The Cinema Within: spectacle, labour and utopia in Michael Bay's *The Island*

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In this article, I will analyse Michael Bay's *The Island* (2005) as a cinematic spectacle which, through its imagination of a particular dystopian future, lays bare the machinery of spectacular visuality that is crucial to the mode of Hollywood spectacle cinema that Bay's work is often held to exemplify. I will suggest that the formal apparatus of the utopia/dystopia, and of science fiction itself, allows for a reading of *The Island* as a kind of self-conscious critique of spectacle cinema within the formal apparatus of spectacle cinema, which works in part through thematising visuality and in part through making visible the very apparatus of cinematic production itself. In this, I will draw upon the work of Jonathan Beller, and in particular *The Cinematic Mode of Production* (2006), and a mode of film theory and criticism in which cinema is foundationally implicated in the production of ideology. In Beller's work, which draws on Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, 'cinema' can be understood not only as an effect of the circuits of late capital, where spectacle is an extension of ideology, but as a means by which capital extends its operations into new productive domains, into attention and the 'work' of spectatorship. My reading of *The Island* suggests that it is a particularly important film in Bay's oeuvre, in that it marks a point at which Bay's visual strategies of cinematic spectacle turn back on themselves and the formal presentation of visuality within a utopian/dystopian paradigm affords the potential for critique, both within and without the film.

In 'Entertainment and Utopia', his landmark article on the relation between popular cinema and modes of reception, Richard Dyer traces a continuity between a form of utopian longing, 'the image of "something better" to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide', and forms of entertainment produced within 'patriarchal capitalism'. (1) The formal difference between entertainment and the formal utopia 'is contained in the feelings it embodies. It presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized'. (2) Dyer does not present this potential unproblematically; he notes how in entertainment there is a 'struggle between capital (the backers) and labour (the performers) over control of the product', but that 'as a relatively autonomous mode of cultural production, it does not simply reproduce unproblematically patriarchal-capitalist ideology'. (3) In this light, then, can we say that Bay's *The Island* is able to negotiate a space of critique of contemporary conditions of spectacular capitalism? Does it have 'relative autonomy' to the economic and representational systems of which it both partakes and presents in estranged form? These are questions which this article will pursue, if not answer.

Insert fig.1

The Island deliberately re-works utopian and dystopian images and tropes, and has clear generic relations to literary works such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). The first part of the film is located in a 'utopia' (clearly indebted in its *mise-en-scéne* to earlier dystopian films such as *THX1138* (1970) and *Logan's Run* (1976)), located in what seems to be a post-apocalyptic world where survivors of some kind of biological catastrophe are maintained inside a controlled environment.

As the film progresses, the machineries of the controlled society are gradually revealed from the point of view of an increasingly alienated and questioning protagonist, the 'agnate' Lincoln Six Echo, played by Ewan MacGregor. The viewer, then Lincoln himself, become aware that the world of The Island is a simulacrum, a construction created by Dr Merrick (Sean Bean) to create and sustain clones of wealthy 'sponsors', which may be used for the purposes of organ donation, surrogate pregnancy, or other purposes. When the 'citizens' (the clones) 'win the lottery' and are relocated to The Island, the last uncontaminated spot on Earth, they are in fact taken out of the sealed environment and are subjected to medical procedures which inevitably result in their death. The second part of the film is an extended chase narrative, where the escaped Lincoln and his partner/ lover Jordan Two Delta (Scarlett Johansson) attempt to understand the 'real' (near-future) world into which they have escaped through a form of primal confrontation with Lincoln's original or 'sponsor'. I will read the first part of the film as an investigation into the hidden machineries of power and control which serve to construct a delusive world for the agnates to believe in, which operates as a staging of the apparatus of cinema as a technology of spectacle and ideological deformation; and I will then propose the second half of the film as a reversal of the terms of the first, as *escape into* the conditions of spectacle cinema, where cinema itself becomes a kind of utopia, an escape from work into leisure, pleasure or the delirium of Bay's hyper-kinetic narrative.

To establish the relation between cinema and ideology that is at the centre of my reading of *The Island*, I will first turn to Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni. It should be understood that Commolli and Narboni, as does Jonathan Beller, use 'cinema' not simply to mean the dominant (Hollywood) mode of

cinematic production, but as a structural term for considering the relation between ideology and representation. This article is self-consciously revisiting that mode of ideological reading of cinema, but I should say here that I am not making a case for a totalised and ahistorical characterisation of cinematic production. I would rather propose Michael Bay's cinema as a particular instance of a contemporary 'cinematic mode of production', with Beller's theoretical intervention strongly to the fore in reading spectacle and visuality as effects of the circuits of late capitalist production. Although writing in 1972, and therefore before the advent of Hollywood spectacle cinema in its effects-driven maturity (after *Star Wars* (1977)), Comolli and Narboni identify a fruitful ideological reading of cinema:

> Clearly, the cinema 'reproduces' reality': this is what a camera and film stock are for – so says the ideology. But the tools and techniques of film-making are a part of prevailing ideology. Seen in this light, the classic theory of cinema that the camera is an impartial instrument which grasps, or rather is impregnated by, the world in its 'concrete reality' is an eminently reactionary one. What the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology. (4)

Drawing upon an Althusserian definition of ideology, wherein 'Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence', Comolli and Narboni go on to suggest that 'Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is experienced when filtered through the ideology'. (5) Cinema becomes an ideological *apparatus*, in Althusser's terms,

presenting the 'imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence'. Comolli and Narboni (following Althusser) implicate cinema *as ideology itself*, a means by which the 'imaginary relationships' of 'Ideology' frame people's understanding of the world.

How, then, to escape the all-encompassing determinism of an Althusserian Ideology, where cinema is always-already re-inscribed in the machinery of ideological reproduction and domination? Comolli and Narboni suggest that it is cinema's status as a communicative act that allows the possibility of cinema *to talk about itself*, to assume a meta-critical discourse within the film itself:

> The film is ideology presenting itself to itself, talking to itself, learning about itself. Once we realize that it is the nature of the system to turn cinema into an instrument of ideology, we can see the film-maker's first task is to show up the cinema's so-called 'depiction of reality'. If he can do so there is a chance we will be able to disrupt or possibly even sever the connection between the cinema and its ideological function. (6)

In talking about itself, then, the film is able to demonstrate that it is talking ideologically. It cannot *escape* ideology, but it can bring its own ideological practices into view and thereby, for the viewer, allow a disruption between the 'depiction of reality' (or 'imaginary relationships') and the everyday 'real'. This functions by way of *estrangement* which, in Darko Suvin's famous definition of science fiction, is the genre's ideological potential. Suvin defines science fiction as:

> a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are *the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition,*

and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment. (7)

Working also in a Marxian tradition, Suvin proposes that science fiction's particular ability is that, through the presentation of a world alternate to the reader's (or viewer's) own (*estrangement*), the text is able to provoke a kind of thoughtful dislocation (*cognition*) in the reader/viewer in which the very ideological constructedness of the 'real' world is revealed though the presentation of an alternative other. This definition of the genre, very-well known and influential yet still controversial within the field (largely for what the definition excludes as sf), is partly a consequence of Suvin's reading of science fiction's generic history (itself still contested), in which he places the Utopian tradition at its core. Indeed, the similarity of Suvin's definition of science fiction, above, to the definition of utopian fiction he offers, is manifest:

Utopia is, then, a literary genre or verbal construction whose necessary and sufficient conditions are *the presence of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized on a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.* (8)

What science fiction and the utopian tradition share, then, is the potential for ideological work upon the reader (or viewer), in the potential for estrangement, for bringing Ideology into view. The Ideological 'depiction of reality' (in an Althusserian sense) may be disrupted by the very generic apparatus that forms the text.

The *double* movement of estrangement, in which the 'real' is recognised in the representation of another world/ time, and its familiar structures made strange, is not only an effect of science fiction or utopia, of course. Estrangement effects reveal the relation between text and world in Modernist fragmentation, in postmodernist 'self-consciousness' and meta-textuality, and in the formal apparatus of modes in which the system of representation leaves an aporia or absence where some matter has been 'hidden'. In Stephen Heath's ideological reading of cinema in *Questions of Cinema* (1981), he proposes a 'something else' that is repressed by the film *Touch of Evil* (1958), a freight which is present and 'which criticism does not fail to respond' but which the film itself cannot explicitly acknowledge. (9) Deploying a Freudian discourse to a mixture of ideological and semiotic criticism, Heath rather poetically concludes his reading of the film by stating:

> The something else, the other film of which this film says everywhere the slips and slides: the narrative of the film and the history of that narrative, the economy of its narrative production, its logic. To approach, to experience the textual system can only be to pull the film onto this double scene, this process of its order and of the material that order contains, of the narrative produced and the terms of its production. Analysis must come to deal with this work of the film, in which it is, exactly, the death – itself the disturbance – of any *given* cinema. (10)

For Heath, the film is a signifying system which hides or cannot acknowledge its symbolic freight, but which contains this 'double' signification, but within and without the film. The insistence on the *work* of the film – earlier, Heath argues that 'the film must hang together; the narrative, therefore, must work' – is both

an ideological and a symbolic work, but one in which the very means of production of the film are hidden codes within it. (11)

As I suggested above, it is the particular function of the genres of science fiction and utopian fiction to bring the hidden 'double' of the text – the time and place of its own production – into view through estrangement. In Bay's *The Island*, this is explicitly presented through the collision of two worlds – the underground 'utopia' in which Lincoln Six Echo lives – but also in the way in which visual technologies are themselves part of the fabric of the film, as a machinery through which the denizens of 'utopia' are deceived as to their condition and future. While I am not going so far as to suggest that *The Island* is a Marxian film, its playful mining of the tradition of utopia leads to the exposure of its own codes of production, which are explicitly spectacular. The very imaging technologies, operated by groups of undifferentiated technicians, which form the illusory Island are the very ones which produce *The Island*. In this way, Bay's film stages the hidden codes that are outside itself, and performs a double estrangement: in terms of the narrative, and in terms of genre. I will return to this shortly.

Before doing so, I would like to explore in more detail the connection between ideology and spectacle, particularly through the influential work of Guy Debord and his text *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967/1970). Debord, a key member of the Situationist International, theorised a shift in the ideological construction of reality through the pervasive immersion of human beings in technological mediation. Debord's fourth section of *The Society of the Spectacle* consists entirely of the phrase: 'The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images'. (12) This appears to be, if not

a restatement of Althusser's definition of Ideology as 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence', then at least a parallel statement of the interrelation between ideology and representation. The spectacle is not simply media, or film, or television, or advertising; it is a 'social relation among people', constructing the very experience of the real. Debord continues:

> The spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. (13)

The spectacle becomes the totality of social relations; it 'is nothing other than the sense of the total practice of a social-economic formation [....] It is the historical movement in which we are caught'. (14) Graham MacPhee, in *The Architecture of the Visible* (2002) suggests that 'Debord's account of the spectacle offers itself as an extension of [Georg] Lukàcs conception of reification to the realm of visual experience'. (15) Reification is a term used to theorise a reduction, in capitalist economies and modern systematization, of human social relations to a relation between things, an extension of commodification into lived experience. MacPhee suggests that Debord itself reduces Lukàcs' conceptualization in 'wholly identif[ying] spectacular vision with "the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality" of modern thought'; the consequences of this are that '[i]n identifying visual experience with systematic unity of modern thought, Debord not only accepts modern thought's claims to unity and coherence, but also drastically reduces the possibilities of critique'. (16) The difference between Lukàcs and Debord is summarised thus: 'the moments of incoherence [in lived experience] that Lukàcs saw as the opportunity for developing immanent critique are misrecognized by Debord as the necessary and unavoidable condition of reified

experience'. This leads to what MacPhee diagnoses as the 'unrelenting picture of total domination and total passivity implied by Debord's account of the spectacle'. (17) Debord's 'spectacle' presents the same problems for critique as does Althusser's Ideology; but the potential of spectacle to lay bare its own visualising technologies is crucial to MacPhee's reading of *trompe l'oeil*, and in particular Jean Baudrillard's use of *trompe l'oeil* as a metaphor for simulation in *Seduction* (1990). MacPhee notes that, in *Seduction*,

> Instead of seeing vision as a transaction which either returns the illusory substantiality of a 'real' world or the blank image of simulation, the unsettling effect of *tromp l'oeil* [*sic*] points to another experience altogether: what is returned or made visible within the jarring experience of *tromp l'oeil* are the conditions of visuality themselves. (18)

MacPhee suggests that, unlike Baudrillard's theorisation of simulacra in *Simulacra and Simulations* (1981), in which he famously (or notoriously) proposed the orders of simulation in which the contemporary mode of signification is one in which a free-floating sign-system of contemporary images becomes its own pure simulacrum, entirely free from the 'real', the idea of the *trompe l'oeil* is inherently estranging and offers a potential opening for critique. Baudrillard himself writes:

> the *trompe l'oeil* does not seek to confuse itself with the real. Consciously produced by means of play and artifice, it presents itself as a simulacrum. By mimicking the third dimension, it questions the reality of this dimension, and by mimicking and exceeding the effects of the real, it radically questions the reality principle. (19)

Trompe l'oeil therefore oscillates between the 'real' and the 'simulacrum', and in this 'mimicking' introduces an element of estrangement. It is a double vision, *both* real and unreal, both material and artificial: 'suddenly this seizure rebounds onto the so-called "real" world, to reveal that this "reality" is naught but a staged world'. (20) *Trompe l'oeil* is thereby a form of visual estrangement, and can be turned to purposes of critique.

Insert fig.2

Where *The Matrix* (1999) (wonderfully described by Jonathan Beller as 'the late-capitalist social-realist film' in *The Cinematic Mode of Production*) self-consciously staged its world-games through Baudrillardian lenses, to the extent of referencing *Simulations and Simulacra* within the *mise-en-scène*, Michael Bay's *The Island* (2005) instead relies upon the estranging double movement of the *trompe l'oeil*. (21) The scenario of *The Island* is that its inhabitants live in a post-catastrophe 'utopia' (a highly regulated and enclosed system) who are subject to a lottery wherein they have the chance to leave for 'the Island', the only remaining natural habitat outside of the walls of utopia that remains uncontaminated by whatever biological catastrophe is presumed to have befallen the human race and the Earth's ecology. The Island is a green paradise set among crystal-blue seas, an idealised space that is first encountered at the very beginning of the film in a narrative sequence that is revealed to be a dream, experienced by Lincoln Six Echo (Ewan MacGregor). The escape to the Island is symbolically attached to dream-work, a crucial element of *The Island* (as I shall explore below); but it is also cinematic spectacle, presented to the viewer across several levels of the film's diegesis (as Lincoln's dream, as the illusory zone of escape within the machinery of utopia and, at the end of the film, as a 'real' space

attained by Lincoln and his fellow escapee from utopia, Jordan Two Delta

(Scarlett Johansson)).

Insert fig.3

The *mise-en-scène* of *The Island* juxtaposes the lush, tropical Island, seen

by the inhabitants on wall-sized television screens as well as through a 'window'

onto an outside 'reality', with the blue/grey palette of the reinforced concrete,

chrome and glass that make up the physical fabric of utopia, as well as the

(branded) white Lycra sports gear that make up the inhabitants' uniform. The

'green world' outside the (glass) walls of Utopia is a motif that derives,

ultimately, from Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924/ 1993), but where Zamyatin's

utopia used transparency as an index of the dystopian state's surveillance and

control by imagining apartment blocks made of strengthened glass, *The Island*'s

use of transparency is to do with the illusory imaging power of visual

technologies: the seeming difference between the televisions and the windows

masks their underlying equivalence. The 'windows' in fact look out onto a

cylindrical holographic projection, visible from anywhere in 'Utopia', that acts as

a 360° panorama, a visual prison that replicates the shape of Bentham's

Panopticon but reverses the direction of the gaze (as it does the direction of the

gaze in *We*): the subjects *look out* upon the spectacle presented to them as 'real',

and it is their belief that this spectacle *is real* that controls them. The *trompe l'oeil*

of the window is implicated in technological spectacle by its homology with the

wall-sized television screens; when Lincoln and Jordan discover the holographic

projection mid-way through the film, on effecting their escape from utopia, this

completes a visual circuit *for the viewer* that had been suggested much earlier in

the film.

The homology between the visualising technologies within the diegesis, and those that bring *The Island* to the cinema or television screen before the viewer, is the way in which Bay's *trompe l'oeil* opens up the codes of cinematic spectacle (that is the currency of his films) to the possibility of critique. Just as Lincoln and Jordan are deceived by the power of the visual, so may we be; just as they are relieved of their delusions, so may we be. For the viewer, the narrative revelation that the 'Utopia' is a manufactured illusion is produced not only by identification with Lincoln's trajectory of alienation from the codes and *doxa* of the Utopia in which he lives (doubts and questions that are shared among many of the inhabitants, it is suggested), but by the progressive revelation of the hidden machinery of Utopia which maintains the system. It quickly becomes apparent that Lincoln is able to access (albeit illegitimately) areas of 'Utopia' which are entirely staffed by 'workers', particularly in visiting Mac (Steve Buscemi), who operates the machinery of Utopia in levels or zones which are typically hidden from the denizens of Utopia. **Insert fig.4** This is curious, in some ways, because the guards, the medical staff, and the canteen staff are entirely *visible* to both Lincoln *and* the viewer, but are somehow *unseen*. These 'visible' workers are of the same status as those who work the machinery 'behind the scenes'; although visible, they do not play the lottery, and are thereby workers not *citizens*. This implied hierarchy (of visibility) is a form of biopolitics, a distinction between *zoē* and *bios*, between 'bare life' and political existence, that Giorgio Agamben elucidates in *Homo Sacer* (1998). Agamben suggested that a decisive transition in modernity can be said to come at the point at which 'bare life', *zoē*, previously excluded from 'political life' (the fully human), was drawn into the sphere of the political. Agamben writes:

the fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of

friend/enemy but that of bare life/ political existence, *zoē/bios*,

exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is a living being who,

in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the

same time, maintains himself to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion.

(22)

Modern democracy, then, 'is constantly trying to transform its own bare life into

a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of *zoē*'. (23) The world of *The Island*

is structured by a radical division between *zoē* and *bios*, between the 'bare life' of

the workers (excluded from the possibility of escaping to the Island) and the

'political existence' of those who play the lottery: between exclusion and

inclusion. The distinction between *zoē* and *bios* seems to be organized through

the ascription of labour: in *The Island*, it first appears that it is *work* that

separates 'citizen' from 'worker', those who may attain the state of natural grace

symbolized by the Island and those who remain excluded from it.

Rather than being a privileged class that are sustained by the labour of a

biopolitically-excluded working class, it is revealed that the white-clad

inhabitants of Utopia, like Lincoln and Jordan, are 'agnates', clones that have

been grown and nurtured within a closed social system in order to maintain

their optimum biological health in order for that health (in the form of organs or,

on one case, as a surrogate parent) to be harvested by the 'sponsor' or biological

original. Just as the Eloi are fed and supported by the Morlocks as 'product' or as

human cattle in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), the agnates are produced

as disposable biological entities which act as a form of ambulatory insurance

policies: against disease, accident, or other form of biological hazard. The biopolitical field is reversed: *zoē* becomes *bios*, the workers are the 'true' citizens, for they are not simply 'product' without the right to life. Mac, who helps Lincoln and Jordan when they escape, tells them: 'You're not human… not real… not like a real person, not like me… you're clones… copies'; although, it must be added, that Mac's own right to life is held to little account by those who are sent to retrieve Lincoln and Jordan, and he is murdered in helping them escape to Los Angeles.

Insert fig.5

The film striates the use of work or labour as a marker of *zoē* and *bios* in scenes where Lincoln, Jordan and others are put to work in the Department of Labor. This seems entirely redundant; what they do – squirt liquids into tubes, which are then fed down to developing agnates at levels hidden from them – could be much more easily and less problematically be accomplished by machine. Setting the inhabitants to work is clearly to do with the sense of purpose that Merrick suggests is crucial for the longevity of the human organism (experiments with agnates in a persistent vegetative state were unsuccessful); the sense of purpose and of hope that also necessitates the lottery for escape to the Island, one which also rationalizes the disappearance of fellow citizens when their 'sponsors' require their organs. The 'real' work of monitoring, guarding and feeding the inhabitants is invisible to them, while their own work operates somewhere between childish emulation/ play and routinized distraction. When Lincoln ascends the levels to find the other machinery of Utopia – the operating theatres and medical technicians who take organs from the 'product' and send them on to the sponsors – it reveals the true work or labour that he and his

fellow inhabitants have been engaged upon: to develop and maintain physical health so this may be transmitted to the sponsor at a time of need. As we will see shortly, this biology exceeds its design parameters and the system that produces it, eventually destroying the system itself.

The connection between the hidden work and machinery of Utopia, and the *trompe l'oeil* spectacle of the Island, offers a potential to read *The Island* not as a political parable but as a critique of the power of spectacle itself, and in particular the imaging technologies of *cinema* that are themselves hidden in the construction of the spectacle film. Here, I wish to turn to the work of Jonathan Beller, in particular *The Cinematic Mode of Production* (2006), as a means by which to articulate a critique of the nexus of work, visuality and spectacle, and how the *work of the spectator*, in terms of a burgeoning 'attention economy', is inscribed into the narrative of *The Island*. In *The Cinematic Mode of Production* Beller draws upon the work of Jonathan Crary (although only cites his work a couple of times), in particular *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) and *Suspensions of Perception* (2001) to frame a Marxian reading of the relation between cinema and economy through regimes of attention. Crary, in both books, set out a historical analysis of the shift in strategies by which the human sensorium was programmed to adapt to the repetitive tasks of industrial production, particularly during and after the 19th century. Crary, in *Suspensions of Perception* argued that the idea of attention became increasingly investigated in the fields of both psychology and optics in the 19th century because of the perceived tendency in human workers towards *distraction*, in what Crary calls 'an emergent economic system that demanded attentiveness of a subject in a wide range of new productive and spectacular tasks, but whose internal movement

was continually eroding the basis of any disciplinary attentiveness'. (24) The conditions of a 'modern', industrial, increasingly consumption- as well as production-oriented economy, pulled the human subject in two directions. Firstly, what Walter Benjamin called the 'shock' of modern existence (urban living, machinery, speed, advertising) creates an increasingly distracted subject in an increasingly kaleidoscopic world; and secondly, the very economic conditions that produce this kind of world require a working subject who is able to maintain long periods of attentiveness to complex and repetitive tasks (over a 10- or 12-hour working day in a factory, for instance). Beller extends Crary's mode of analysis into a Marxian reading of contemporary capital which, he argues, is historically coterminous with the rise of cinema and the development of a society of the spectacle. Beller's work is more than an elucidation of Debord, however; though he proposes 'the cinema' to mean 'the manner in which production generally becomes organised in such a way that [...] creates an image that [...] is essential to the general management, organisation and movement of the economy', the focus is upon production rather than alienation, and in particular the construction of a spectatorial subjectivity that is put to *work*. (25) As we saw above, Jean-Luc Comolli had asserted the relation between cinema and ideology and, as quoted by Beller, that 'the spectator ... works'. (26) Crucially, Beller identifies the turning of human attention to productive ends to be an effect of capitalist economies that seek new territories to exploit:

> From a systemic point of view, cinema arises out of a need for the intensification of the extraction of value from human bodies beyond normal physical and spatial limits and beyond normal working hours – it is an innovation that will combat the generalized falling rate of profit. It

realizes capitalist tendencies toward the extension of the work day (via

entertainment, email), the deterritorialization of the factory (through

cottage industry, TV), the marketing of attention (the advertisers), the

building of media pathways (formerly roads), and the retooling of

subjects. (27)

The spatial paradigm – territory, expansion, colonisation – is connected to a

Marxian analysis of accumulation, wherein the exhaustion of resources and the

'falling rate of profit' necessitates the acquisition of new 'territories'. The

political collective RETORT, in their book *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle*

in a New Age of War (2005), read the 'War on Terror' following 9/11 and the

2003 invasion of Iraq in terms of Marx's 'primitive accumulation', a return to an

age of 'violent expropriation' that particularly marked the age of colonialism, but

one that is marked by new conditions of mediation: 'primitive accumulation is to

be carried out in conditions of spectacle: that is the new reality in a nutshell'.

(28) RETORT find a kernel of hope in this spectacular turn:

A new round of technical innovation has made alienation-into-a-realm-of-

images a pervasive, banal, *consistently self-administered reality*. The

dystopian potential of such an apparatus is sufficiently clear. But in

present circumstances it has at least the benign side-effect of making

control of imagery that is a necessity of war and occupation, as opposed

to the tendential and structural 'management' of appearances appropriate

to peacetime – truly hard to maintain. (29)

As with the *trompe l'oeil*, the conditions of visuality of the spectacle themselves

offer the possibility of critique *in their very visibility*. Beller is critical of *Afflicted*

Powers, and what he characterises as its weakness of 'understanding of the

relationship between media and what the collective calls "primitive accumulation"', in its emphasis on 9/11 as a 'huge blow to the state's control and organization of the spectacle' and its organisation of the invasion of Iraq as a 'quasi-hysterical endeavour to overcome this defeat in the spectacle'. Beller's focus, instead, is upon 'the necessary daily calibration of spectators […] as well as the transformed proprioception of subjects'. (30) Where RETORT propose primitive accumulation operating on a macrocosmic or geo-political scale, expropriating the oilfields of Iraq, Beller suggests that it is the *interior* landscapes of subjectivity that are the focus of economic exploitation; the human body and the human sensorium are, for capital, 'the next frontier'. (31) One should note that in his most recent book, *24/7* (2013), Jonathan Crary has proposed a similar extension of disciplinary regimes (his approach is more overtly Foucauldian than Marxian) into previously 'free' areas: not only the elimination of 'the useless time of reflection and contemplation', but the extension of productivity through the minimising or evacuation of the need for sleep. (32) Crary juxtaposes the space/time of reflection with the imperatives of economic expansion and exploitation, wherein 'reverie' is outside the disciplinary regimes of labour: '[o]ne of the forms of disempowerment within 24/7 environments is the incapacitation of daydream or of any mode of absent-minded introspection that would otherwise occur in intervals of slow or vacant time. […] There is a profound incompatibility of anything resembling reverie with the priorities of efficiency, functionality, and speed'. (33) Where Beller differs is that in his analysis, unconsciousness and dream *has already been produced by the conditions of cinema*.

Insert fig 6

As I noted above, *The Island* begins with shots of a crystalline blue sea, a rocky coastline and islands, as something out of a tourist advertisement or glossy travelogue. This effect is magnified when a large, angular motor yacht appears, upon which Lincoln and Jordan pose in the sun. This scene, clearly imbued with jet-set fantasy, is then disrupted: anonymous threatening men appear, who push Lincoln from the boat and struggle with him underwater. After a rapid montage, Lincoln awakes in the utopian facility, and the foregoing sequence is revealed as a dream. Although dreams are monitored in *The Island* – Dr Merrick conducts analytical sessions with Lincoln, where the latter draws the boat – they are not manipulated *within* the minds of the inhabitants, and in fact operate as a separate and in some senses *free* space of unconscious drives. When trying to escape, Lincoln and Jordan fall into a conditioning room where recently-birthed agnates are subjected to a barrage of televisual programming, broadcast by arrays of mini-monitors. In a clear reference to *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), the agnates' eyelids are held open while the 'messages' are broadcast directly into their eyes, forming their subjectivity. If this acts as a kind of 'unconscious' sub-stratum of foundational conditioning, Lincoln's dream-work exposes an unconscious *beneath* this unconscious, a double subjectivity which repeats his own condition as agnate/ clone. Dr Merrick begins to understand that what Lincoln Six Echo has been dreaming is built upon the memories of Tom Lincoln (also played by MacGregor, but with a Scottish accent, and as an amoral, exploitative, privileged creep), not the shallow draught of time in which Lincoln Six Echo has lived in the facility. These dreams, a 'biological' excess which compromise Lincoln's status as 'copy' (to an extant that, during one of the later chase sequences, Lincoln is able to successfully imitate his 'sponsor' and avoid

being killed), signify at once the irreducibility and transmissibility of dream-space and fantasy. It is not, ultimately, recuperable to the imperatives of control that are fashioned by Dr Merrick and which are continually administered by the hidden machineries of utopia/dystopia.

At the close of the film, where Lincoln and Jordan sit aboard the yacht *in reality*, the film closes by supplanting 'the real' with 'the dream', just as Lincoln and Jordan have supplanted their 'real' sponsors. In fact, the film suggests that Lincoln and Jordan are *better human beings* than their sponsors, and the fantasy mobility of the yacht can be considered some kind of reward. However, I think it is possible to argue, particularly in terms of genre, that an *escape into fantasy* has already been enacted much earlier in the film, at the point at which Lincoln and Jordan escape from 'utopia'. The facility, it emerges, is underground, funded by the US Defense Department, and in the middle of the desert in the American South-West. Soon after ascending from the facility, Lincoln and Jordan come across a road, and it is *the* road of the American imaginary of automobility, Route 66: as they run down it towards the nearest town, the film shifts generically from dystopia to chase film, as Merrick engages Albert Laurent (Djimon Hounsou), a French Special Forces veteran, to track down and eliminate the fleeing agnates. Meeting Mac (Buscemi) at a roadside bar, Lincoln and Jordan enlist his help in fleeing to Los Angeles to confront their sponsors. Even here, the visual register insists upon spaces 'behind' the public façade, the 'hidden machinery'. Lincoln first catches up with Mac as he sits upon the toilet in the Men's rest room; at a nearby Maglev station, pursued by Laurent's henchmen, Lincoln and Jordan run into old workshops, junkyards and sheds, in order to escape. The transition from the 'private' (and securitized) space of the underground facility to the public

spaces of the 'real world' is effected piecemeal, as the escaped couple are
exposed to tracking technologies when in the open. In becoming fugitives, they
exchange one form of enclosure and secured space for another.

Insert fig.7

In Los Angeles, Bay's camera also becomes significantly more mobile. A
long chase sequence along a freeway, where Lincoln tumbles large railway
wheels from a flatbed truck onto the chasing cars, is madly kinetic and
spectacular; when a flying 'jetbike' turns up, which is then used by Lincoln and
Jordan, CGI becomes particularly intrusive. As the couple zoom among the
towers of Los Angeles' downtown, the CGI becomes 'bad', a visible rather than
invisible *trucage*. This, however, is surely deliberate; just as Ewan MacGregor's
American accent as Lincoln Six Echo is considerably less authentic but more
attractive than his 'real' Scottish one as Tom Lincoln (trading upon MacGregor's
star persona as Scottish 'bloke'), and Lincoln's impersonation of Tom Lincoln a
crucial blurring (or more properly overturning) of agnate/sponsor, artificial/
real binaries, the intrusiveness of the 'unreal' CGI indicates that, in the rhetoric of
the film, the *fantasy* supersedes or is 'better' than the real. Lincoln Six Echo and
Jordan Two Delta, perfectly toned young adults, objects of the desiring gaze
(doubly staged in the case of Johansson, who is the agnate of a film star/ Calvin
Klein model who appears to be Johannson herself), are improvements (or
upgrades) upon their sponsors, possessed of greater agency and ethical sense,
whose affective superiority goes beyond Tom Lincoln's amoral individualism
towards both romantic love and a greater sense of collectivity. Before escaping
into the fantasy mobility of Tom Lincoln's motor-yacht and jet-set lifestyle, they
return to the facility to free their fellow agnates.

When the two protagonists escape from Dystopia and enter Bay's territory, the kinetic chase film, they are not escaping *into* the 'real' (as the freed clones seem to do at the end of the film); instead, they are escaping *into cinema*, into its fantasy or liberatory potential. While the 'thriller' elements of the chase narrative seem to infect the world of Merrick's facility when he brutally kills another questioning agnate, Gandu Three Echo (Brian Stepanek) with a syringe to the neck, the condition of the *trompe l'oeil* that allowed the possibility of critique through *the visibility of visibility* in the 'utopia' also regulates the spectacle of the second half of the film. The very end of the film promises an escape from the regimes of work (administration, attention, the biological purpose of the agnates) into a fantasy of leisure and pleasure. The accelerated camera-movement and CGI is not simply a technical and structural element of Bay's filmmaking, but a release from stasis into ecstatic movement, and the promise of a release from the (dystopian) work of cinematic production into the dream-work of fantastical spectacle. In a sense, *The Island* attempts to reverse the polarity of 'spectacle' itself: from Debord's and Beller's imaging system of production and consumption, implicated in opening out new productive territories and colonising subjectivity, spectacle instead becomes a means by which to induce dream, fantasy, a space outside of the regimes of administration and control identified by Beller and Crary.

Insert fig.8

To conclude, we can return to a much earlier mode of analysis of cinema, the relation of dreaming/ daydreaming and spectatorship proposed by Siegfried Kracauer in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960). For Kracauer, cinema induces a state of daydreaming that *exceeds* the signifying

economy of a particular film. 'The moviegoer watches the images on the screen in a dream-like state', Kracauer suggests:

> [a] trance-like immersion in a shot or a succession of shots may at any moment yield to daydreaming which increasingly disengages itself from the imagery occasioning it. Whenever this happens, the dreaming spectator, who originally concentrated on the psychological correspondences of an image striking his imagination more or less imperceptibly, moves on from them to notions beyond the orbit of that image. (34)

This, then, is the capacity that confirms Lincoln Six Echo's alienation from the dystopian system of the facility, the excess of dreaming which leads him behind the *trompe l'oeil* to the machineries. It is the importance of the *cinema within*, the fantasy/ dream imagery with which the film begins and ends, which propels Lincoln towards liberation, and that is what *The Island* proposes for its own spectators. As Kracauer proposes, 'the moviegoer finds himself in a situation in which he cannot ask questions and grope for answers unless he is saturated physiologically': that 'unless', the *necessity* for immersion in the dream, motivates the precedence of spectacle over narrative, fantasy over the 'real'. (35) It is fantasy, the dream, that in *The Island* and in Bay's cinema *tout court*, is the source and site of utopia. When Richard Dyer states, in 'Entertainment and Utopia', that the problem for conceptualising entertainment as utopia is that 'entertainment provides alternatives *to* capitalism which will be provided *by* capitalism', the 'escape' offered by *The Island* is thrown into stark relief (36); in a sense, for Bay, the solution to the problem of spectacle is spectacle, the way out of the cinematic mode of production is cinema itself.

Endnotes

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31. Beller: 202.

32. Crary, Jonathan. *24/7.* London: Verso, 2013: 40.

33. Crary 2013: 88.

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35. Kracauer: 310.

36. Dyer: 27.