long dissolves between Hubble space telescope imagery and NASA imagery) to create the impression of 3-D movement through space.

Figures 86 - 87: Wormhole Designs



6.3 Found Knowledge

The main contribution of my practice-based approach is to fill in the gaps in my knowledge and discovery of thematic aspects of representation relating to space tourism in the cinema that could not be inferred from the close textual analysis of films and literature alone. From the creative process of film-making, I gained a new perspective on the case studies that I have engaged with in the thesis, which has shaped my critical

understanding of the topic as a film theorist and a film historian. Designing a film has led me to note the importance of analysing how the various components of film fit together in formulating a narrative, which I now understand is equally as important as teasing out finer details individually using CTA. Creating a sound design and production design has led to a heightened awareness of the role played by music and sound effects within film, and has also caused me to take note of the complex planning and storyboarding process that is required in creating a production design – elements which I have realised are easily neglected in film analysis. I have therefore made an effort to emphasize the role of sound and production design when writing about the case studies.

In scouting for locations and editing footage, I discovered firsthand how directors whose work I have examined, including Akerman and Herzog, are able to transform ordinary-looking scenery into something otherworldly, using a combination of filters, voiceover, and music to provoke feelings of alienation. Furthermore, in designing a voiceover narrative, I learned how to discursively transcode my own environment into the form of a cinematic narrative, and how to project contemporary social issues into a science-fiction future. This has given me a first-hand account of how the process of discursive transcoding might lead to parallels between films and daily life, and has therefore led me, in my examination of the case studies, to place an increased emphasis on both discursive transcoding and the broader *process* of film-making itself, which includes the perspectives and personal experiences of screenwriters and directors such as Sun Ra.

I came upon a further relationship between cinema and outer space which is captured by director Claire Dennis in an interview regarding her film *High Life* (2019), about convicted criminals cut off from the outside world, struggling to remain alive in a space station where they are incarcerated for life:

To shoot a film already makes you feel like you're in a space station because you are in another time. You and the crew belong to the schedule of the film. The fatigue and restlessness is not the same [as everyday life] (2019, p. 23).

The creative process of film-making led me to discover that aside from being a highly controlled process, film-making is an *alienating* practice; being behind the camera made me the subject of frequent, estranging gazes from bystanders; furthermore, editing footage within an isolated editing suite required being cut off from the external world for extended periods of time. The level of control required in the process of film production represents a further parallel between the controlled environments represented in the habitations depicted within cinematic outer space films, as well as film sets and production designs. I speculate that the degree of control necessitated by cinema in constructing artificial production designs, 'chance' encounters, and new 'worlds' is another reason that cinematic films about outer space are particularly suited to depicting controlled environments, as well as discursively transcoding the highly-regulated process of film-making itself.

Furthermore, I engaged with intertextuality within my film by referencing both filmic and literary case studies, which has led to a first-hand account of film can be greatly enriched by references to numerous other thematically related works. This realisation led me, in my interpretation of the case studies, to place a particular emphasis on instances of intertextuality within the case studies throughout the thesis in order to tease out more subversive or subtle messages embedded within these works. Finally, the transformative process of editing has led me to understand that one does not need to travel anywhere at all or do anything in particular to qualify as a tourist, rather, in decolonising notions of tourism through film-making and writing about film, I have come to the conclusion that tourism is a notion that is dependent on one's internal perspective, rather than external circumstances. This has further reinforced for me the notion that the encounters created and experienced in the process of film spectatorship represent a mode of tourism.

6.3.1 Criteria for Evaluation

In establishing the contributions and usefulness of my practice-based work, I propose that *Space Tourist* should firstly be evaluated by how successfully it contributes new insights into a critical understanding of the subject of cinematic space tourism. During editing, I began to understand cinematic space tourism as a narrative shortcut

which may be employed in science-fiction to shift from point A to point B, from one planet to the next, from the ‘Self’ to the ‘Other,’ and from utopia to dystopia and back again, creating rapid changes in location and perspective which can then be compared and contrasted. Drawing out the tropes and symbols that have become almost standard across science-fiction since the conception of cinema has also allowed me to observe how science-fiction depictions of cinematic space tourism have changed over the years, and perhaps more importantly, how they have stayed the same. In attempting to create a character who defies convention, I was able to notice what was lacking in cinematic accounts of space tourism — in particular a female ‘foreign’ perspective. The genre of science-fiction can therefore be expounded on by a process of searching for and creating new visions of space tourism which run counter to what has gone before.

The film can also be evaluated based on what it contributes to an understanding of the discursive transcoding of societal issues in the cinema which can only be reached by the process of film-making — spanning from the conception of the storyline until the final edit and audience screenings. Film-making offers a comprehensive experience that cannot be understood simply by screening or reading about films. As discussed in previous chapters, discursive transcoding is a process that cannot be understood as a conscious mechanism, but rather conceptualised as a subconscious manifestation evinced through a close-textual analysis of the work at hand, taking into account the relationship between historical context, filmic symbolism, and reality as a social construction.

I argue that discursive transcoding begins with the film's conception; I would describe my account of screenwriting and storyboarding as an intuitive one which emerged after reading widely on the subject and sifting through countless potential case studies, searching for 'evidence' of transcoded social realities. What was perhaps most surprising to me was that it was not until after I completed the film that I began to notice evidence of the discursive transcoding of my own environment, thoughts, and feelings emerging in the narrative, which seems to have occurred at a subconscious level, conveying motions that are, to some extent, buried or suppressed. While the themes of global warming, tourism, and outer space were intentionally inserted into the narrative in order to represent prominent issues and debates today, as it turns out this is not only a film about global warming, tourism, and environmental degradation, but more so, it seems to be about technological alienation, disappointment, and fear.

It seems that through discursive transcoding I unintentionally represent within the film my feelings of being a graduate student, studying abroad while isolated by technology and cut off from people, meanwhile exploring, traveling, and discovering incessantly; this can be observed in scenes where the astronaut is cut off from nature and sealed inside of trains, subways, the spaceship, and cities, or wandering around alone. The end of the film also seems to reflect my own feelings and fears about death and the possible end of all life on Earth. There seems to be a pervasive fear in contemporary media discourses that during this century many people could die from climate wars, floods from the melting ice caps, or a plethora of other related weather anomalies

resulting from global warming. In this way, the film parallels a dream (or nightmare) scenario, allowing me to confront some of these events head-on, without actually experiencing these; this ability to ‘confront’ the unknown is one aspect which makes film empowering. Ultimately, I realised that the astronaut appears to reflect my subconscious and social reality more than I had intended.

This work can also be evaluated by the degree to which it offers a new, experimental approach to science-fiction filmmaking. While designing the film, I made the decision to amalgamate facets from films spanning from the earliest space voyages to the contemporary (as well as films about the subject of tourism and space more generally). As previous sections in this chapter have demonstrated, the film references a variety of films (as well as science-fiction literature) using symbols, tropes, elements of set design, landscapes and other locations, sound, and editing effects. This has revealed what is, as far as I know, an eclectic new approach to research through film-making, revealing that research can be conducted by sifting through films from early cinema until the present and making a composite picture of these which reflects and represents, in part, the history and development of the genre.

While the practice-based component has been a useful and informative exercise, there were some limitations posed by my approach to the project. One important limitation of my approach is that, without knowledge of the written portion of the dissertation or of how (and why) the film was made, it may be difficult, or even impossible, for viewers to spot the references that are made within the piece, particularly

due to the esoteric nature of some of the research material I use. For example, a viewer who is unfamiliar with the music of Sun Ra would not pick up on the use of The Solar Arkestra's music in the film, and therefore would not perceive of that dimension of the film as it relates to the subject of reverse space tourism. This means that the film's intentions, references, and strategies will only be noted by a limited number of spectators.

Conclusion

In the written portion of this project, I first set out to offer a considered analysis of the thematic, formal, and stylistic aspects comprising cinematic depictions of space travel, in order to connect these chronologically to technological developments in tourism, as well as key ‘moments’ of crisis and social transformation in the 20th and early 21st centuries. In doing so, I have identified and analysed five major trends that have emerged in the portrayal of space tourism, beginning with early cinema and lasting until the present. Each of these connects to a specific historical ‘moment’ implicating social transformation and ideological battles over progress and technology, demonstrating that cinematic space tourism, as an allegory, offers an expression of controversial topics, in a visually nuanced manner, showcasing society's changing attitudes towards race, gender, whiteness, and colonialism.

These narratives appear to pose and attempt to answer ethical, philosophical, scientific, and practical questions emerging around space exploration, including those questions which would otherwise be impossible to address using known forms of space technology. The allegory of space tourism is ideal for postulating scenarios related to progress, due to the fact that space tourism itself is a highly paradoxical and morally ambiguous endeavour lacking a clear, established purpose. My inclination is that tourism may become quickly outdated and banal to space tourists of the near future who might

instead demand to visit the Moon or Mars; furthermore, space tourism is unlikely to be a pleasurable experience. Some of the overlooked, practical limitations of space tourism are outlined by tourism researcher Frances Brown:

Interestingly, however, space tourism and space tourists are unlikely to fit easily into either Butler's (1980) resort lifecycle or Cohen's (1972) and others typologies of tourists, since the 'pioneering' and 'exploratory' nature of their travel will also be highly institutionalized, requiring participants to follow instructions to the letter for safety reasons. Even if hotels are eventually built into orbit, the range of activities will necessarily be limited – any spacewalking would have to be done at the end of the tether, effectively ensuring that these trail-blazing space tourists are as cocooned in an environmental bubble as Cohen's (1972) organized mass tourists are within their hotel complex... (2015, p. 38).

Therefore, one overarching conclusion that can be drawn from this project is that space tourism, should it become available, is quite likely to be a debacle once the novelty wears off. As cinematic case studies of space tourism throughout the decades reveal, enthusiasm for commercial space tourism will be impossible to extricate from the Western dream of Manifest Destiny, and with it, colonial sentiment, nationalism, and the propensity towards the exploitation of human life for material ends.

There exists a noteworthy parallel between discursive transcoding and Baudrillard's descriptions of the simulation. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the simulation cannot be separated from its source, as the two will invariably overlap, making it unclear exactly where the source ends and the simulation begins. It has been established that discursive transcoding is a slippery area of film studies; while *evidence* of the process can be described and assessed in film scholarship, exactly how social reality and film mimic

and influence one another remains impossible to discern precisely, as the cyclic relationship between the two renders them inextricable. What can be inferred is that films contain within them alternative interpretations that are not necessarily predetermined. There may also exist various levels of discursive transcoding in this process — for instance, while an independent film-maker may intentionally address certain discourses within a film, in Hollywood, for instance, when a large team comes together to produce a film, discursive transcoding might instead occur at a group level. How different facets of film-making join together to potentially share in this process is an area of further investigation.

This study contributes to a wider debate concerning how science-fiction cinema has interrogated the many uses of the word ‘progress’ over the last century by examining a number of case studies that have never achieved mainstream recognition, and contrasting these with strategies used in more mainstream science-fiction. As a whole, all the branches of science-fiction ultimately tell stories about progress, and the relationship between society, ideology, materialism (or else materiality), and the status quo. Much of mainstream science-fiction such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* almost appears as an advertisement for a future in space, showcasing America’s dream of endless innovation, exploration, and domination whereby the Aryan male is almost invariably the heroic protagonist and the centre of the narrative. I would argue that lesser-known works of science-fiction, particularly those that are omitted from the literature, contain some of the most invaluable insights and contributions that can be gleaned from the investigation of

science-fiction film because they form a counterculture which questions the nature and limitations of progress, and interrogates at length many of the horrific consequences associated with incessant, uncritical innovation. Non-mainstream science-fiction films therefore attempt to add new strategies to some of the wearied colonialist narratives which have been promulgated in the genre since its inception. In doing so, these lesser-known science-fiction films openly reveal and critique the limitations of humanity and progress, while also experimenting with and redefining the boundaries surrounding what stylistic, narrative, and thematic elements the genre is composed of.

Furthermore, I have demonstrated in my practical work that research in the field of film studies need not be limited to the literature and film spectatorship, but can be conducted through the process of film-making in order to attempt to fill in the gaps in more slippery areas such as discursive transcoding. A fluency in film-making is useful for film scholars assessing films, since a more considered and thorough understanding of the practical strategies of film allows one to consider the filmmaking process as critical to deciphering discursive transcoding within films, leading to a new appreciation of the importance of the decisions and thought processes which go into a film's construction, including what messages and ideologies are being inserted (whether deliberately or not) into the film by those working on it. By making a film, I became more attuned how aspects of film production fit together to tell a story, paying closer attention to the presence and function of sounds, music, set design, editing strategies, and intertextual

dimensions³¹ of science-fiction films, as well as how the backgrounds of directors and screenwriters and the film's historical context help to mould it.

This study has revealed that images of space tourism in cultural history are a means of expressing national and collective identities, contributing to a broader understanding of the relationship between the liberal arts and human life on Earth. At the centre of every science-fiction narrative involving space tourism are those working on the film, as well as people living in the era in which the film was produced, and therefore human society is cleverly disguised as something entirely alien. Yet there is nothing to disqualify the idea that 'Humanity' is itself an alien race, and from the perspective of the Other, Humanity might look something like a pitifully small colony on a very mediocre planet overrun by restless, warring, bumbling apes. Ultimately, the countless billions invested in the advent of commercial space tourism may be in vain, as what many of the case studies indicate to us is that humankind might have been searching for itself all along and therefore, humanity can be thought of as a base reality version of science-fiction. This recalls Ballard's framing argument in his essay entitled 'Which Way to Inner Space?':

The biggest developments of the immediate future will take place not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is inner space, not outer, that needs to be explored. The only truly alien planet is Earth (1997 p. 101).

³¹ Referring to how films frequently allude to iconic moments in thematically related films

With this in mind, there are still many more important, emerging technological developments and social movements concerning space tourism in sci-fi cinema which remain to be explored, including the rarefied figure of the female Afrofuturist figure in the cinema, as well as the perspective of female space tourists and astronauts of colour that lie outside Afrofuturist parameters. In terms of film-making, it would be worthwhile to document the stories of wealthy individual paying large amounts of money to travel to space today, such as in the case of Christian Frei's documentary *Space Tourists* (2010) which follows the journey of a wealthy Iranian businesswoman, Anousheh Ansari, as she prepares for a touristic expedition to space; this documentary offers evidence that contemporary space tourism is a whimsical fantasy of the global elite within an increasingly unequal world.

I conclude with one final thought regarding a category which hasn't been addressed in the thesis or critical studies of science-fiction, and therefore constitutes a ripe opportunity for adding to this debate, is the depiction and historical significance of cinematic portrayals of children traveling to outer space – a trope has been frequented for decades, particularly in Soviet science-fiction cinema. Future research might also address virtual-reality experiences of space tourism, such as a plethora of video games portraying outer space, and devices such as the 'Oculus rift' released in 2016 – an interactive, virtual technology headset through which NASA, using imagery stitched together from the 'Curiosity' rover, has created a virtual walking tour of Mars (Lee 2013). Considering the various ways in which space tourism and cultural history have

been intertwined from early cinema up until the present, and the ways that space tourism has been portrayed in incredible detail within the cinema, I conclude by putting forward the notion that cinema itself can be considered a mode of commercial space tourism, offering innumerable encounters with alien landscapes and mysterious ‘Others.’

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