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## Systems, Architecture & The Digital Body: From *Alphaville* to *The Matrix*

Debra Benita Shaw

*Bodies are absent in architecture but  
they remain architecture's unspoken condition<sup>i</sup>*  
Elizabeth Grosz

Architecture is an important discipline for interrogating the politics of science and technology in that it necessarily responds to successive ideas about the structure and functioning of the human organism while being a cultural product which both reflects and utilises technoscientific ideas and their effects in the social realm. With this in mind, I want to examine the way that late 20<sup>th</sup> century science fiction film making has imagined the future city, not least because the genre is necessarily in a highly reflexive relationship to the technologies of visual production which enable its realisation of potential urban configurations and architectural developments. What are the implications for a politics of the body in the relationship between urban space, film space, the technologies of the cinema and spectatorship?

One of the most extraordinary future cities on film was realised by Fritz Lang in his celebrated *Metropolis* (1927). Lang is said to have developed his vision after a visit to New York in 1924 but the set designs owe much to the architectural philosophy of the Bauhaus and seem to accurately reflect Le Corbusier's vision of the 'Radiant City', with its towering skyscrapers linked by an aerial transport system and walkways. Le Corbusier's conception of the modern city was based on a belief in the power of architecture to solve social problems. His city 'espoused space, speed, mass production and efficient organisation'.<sup>ii</sup> When he insisted that his contemporaries must 'measure afresh the consequences of being bodies', he was articulating precisely the dilemma at the heart of modernist rationalism. In order to 'make the true destiny of the machine age a reality' the optimal requirements of an assumed universal body must be understood but it must equally be able to conform to the requirements of the industrial process. Le Corbusier had no doubt that the architect, guided by both a rational understanding of the body and a clear idea of the future requirements of industry and commerce, would be instrumental in providing for an environment in which 'a new modern consciousness' would flourish.<sup>iii</sup> Architecture would provide the solution to the conflicting needs of bodies and machines and the structure of the city would reflect the triumph of rational planning and thus the triumph of an ideology in which everyday life is determined by the dictates of scientific management.

It was these ideas which drove the restructuring of Paris following WWII and the collapse of the French Empire, when France underwent a period of 'headlong, dramatic, and breathless' modernisation.<sup>iv</sup> Paris, 'the city itself, became the new site for a generalized exploitation of the daily life of its inhabitants through the management of space.'<sup>v</sup> Kristin Ross makes a convincing argument for connecting the realisation of functional architecture and the introduction of technical home management with a desire to reconstruct the *idea* of France, following the loss of the colonies, in terms of efficiency and hygiene:

'If Algeria is becoming an independent nation, then France must become a *modern* nation: some distinction between the two must still prevail. France must, so to speak, clean house; reinventing the home is reinventing the nation'.<sup>vi</sup>

Of course, the body, also, must be subject to reinvention and the Americanisation of French life saw an increasing emphasis on bodily health understood in terms of moral and physical cleanliness. Needless to say, the discourse of hygiene and the idea of the 'clean home' had a distinct resonance with the restructuring of the city to reflect the new power relationships of post-colonial France. Steve Pile, drawing on psychoanalysis, suggests that the 'purification of space becomes an obsession where abjection takes hold: the city is purified as the nation is purified – the history of the present testifies to the sickening ferocity with which these feelings can be prosecuted – on bodies, in cities'.<sup>vii</sup> In this view, certain bodies (workers, immigrants, women, prostitutes, criminals) become marked for expulsion, not from the city *per se* but from those spaces within the city that reflect the dominant ideal. Ghettoisation positions social marginality 'at a safe distance ... . This means that the city must be seen as the most immediate locus for the production and circulation of power'.

However, Elizabeth Grosz suggests that we should not understand the city merely as a representation of state power. The power relations both within the city and between the city and the state are held in tension by conflicting goals. The state 'can let no body outside of its regulations', yet, to a certain extent, the city, a site for 'chaotic, deregulated, and unregulatable flows [such as] [t]he movement of illicit drugs, ... commodities [and] information', resists regulation. The state's 'demand for identification and documentation relentlessly records and categorizes, though it has no hope of alleviating such dereliction'.<sup>viii</sup> Hence, the subversive potential of 'the street' and the 'underground', terms which evoke spaces of resistance, both within the city itself and in the arts to which it gives rise. Equally, 'the city is ... the site for the body's cultural saturation, its takeover and transformation by images, representational systems, the mass media, and the arts – the place where the body is representationally reexplored, transformed, contested, reinscribed'.<sup>ix</sup> The tension, then, is between science as applied to the technical management of space and as applied to the production of technologies which mediate that space. What I am interested in here is how filmed representations of the city can interrogate these tensions.

### **Visual Space and Systems Architecture**

As Ian Wiblin has pointed out 'Jean-Luc Godard makes very specific and original use of architecture. He succeeds in creating a spontaneity that seems to spark around and within a framework which is crucially provided by architectural space'.<sup>x</sup> In *Alphaville* (1965), for instance, the camera frequently angles upward, raking across lines of lighted windows, brief shots introduce the exteriors of buildings or the city is glimpsed, in dim light or darkness, through the window of a moving car. The film, which Chris Darke ranks alongside *Metropolis*, as 'one of the definitive works in the cinema of dystopian cities'<sup>xi</sup> was shot, in winter 1964, in the streets of Paris and its suburbs 'dominated by the hideous glass and plastic architecture of the Sixties'.<sup>xii</sup>

The plot concerns secret agent Lemmy Caution who is pitted against Alpha 60, a computer programmed by a mad scientist to run Alphaville according to the dictates of strict logic. But Alphaville suggests, not so much a city run by a computer as a city that *is* a computer. Alphaville is systems architecture: literally, an architecture which conforms to a systematic totalitarianism but, equally, an architecture which functions as the matrix for the complex system that is Alpha 60, the ‘electronic grating’ voice of which, ‘unpleasant as it is indescribable’ is omnipresent.<sup>xiii</sup> Apparently, Godard used the voice of a man who had lost the use of his vocal chords and had learned to speak from his diaphragm.<sup>xiv</sup> In the context of the film’s *mise en scène* it is a voice that is literally disembodied, being both everywhere and nowhere, while still (almost) recognisably human. Interior shots show what appear to be miles of indistinguishable corridors and rooms in which the extensions of Alpha 60 (microphones, tape machines and white coated human engineers and clerks) are a dominant presence. Hotel rooms and brightly lit lobbies of public buildings are familiar spaces rendered startlingly alien by their proximity in film space to the distanced spaces of Godard’s darkened Paris. Alpha 60 speaks, articulating the super-rationalist philosophy which structures the social nexus of Alphaville, and its locution both invokes and evokes the city and the bodies that are its correlates.

As Lee Hilliker points out, *Alphaville* was made during the period in which ‘censorship surrounding the Algerian war [had] reached its hysterical peak’.<sup>xv</sup> Godard himself had had ‘run-ins with the censor’ and ‘went on afterwards to more directly political work’.<sup>xvi</sup> Clearly, in the context of the restructuring of Paris during this period, Godard, engaged in ‘the search for a form of cinema which could discuss politics’,<sup>xvii</sup> was elaborating a connection between censorship, surveillance and the city, utilising the science fiction genre to dramatise a vision of the future in which these trends have coalesced into a wholly dehumanising totalitarianism. Alpha 60 thus stands as a synecdoche for the techniques by means of which this totalising ideology becomes naturalised. That film is, itself, implicated in this structuring of conformity is indicated by the constant references to visual production and surveillance. Lemmy Caution incessantly photographs everything he sees with an Instamatic, referred to by one of Alpha 60’s technicians as ‘obsolete’ (‘I’m old fashioned’ is the reply). The denizens of Alphaville take little notice of Caution’s activity, nor is his camera confiscated or destroyed. There is no fear that the regime is in danger from being ‘exposed’ because, as Alpha 60 says, ‘the present is all one can know in life. No one’s lived in the past, or will live in the future’, only the eternal present exists, structured according to the probabilities that Alpha 60 endlessly computes. Without the context provided by an idea of time to structure a reading of the image, Caution’s photographs are meaningless. In Godard’s critique of modernity, the scientific management of populations through technology has rendered obsolete the arts through which the stable subject that it requires is potentially destabilised.

Of course (and ironically), cinema itself is similarly obsolete. A brief shot of the interior of a cinema is accompanied by Caution’s voiceover explaining that it was used for a now discarded method of executing ‘unassimilables’, who were electrocuted ‘as they watched a show’ and tipped into ‘giant rubbish bins’. This can be read as a coded reference to the

huge popularity of American film in France following WW2 and its role as a 'semiofficial propaganda machine for "the American Way of Life"'<sup>xviii</sup>. Those unable to conform to the American style of consumption would, of course, be relegated to the margins of society and the 'giant rubbish bins' resonate suggestively with descriptions of Sarcelles, a notorious example of the *grand ensembles* which characterised the pattern of housing established in Paris during the 1950s and which 'characteristically encompassed subsidized low-cost housing'.<sup>xix</sup> Sarcelles was referred to as a 'vertigo of technology', a 'human silo', a 'termite heap' and a 'concentration camp', and 'its physical immensity promoted a vision of nameless, faceless, human hordes'.<sup>xx</sup> In fact, there is a more direct reference when one of Alpha 60's technicians explains to Caution that not all dissidents are executed but that some, thought to be reclaimable, are sent to HLMs (*Hôpital de la Longue Maladie* which translates as Hospitals for Long Illnesses). As Richard Roud explains, 'HLM actually means *Habitations à Loyers Modérés*: in other words, council houses'<sup>xxi</sup> and the scene is punctuated by a brief shot of a curtain-walled tower block, with *Alphaville*'s characteristic ranks of lighted windows, set in a darkened wasteland.

This scene resonates suggestively with Henri Lefebvre's analysis of the effects of visual culture in the social realm and the way in which illusions of space are produced by techniques like film editing and panoramic photography. As he says,

'Wherever there is illusion, the optical and visual world plays an integral and integrative, active and passive, part in it. It fetishizes abstraction and imposes it as the norm. It detaches the pure form from its impure content – from lived time, everyday time, and from bodies with their opacity and solidity, their warmth, their life and their death. After its fashion, the image kills'.

This fetishized abstraction he also sees as conditioning the subjectivity of the 'spectators-cum-tenants' who inhabit 'apartment building[s] comprising stack upon stack of 'boxes for living in''. The 'phallographic' spectacle or 'arrogant verticality' of the building provokes a compensatory identification, in which a 'logic of visualization, ... a metonymic logic consisting in a continual to-and-fro movement – enforced with carrot and stick – between the part and the whole ... constantly expand[s] the scale of things.

'[T]his movement serves to compensate for the pathetically small size of each set of living-quarters; it posits, presupposes and imposes homogeneity in the subdivision of space; and, ultimately, it takes on the aspect of pure logic – and hence of tautology: space contains space, the visible contains the visible – and boxes fit into boxes' (Lefebvre, 1991 (1974)).

Thus the body is conditioned to a grid of restrictions which are not experienced as such because in the cinema, for instance, the illusive continuity of perception that characterises spectatorship, what Siegfried Kracauer refers to as the 'solidarity of the universe' or 'spatial continuum' which allows the spectator 'the feeling of being omnipresent'<sup>xxii</sup> also conditions lived reality. In *Alphaville*, Lefebvre's argument is evoked by the narrative and the diagetic elements which refer to the connection between Alpha 60's 'pure logic' and the disposition of bodies in the spaces of the city. At the end of the film, Alpha 60 self

deconstructs (when Caution, in true comic book style, poses it an unsolvable riddle) and the camera follows Caution as he searches the corridors of the computer's nerve centre for Natasha von Braun (Anna Karina), the scientist's beautiful daughter with whom he has (of course) fallen in love. Only Caution is moving in a straight line, passing countless bodies groping blindly in space, crouched at odd angles, or flattened against the walls, moving as if they are attempting to pass through solid matter. Without the 'pure logic' of Alpha 60 to guide them, they have lost all orientation or sense of the relationship between themselves and the spaces that they inhabit.

Steven Shaviro, in his introduction to *The Cinematic Body* discusses the cinematic experience in terms of 'visceral immediacy' and is concerned to explore spectator response in terms of affects at the level of the body which do not allow for the distance required by a purely representational or semiotic reading. Arguing against the association of visual pleasure 'with the illusion of a stable and centered subject confronting a spatially and temporally homogeneous world', he suggests that '[t]he kino-eye does not transform reality, so much as it is itself caught up in the dynamic transformations that constitute the material and social real'.<sup>xxiii</sup> Here, he is agreeing with Kracauer that 'films evoke a reality more inclusive than the one they actually picture'<sup>xxiv</sup> while suggesting that film editing techniques emphasise the mediation of the camera and thus the 'unnaturalness' of the flow of images while, at the same time, the 'sympathetic participation'<sup>xxv</sup> into which the viewer is drawn 'directly stimulates the nervous system' and thus destabilises the subject/object, inside/outside dichotomies which structure subjectivity and on which film criticism which relies on an idea of perception as a form of appropriation bases its arguments. The subject is, as it were, faced with its own fragmentation and instability.

'[F]ilm moves and affects the spectator precisely to the extent that it lures him or her into an excessive intimacy, one so extreme that it is also, immediately, a distance precluding identification. It dissolves the contours of the ego and transgresses the requirements of coherence and closure that govern "normal" experience. ... The world of static, stabilizing self-representations slips out from under me. I am drawn instead into ... a time and space from which all fixed points of reference and self-reference, all lines of perspective, and all possibilities of stabilizing identification and objectification are banished'.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The intimation here is that film can undo the monolithic structures of identity which must be accepted for Lefebvre's 'pure logic' to function. Aside from challenging the highly gendered assumption that all spectatorship tends towards phallic appropriation, the idea that the 'impure content' of the body can pollute the image and that '[i]n film's virtual space, visual pleasure and fascination are emphatically *not* dependent upon any illusion of naturalness or presence' makes sense of *Alphaville*'s 'pop-art' pretensions and constant foregrounding of its own constructedness.<sup>xxvii</sup> Indeed, the total defamiliarisation of Paris which Godard's camera achieves now comes to represent, not so much a dystopian appraisal of the politics of social organisation in post-colonial France as a critique of the assumptions underpinning both theories of visual pleasure and architechnological determinism.

Michel Foucault refers to the cinema as 'a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space'.<sup>xxviii</sup> For him, it is a prime example of what he calls a 'heterotopia', 'in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'. I would suggest then that films which, like *Alphaville*, offer what might be called a super-heterotopic experience of familiar spaces, can be prime sites for the practice of heterotopology 'a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live'<sup>xxix</sup> and can thus function to dispute Lefebvre's 'deathly' analysis of the image and the associated experiences of everyday life.

### **Virtual Space and the Heterotopology of the Cinema**

I would like here to digress from *Alphaville* in order to re-pose the problem of space, architecture and cinema in terms which can further elucidate the radical possibilities of the cinematic subject. I want to interrogate the experience of contemporary cinema through a reading of *The Matrix* which attends to its foregrounding of specific processes of film production. I will suggest that the visceral correspondences between the body as understood through contemporary scientific discourse and as experienced through what Jacques Derrida calls the 'spatial' arts is both different from, and can be thought in opposition to, the functionally determined bodies through which modernity imagines itself and which *Alphaville* critiques.

Derrida defends his use of the term 'spatial', rather than 'visual' arts by pointing out that he cannot be sure that 'space is essentially mastered by [*livré à*] the look'. He then continues:

"Philosophy is only a mode of thought, and thus it is the extent to which thought exceeds philosophy that interests us here. This presumes that there are practical arts of space that exceed philosophy, that resist philosophical logocentrism ... [...] [T]here is thought, something that produces sense without belonging to the order of sense, that exceeds philosophical discourse and questions philosophy, that potentially contains a questioning of philosophy, that goes beyond philosophy. This does not mean that a ... filmmaker has the means of questioning philosophy, but what she or he creates becomes the bearer of something that cannot be mastered by philosophy'.<sup>xxx</sup>

Part of Derrida's support for his assertion turns on what he calls 'interpretation of one's own memory'. Both producers and viewers of the spatial arts are implicated in this mode of 'thought'. The interpretation that takes place is partly dependent on the 'memory of the history of film'. This history is 'nevertheless recorded' in successive productions and innovations, whether or not it is 'known' to the filmmaker or viewer.<sup>xxxi</sup> This is particularly true, I would suggest, in the case of productions which deliberately defamiliarise space, provoking an awareness both of the radical possibilities of the filmmaker's craft and a simultaneous shock of recognition, involving not just the history of film but the history of both art and technology as inseparable from the way that we

understand, and experience, the body. This produces an affect, I would suggest, similar to what Paul Crowther refers to when he writes of a 'common transition from the subliminal to the sublime which warrants the term 'sublimicist' in relation to both contemporary 'art' and 'philosophy''. This movement is produced by works which 'radically 'dislocate' their subject-matter in a way that questions the nature of representation and vision's correspondence with the world':

'The essentialising attitude which makes Modernism possible, in other words, is subjected to a remorseless critique. 'Art' is recognised as a play of *différance*. It is a sense of this complexity, this immense 'art' totality, its past and its possible future, its overlap with other discourses, which is thrust upon us ... . But whilst such a totality is ungraspable from the viewpoint of a finite imagination, the artist at least presents it *as such*. It is he or she who, in deconstructing the subliminal closures and concealments of 'art' and its history, inscribes this overwhelming complexity upon our sensibility. We are thus transformed. The pain of that which exceeds us gives way to the pleasure of achieved understanding'.

Although Crowther is discussing contemporary conceptual art, rather than film, his concept of sublimicism brings into sharper focus the connections that Derrida himself makes between the 'spatial' arts and deconstruction. Crowther suggests that 'sublimicism may be a definitive feature of Post-Modern culture *as such*'. As he says: 'the availability of techno-scientific equipment and data is so pervasive in contemporary life that 'reality' itself is readily Deconstructed into an overwhelming network of macro and microscopic processes and relations, which are customarily concealed, but which make 'reality' as we know it, possible'.<sup>xxxii</sup> I want to suggest here that his meaning can best be understood in relation to the heterotopology of the cinema which could, in fact, be said to reproduce and reflect the body as understood in terms of the same processes that produce special effects and virtual characters on film. That is, the code that structures the organism as an informational entity, that can be stored and manipulated according to the logic of databases and cybernetic systems. In other words, I am interested in the connection between Shaviro's 'sympathetic participation', the kind of sublimicism which Crowther identifies as an experiential element in postmodern artforms and the way that contemporary science reads the body. Under the terms of contemporary genetic, virological and bacteriological discourses, modern taxonomies are no longer appropriate to distinguishing between ourselves and other, genetically similar organisms or, indeed, machines, which inevitably now become part of our self-description. In this sense, to evoke the term 'human' becomes problematic in that it can now be seen to evoke a historically specific and contingent classification. The body as discursively produced through the language of eg., genomics and the immune system ceases to conform to the typology of modern humanism and becomes, for the purposes of signification, posthuman.

Although, as N Katherine Hayles reminds us '[t]o the extent that the posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it continues the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it'<sup>xxxiii</sup>, it is possible, as Donna J Haraway has shown, for the posthuman body to be appropriated to deconstruct essentialised notions of corporeality.



As she says, '[i]t is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices'.<sup>xxxiv</sup> This model thus problematises the dualisms that have constructed hierarchies of difference and which informed the architectonics of 'modern man'. What can now be acknowledged is that film, perhaps from its inception, has equally troubled these distinctions. David B Clarke agrees with Shaviro when he suggests '[t]he haptical space of the cinema potentially serves to transform the division between the Eye (= I) of the Rational Subject and *its* (assimilable and rationalizable) object – the very division definitive of the frame of reference through which modernity has imagined itself'.<sup>xxxv</sup> As I will argue, it is this idea with which The Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999) diagetically engages in its troubling of the relationship between informatics, the body and the city.

The premise of *The Matrix* is that the world that we take to be 'reality' is, in fact, a computer simulation. Neo (Keanu Reeves) is the hero who is freed from technological slavery by Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne) who pilots a hovercraft, the *Nebuchadnezzar*, through the sewers of the 'real' world, a blasted cityscape where only the machines that have enslaved the human race can survive. Morpheus, and his rebel army, are on a mission to save the human race and Neo is the computer hacker *extraordinaire* who can re-enter the Matrix (newly equipped with an impressive array of virtual weaponry) and manipulate the code to confound the machines.

When, in an early scene, Neo sells contraband software to a caller at his apartment, he retrieves the disc from a hollowed out copy of *Simulacra and Simulations* and, when he is first reintroduced to the Matrix aboard the *Nebuchadnezzar* (in a construct containing only two armchairs and a television), Morpheus describes it as 'the desert of the real'. The irony of these direct references to the work of Jean Baudrillard, the philosopher who has done most to expose the ideological effects of spectacular culture, transmitted through the very medium which has most conditioned our 'hyperrealist sociality' could be read as Hollywood triumphalism.<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, I want to suggest that it can more productively be understood as a critique of Baudrillard's somewhat monolithic representation of the power relations of late capitalism and, perhaps, a recognition of the potential for a critically informed politics.

In Baudrillard's formulation of simulated culture, the model, derived from the code, has replaced any idea of an independent and knowable reality. Simulations construct our relationship to the world so that, with the knowledge that *anything* is reproducible, the idea of transcendence becomes impossible. All that remains is a largely empty simulation of politics which is, itself, caught up in the commodification of the image and produced by techniques of reproduction. On the other hand, for theorists such as Haraway, understanding the potential for re-writing subjectivities in order to code alternatives to the social structures which marginalise difference, involves an appreciation of the possibilities for appropriating these same techniques 'to mark the world that marked [us] as other'.<sup>xxxvii</sup> As a feminist, Haraway recognises that the world that Baudrillard mourns is one in which women's relationship to any understanding of reality was always, in any case, mediated by patriarchal power relations. It is the indifference of the code to any previously understood hierarchies of difference or strategically gendered, race or class based formulations of space which open up the possibilities for her cyborg politics.

Computer mediated simulation is about process and relatedness, producing effects which translate the meaning of both bodies and spaces into a set of coding operations. Hence, I read *The Matrix* in terms of Crowther's reading of the postmodern technological sublime as activating an aesthetic that radically dislocates the formal constraints that have regulated notions of bodies and architecture while equally exposing all the 'macro and microscopic processes and relations' which make contemporary reality possible *as* process and *as* relatedness.

So, in an early scene when Trinity, one of the rebels who has been projected into the Matrix to contact Neo, leaps increasingly prodigious spaces between city roofs in order to escape the Agents (sentinel programs which protect the Matrix), two 'ordinary' cops attempting to join the chase are finally defeated. As they watch Trinity, followed by 'Agent Smith', take a leap into an apparent void and land on a far building, one turns to the other and says 'That's impossible'. There is a multiple irony in this statement which can perhaps best be explored with reference to Anthony Vidler's statement that:

Where in the '20s and after, film and architecture were, in a fundamental sense, entirely different media utilizing their respective technologies, the one to simulate space, the other to build it, now, by contrast, the increasing digitilization of our world has rendered them if not the same, at least coterminous ... . And, in this condition, we are no longer, or not for long, talking about "virtual reality" but rather about "virtual space" ... . Virtual space (and not hyperspace, or cyberspace ... ) would be that space that is neither flat nor deep; neither surveyed nor unsurveyed; neither changing nor unchanging ... . It would be, and perhaps be for the first time, a space that was entirely indifferent to any differences among bodies, things, and positions. Constituted of endless strings, represented on apparently flat screens, it would exist without us and would not expect us to exist.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

I read Vidler's concept of virtual space in terms of Gilles Deleuze's adaptation of the Bergsonian concept of duration which enables space to be conceived of, not as a place in which matter happens to find itself but as, in Elizabeth Grosz's words, 'an effect of matter and movement.'<sup>xxxix</sup> It is thus opposed, and in some sense prior to, the space of the Cartesian grid. It is a concept of space that can activate the 'pleasure of achieved understanding' in Crowther's formulation of sublimicism in that it is attuned to a dynamic futurity which deconstructs the notion of the present and thus of presence.

In the virtual space of *The Matrix*, nothing is impossible and yet no *thing* is possible. The film opens with a full screen shot of the 'endless strings' of code which constitute *The Matrix*. Thereafter, all the scenes which take place 'in' *The Matrix* (tinted green to emulate 'the phosphorous green of old PCs') are interposed by cuts to the interior of the *Nebuchadnezzar* in which the crewmember functioning as 'operator' surveys a bank of screens. These display the code, which she or he 'reads' to warn of danger, to direct the dissidents 'in' *The Matrix* towards 'exits' and, later, when Neo and Trinity enter *The Matrix* to rescue Morpheus, who has been captured by the Agents, to provide them with weaponry. At this stage, Neo's superadditional hacking capabilities are represented on screen by the use of special effects, including several scenes which make use of the

Wachowskis' 'Bullet Time' simulations, 'dynamic camera movement around slow-motion events that approach ... 12,000 frames per second' (first previewed in an early scene where Trinity is suspended at the apex of an elaborate *pas de chat* as she fights a contingent of Matrix cops while the camera appears to sweep through 360 degrees around her). Bullet Time is, itself, dependent upon sophisticated manipulations of programming code and, like Japanese Anime cartoons, takes advantage of 'the physics of decimation'.<sup>xl</sup>

The endless strings of green tinted code are, within the film, a *mise en abîme* referring to the process of digital film production which is the same process that, diageetically, constructs the Matrix and is thus what produces bodies capable of defying the laws which structure the restrictions which Michael Menser refers to as the 'laminar metric' of modern social space; the striated space which situates bodies within 'preexisting structuring characteristic of the state'.<sup>xli</sup> This pre-existing structuring not only expects us to exist but codes that existence in terms of a fundamental corporeality. The physics of decimation, in this context, describes the kinds of oppositional coding practices which inform Haraway's cyborg politics. The cyborg 'a condensed image of both imagination and material reality'<sup>xlii</sup> explicitly refuses 'naturalized identities'<sup>xliii</sup> and is attuned to the possibilities of recoding implied in simulation. The history of cinema and its technical apparatus is here thoroughly implicated in the production of cyborg ontologies and the film equally encodes a recognition of our contemporary understanding of architecture as both the system of spaces which marks out the city and the set of specific interactions between hardware and software of which a computer system is composed. *The Matrix* collapses the tension that holds these meanings apart and, in so doing, produces a diageitic effect in which Neo and his associates literally hack the city.

### **Hacking and Heterarchy**

I want here to briefly return to *Alphaville* in order to elaborate the connections between hacking and the way that film, as a spatial art, produces sublimicist affects. As Andrew Ross describes it, the hacker ethic, 'asserts the basic right of users to free access to all information. It is a principled attempt ... to challenge the tendency to use technology to form information elites'.<sup>xliv</sup> Romanticised by the cyberpunk genre which flourished during the 1980s, the hacker (particularly in the novels of William Gibson, see eg., *Neuromancer*, 1984), has much in common with the 'hard-boiled' detective in the novels of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, later given specific visual form in Hollywood *film noir* of the 1940s and 50s. It is this genre to which *Alphaville* refers in its stark evocation of a darkened city and, more specifically, in the character of Lemmy Caution who, as Keith M Booker points out is a high-tech hero with the demeanour and appearance of a 'hard-boiled' detective in the mould of Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe.

As a detective, and one symbolically connected to the traditions of *film noir* and comic book superheroes, Caution recalls associations with Baudelaire's *flâneur*, later elaborated by Walter Benjamin into 'the quintessential paradigm of the subject in modernity, wandering through urban space in a daze of distraction'.<sup>xlv</sup> The private detective, equally, roams the city in search of clues, following trajectories of logic which undercut the apparent surface of everyday life, a trait which Vidler suggests can also appropriately describe the film director. As he says:

Both share affinities with the detective and the peddler, the rag-picker and the vagabond; both aestheticize the roles and materials with which they work. Equally, the typical habitats of the flaneur lend themselves to filmic representations: the *banlieu*, the margins, the zones and outskirts of the city ...<sup>xlvi</sup>

Vidler's description could, in fact, be equally applied to the hacker hero, making sense of cyberpunk's utilisation of generic conventions borrowed from detective fiction. As a typical example, Henry Case in Gibson's *Neuromancer* is a homeless wanderer, inhabiting nowhere but 'at home' in both the marginal spaces of the city and the interstices of virtual space, 'the space of emergence of the new, the unthought, the unrealized' which hacking exploits.<sup>xlvii</sup> Both *Alphaville* and *The Matrix* playfully construct *mis en scènes* which evoke the connection between film direction and *flânerie* and both make explicit the connections between computer mediated reality, the structure of the city and the potential of virtual space. As Grosz points out, 'the computer and the worlds it generates reveal that the world in which we live, the real world, has always been a space of virtuality'.<sup>xlviii</sup> And, in the heterotopology of the cinema, the processes of film production produce sublimicist affects which reveal virtuality as a condition of our ontology.

The distinctions that Vidler makes between cyberspace and virtual space are instructive here. Cyberspace cannot 'exist without us' because it is, in William Gibson's definition, a 'consensual hallucination'<sup>xlix</sup> and one which Michael Menser, in his use of the term 'information suckerhighway', reminds us is increasingly requiring us to consent to 'a corporate-state perspective'.<sup>1</sup> Virtual space, on the other hand, to extend Vidler's definition, is the potential from which cyberspace is actualised. If Baudrillard's hyperreal can be said to describe the conditions under which we consent to be governed by the code, then contesting the hegemony of the code requires us to attend to the terms under which it expects us to exist.

Architect Lebbeus Woods has proposed 'the invention of new ways of occupying space' in his concept of 'freespaces'<sup>li</sup> which are 'not invested with prescriptions for behavior'. 'Strictly speaking' as he says, 'they are useless and meaningless spaces'. Freespaces are not easy to occupy. The 'eccentricity and complexity of their spatial configurations' requires a conscious act of creative engagement. They 'create extreme conditions, within which living and working are engaged with a disparate range of phenomena'. Fundamental to freespaces are

'electronic nodes containing computers and telecommunications devices for interaction with other freespaces and locations in the world, and with other inhabitants. At the same time, freespaces also include instrumentation for exploring the extrahuman world at every scale, insuring that telecommunity encounters the elements and forces of a wider nature'.

Woods is committed to an idea of space which recognises the emergence of 'the heterarchy, an order without symbols'<sup>lii</sup> which 'constructs spaces which make possible

effects or emergent properties instead of signification bound to an abstract regime of overcoding characteristic of the state and its cohorts'.<sup>liii</sup> What Woods, along with Elizabeth Grosz, recognises is that '[s]pace, like time, is emergence and eruption, oriented not to the ordered, the controlled, the static, but to the event, to movement or action'.<sup>liv</sup> The possibilities of heterarchy, then, are the same as those realised by hackers, detectives and film directors. All are concerned with the production of space as process and with challenging the 'metric space of the state'<sup>lv</sup> which codes both bodies and buildings in terms of hierarchy, entitlement and conformity. As Menser reminds us, the terms under which buildings are physically constructed, with divisions into intellectual and manual labour and the privileging of certain kinds of expertise, leads to the homogenizing of spaces, materials and, most crucially, the inhabitants and users of these structures'.<sup>lvi</sup> But, as Haraway points out, 'we are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society, to a polymorphous, information system – from all work to all play'<sup>lvii</sup>. In this transition, the city becomes a highly contested space. To take seriously Derrida's suggestion that film making is a spatial rather than a visual art is to appreciate that the technology of the cinema can challenge the paradigms of conformity which give form equally to social systems, bodies and the built environment.

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